

Communication Policy

Diamond Nursery Assessment Placements, Sapphire
Assessment Resource, Emerald Specialist Resource Provision.

Knollmead Primary School

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Our Vision and Values

We support children with autism spectrum disorders and learning difficulties to develop their functional communication skills, increasing their understanding and independence so they can be successfully included in their communities and access activities of daily living.

We provide a 'total communication' environment where all forms of communication are valued and encouraged. Our autism friendly learning environment utilises a variety of teaching approaches and strategies to develop opportunities for children to communicate throughout the curriculum to the best of their ability and according to their individual needs.

This means:

- Children have access to their own means of communication throughout the school day: in the classroom, around the school and when out in the community on trips.
- Children may be supported to use a range of different communication methods in different contexts or simultaneously.
- School staff work closely with and access training from relevant professionals, such as the Speech and Language Therapist and Educational Psychologist to ensure communication strategies are embedded in classroom learning.

We refer to people 'with autism' and 'autism spectrum disorders', in keeping with recent guidelines from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (2011).

Our Approach

We work to the SPELL framework from the National Autistic Society.

Structure: We structure our learning environment to make it more predictable for our pupils, allowing them to be as independent as possible. Our activities have clear starts and finishes and we communicate to our pupils what is going to happen and our expectations of them.

Positive approaches and expectations: We carefully assess our pupils, allowing us to have high but realistic expectations for each individual. We consider their strengths, interests and abilities as well as their needs, building on these to reinforce confidence and self-esteem. We consider barriers to communication and learning, adapting our approaches to meet the needs of individual pupils.

Empathy: We make every effort to understand, respect and relate to the experience of the person with autism, which underpins our attempts to develop communication and reduce anxiety. We try to develop positive relationships with pupils, remaining calm, predictable, good humoured, empathetic and analytical (NAS, 2016).

Low arousal: We provide a low arousal environment which is calm and ordered in such a way as to reduce anxiety and aid concentration. We try to keep distractions to a minimum. We allow children time to process what they have seen and heard before expecting them to respond. We teach children using the methods best suited to their learning styles and adapt our approaches according to individual need. We seek advice from Occupational Therapists to support children to manage additional sensory needs.

Links: We ensure open communication between all those working with the child (provision staff, mainstream staff, parents, external professionals) to provide a holistic approach to supporting each pupil. Links with the mainstream, through curriculum and other experiences, enable the individual to participate in a meaningful way in the life of the wider community (NAS, 2016).

Total Communication

Total communication is an approach that promotes more effective two-way communication. This approach recommends that all means of communication, both verbal and non-verbal are used to support what we say. This means we may use signs, symbols, objects of reference or photographs to support what we say. By using these alongside speech, we provide pupils with the best possible opportunity to understand our communication and respond in a way best suited to their needs, abilities and learning styles. Members of staff are expected to recognise that all means of communication have equal importance.

Body Language

Body language is a fundamental element of all successful communication and includes gesture, eye pointing, facial expression and proximity. Body language is interpreted as an attempt at communication and respect as such. Members of staff provide good models of effective communication and functional communication.

Signing

In the provisions at Knollmead Makaton is the signing system used. We are mindful that there is also a specialist provision within the school for children with hearing impairments and we liaise with members of staff from that provision to ensure consistency across the school. Makaton is a signing system used alongside speech to develop a pupil's understanding of language and their ability to express themselves. The use of signing throughout the school day by staff greatly enhances a child's ability to be an effective communicator. Makaton training and updates can be provided by the speech and language therapy service.

The following guidelines are followed:

- Staff must always speak when they sign.
- Staff should sign key words while using clear, simple language.
- Staff should ensure that the pupil can see their hands clearly and must use their dominant hand as the working hand.

- Staff should use appropriate direction when signing, e.g. “look”, “go” and “give”.
- Staff should use appropriate movement when signing, e.g. when talking about running fast, move the sign quickly.
- Staff should use appropriate placement when signing, e.g. when you sign “put the cup on the table”, sign ‘cup’ above where you sign ‘table’.
- Staff should try not to use their hands unnecessarily when they speak. Hand movements should be clear signs.
- Staff should give the pupil time to respond. All attempts to sign and communicate should be praised and encouraged.
- Staff should ensure their signs are accurate and correct. However, pupils may not make their signs so precisely. Staff should acknowledge the pupil’s effort to make the sign and show/model the correct sign to them, helping mould their hands into the correct handshape, if appropriate.
- Staff should ensure that the signing words/concepts are at the correct level of understanding for that pupil/cohort.
- Staff should practise their signing whenever possible.

Symbols

Symbols are used to aid the pupil’s understanding of what we are saying and represent what we are referring to, e.g. a symbol for the bus before going on a trip or using a visual timetable to ensure the pupils know what they are doing next. The use of symbols, pictures and photographs provides a valuable support and is encouraged even if pupils are primarily verbal. It is the responsibility of class staff to provide symbol vocabulary as appropriate. In the provisions at Knollmead Boardmaker Picture Communication Symbols (by Mayer-Johnson) is the symbol set identified for use. Consistency in the use of symbols is important for supporting and developing pupil understanding.

Objects of Reference

Pupils are taught to associate an object with the item or activity we are referring to, e.g. a knife and fork to show it is time for lunch. Objects of reference will be used for identified pupils as agreed by the Speech and Language Therapist and class teacher.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) (Bondy and Frost, 1994)

PECS is an Augmentative and Alternative Communication aid, where pupils learn to exchange picture symbols to communicate. There are 6 phases of PECS that pupils can move through. These are:

1. Exchanging a symbol
2. Travelling
3. Discriminating between symbols
4. Producing sentences
5. Answering questions
6. Commenting

On entry to the school, all pupils are assessed by the Speech and Language Therapist to determine the phase they should begin at. The following guidelines are followed:

- Each pupil being supported to use PECS should have their own PECS book containing their personal vocabulary of useful symbols.
- Motivating toys used as PECS reinforcers should be kept out of reach of children, e.g. in a choosing box.
- Pupils should be taught and encouraged to take responsibility for their own PECS book, including fetching them for use and carrying from place to place. Books need to be kept accessible and where the pupils know where they are. Prompting to get books should be physical not verbal and faded out as soon as possible.
- Each pupil's family should be offered support in PECS use at home. Parents/carers may be invited into school and/or home visits may be carried out by SALT, SALTA or teaching staff or a combination of these.
- Each pupil should have opportunities to use PECS every day, in a range of situations, with a range of adults, to work on identified goals.
- Each pupil should have opportunities to use PECS in the community, e.g. planned trips to the café, local shop etc.
- Each class should have a list of ideas for encouraging incidental and functional PECS opportunities. Staff should refer to this when planning the day.
- Class teams should have a pack of general PECS information to refer to, including the phases of PECS, rules for use and error correction procedures.
- Each class should have a 'PECS Champion'. This person is responsible for:
 - Tidying up PECS books, ensuring symbols are relevant and in the right places
 - Making any new symbols required or asking for support with this
 - Carrying out regular reinforcer checks to find out new preferred items to add to the pupil's vocabulary
- Information about each pupil's PECS to be displayed on class walls. This will be a live document regularly updated and contain what PECS phase they are at and current goals and ideas.

Photographs

Photographs are used to help pupils remember what they have done, to provide a visual sequence or as prompts for activities. They are also used to encourage social interaction and discussion.

Voice and Speech

Verbal communication must be differentiated to suit the individual needs of the pupil. It is essential that we use language the pupils can understand. All pupils will be supported to develop verbal communication where possible, and all attempts at speech will be encouraged. For some pupils, verbal communication will be developed through the use of non-verbal communication methods such as symbols, signs and gestures.

Communication Profiles

All pupils have a communication profile. These give people vital information about a pupil's individual needs including personal information, as well as how they communicate. The class teacher is responsible for writing and updating these profiles, seeking advice from the speech and language therapist as appropriate. These should be updated once a year or earlier if information changes

significantly. When a pupil leaves the provision at Knollmead the Speech and Language Therapy team will help to create an updated profile for their new setting to support their transition.

Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is a way of interacting and spending time with people with learning disabilities and/or autism. It is based on how communication develops, in ways that are enjoyable for all. (Nind & Hewett, 2001). Intensive Interaction focuses on taking turns, developing shared attention, having fun and playing together, using and understanding facial expressions, using and understanding eye contact, using and understanding non-verbal communication, such as body language. It focuses on the interactions that happen naturally between adults and children throughout the course of any day. These are the light-hearted, fun, face-to-face exchanges of eye contact, facial expression, touch or sounds.

Features of a Communication-Friendly Environment

- Adapt your language according to the needs of the individual. This may mean simplifying or reducing the words you are using.
- Give information in manageable chunks, delivered with pauses to allow processing time before expecting a pupil to respond.
- Use visuals to support spoken language in all teaching situations. This may mean pictures, symbols, real objects, signs or gesture as appropriate to the situation.
- Be prepared! Ensure you have any visuals or other communication supports you might need at the beginning of any activity.
- Value and respect all forms of communication and acknowledge all attempts.
- Use repetition and rehearsal to consolidate learning.
- Model correct grammar and appropriate social behaviour.
- Face the pupil and avoid putting your hand in front of your face.
- Where practical, turn off machines that create background noise.
- Try to avoid using idioms or figurative language, e.g. "pull your socks up".

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

Communication underpins all learning and therefore we are committed to providing specialised teaching to promote speech, language and communication skills. Speech and Language Therapy approaches and practices are integrated into classroom learning at Knollmead. The Speech and Language Therapy for Diamond, Sapphire and Emerald is provided by Your Healthcare CIC, a provider service for the NHS. The school also employs a Speech and Language Therapy Assistant for 3 days per week to work under the direction of the Specialist Speech and Language Therapist. Children are supported by the Speech and Language Therapy team to develop their functional communication skills through packages of care at Universal, Targeted and Specialist levels.

The Speech and Language Therapy team also provide training and advice on relevant approaches to supporting communication development to school staff, as requested and arranged by the provision leader and/or class teachers. Such training may include:

- Understanding autism
- Communication friendly environments
- Using visual supports and symbols
- Signing
- Colourful Semantics
- Talking Mats
- Using Social Stories/Social Scripts/Comic Strip Conversations
- PECS
- Intensive Interaction
- Attention Autism (developing shared attention and engagement)
- Supporting comprehension
- Supporting expression
- Developing social communication and social understanding

References and Sources of Further Information

Bondy, A., & Frost, L. (1994). The picture exchange communication system. *Focus on Autistic Behavior*, 9, 1–19.

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