



From Little Rivers Mighty Oceans Grow.

Communication & Interaction Policy

Revised: September 2019

To be reviewed: September 2020

Riverbank academy is a broad spectrum special school for secondary age students within the Sidney Stringer Academy Group, welcoming students' from across Coventry. We are a fully inclusive environment and aim to ensure everyone feels safe and happy irrespective of gender, disability, ethnicity and social, cultural or religious background. We aim to provide a safe place where curiosity is nurtured, learning is celebrated and expectations are high, enabling our students to become active members of their wider community beyond the school day. Through our policies and practice we aim to help all Riverbank students uphold the schools core values of being *Motivated, Creative and Caring*.

This policy identifies the wide range of communication needs and abilities within our community and ensures we have suitable assessment practices and communication tools throughout the school environment and beyond.

Purpose

- To ensure teachers can effectively assess children's communication levels and identify their preferred method of receptive and expressive communication
- To assist staff to provide an environment where all learners have the opportunity to communicate using their preferred method with both adults and their peers.
- To imbed communication skills and opportunities throughout the curriculum, developing on individual preferences and motivation.
- To ensure we meet our statutory requirements for teaching communication skills as laid out in the National Curriculum for secondary and post 16 learners.

How do we do this?

We will always carry out baseline assessments across the curriculum using appropriate assessment tools (see assessment rational) within the first half term of a learner joining the school. It is important to identify the level at which they are communicating for us to provide the appropriate communication environment, so in addition the teacher or SaLT may complete the *Communication Matrix* (appendix i) and/ or *Affective Communication Assessment* (appendix ii). Once this is complete we will identify personal communication targets and highlight any requirements that need to be put in place to minimise communication barriers (such as wearing glasses or hearing aids, or sitting correctly in prescribed seating). We will also provide an environment appropriate for developing their communication skills, using the communication environments checklist if appropriate (appendix iii). This will vary for individual or groups of learners, but may include adjusting light or sound levels, removing distractions or providing stimulating displays to motivate discussion. We will also aim to provide opportunities for learners to use their home language if it is other than English. We may use intensive interaction to develop early communicative exchanges for some learners. We will provide a communication passport (appendix iv) for all learners, explaining how they

communicate and interact which we will ensure is updated regularly. We will work closely with families and external agencies such as SaLT, or sensory support teachers to ensure the best possible communication opportunities are provided.

Place within the curriculum

Communication skills may be taught as discrete elements of the English, PSHE or Life Skills programmes of study. Use of communication skills and aids should however be embedded throughout the whole curriculum, and all periods of the school day as appropriate to the individual children. The *Scope* information on communication difficulties (appendix v) may help to plan for learners working at P4 or above. Some pupils may also have communication elements in their Personal Programmes.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)

AAC refers to all methods of communication used instead of or in addition to speech. In school learners may use or require access to one or more communication methods, aids or resources which may include (but is not limited to) the following;

Environmental cues: personally meaningful elements for an individual within the environment which the adults believe help learners to understand what is happening and which are used to help cue them in to an activity or experience. For example the learner may tilt their head to listen or open their mouth at the sound of water pouring into a cup for drink time. It may include touch, sound, smell and visual cues. This is normally only a receptive form of communication.

Objects or reference: a Local Authority agreed language of objects which relates to places and curriculum subjects (appendix vi). For those who are reliant on environmental cues, and not yet communicating with intent a reduced system can be used to introduce the method and begin to understand that objects can hold meaning. This will normally begin with introducing a 'busy brick' for all focused learning activities, indicating 'work time'. The separate objects of reference will only be introduced when a learner is showing interest and awareness of the meaning of the brick, starting with objects which represent the individual's favourite places or activities. Objects of reference can be used receptively or expressively.

Personal identifiers: All learners with PMLD, those recognised as visually impaired or multi-sensory impaired and the staff who work with them should be assigned an object or texture personal to them which can be used to help recognise individual people as well as identify things that belong to them, such as their coat peg.

Symbolic objects: miniature versions of OORs (such as a doll house chair or toy cup) or an increasingly abstract object with an agreed meaning (such as a rubber duck for

swimming). These can be individual or agreed for a group. They are effective for building a tactile expressive language where due to visual impairment symbols or photographs would not be accessible.

Photographs: a photo of a real person, place or object which can be used to show learners where they are going or what is happening next. Learners can also use them to express wants and preferences and learn to make meaningful choices. They can be sequenced to make timetables or start to negotiate. Where a learner has progressed from OORs or symbolic objects they may use photographs of the objects they used previously. This may also include Tobi photographs which are printed to the same size as the original object with no background to help a learner understand that a real object can be represented symbolically. Photos can be presented on boards or in folders. Each class has their own digital camera for making photograph cards. Photographs of all staff, all areas around the school and all the OORs will be stored on the server; all classes will use these to ensure continuity and not take their own.

Symbols: agreed language of symbols using Communicate in Print software which are used for receptive and expressive communication. Symbols can be printed and used on boards or in folders, or they could be used with communication aids such as I pads or eye-gaze technology. Symbols could be used by pointing to or eye-pointing to single symbols to answer questions or show wants and preferences. They can also be combined to make sentences and have more complex interactions. This is the start of developing reading skills. All classes have access to Communicate in Print software in their classrooms for making symbols.

PECs: may use photographs, Tobi photos or symbols depending on their awareness of symbolic representation as an expressive method of communication. An individual selects a picture and exchanges it with a communication partner to gain a desired object, activity or outcome.

Signing: we use sign supported English in school, using the MAKATON system. We sign only the key words in a sentence, with the complexity depending on the understanding of the individuals we are communicating with. For a few very early communicators who also have a visual impairment signing may not be appropriate due to their inability to use visual information. Signing is used for both expressive and receptive communication. It is the teachers' responsibility to ensure they have all the signs for their session.

Personal signs: all staff working with children should have a sign that includes the first letter of their name and an identifying element. Staff should use these signs when talking to each other and the children.

Body signing: we use the agreed system of body signing (appendix vii) devised by the

Leicester SEND support service and SaLT team. This is a receptive method for sharing information primarily used with learners with sensory impairments, but may also benefit pre-intentional communicators. In some cases it is possible for learners to develop these signs for expressive communication. The movement signs should be used for all wheelchair users who have delayed communication processing.

VOCA (Voice Output Communication Aids): These are generally provided for individual learners depending on their needs and abilities, via a referral for an assistive technology assessment. These normally use symbols and are programmed for the learner to use for expressive communicative interactions. This may include a variety of switches, I pads, eye-gaze computers or other touch screen devices.

Speech: The use of speech underlies all other forms of communication. Staff need to judge the level of language, tone and volume (appendix) they use with individuals and groups of learners, and if required match it with appropriate signs, pictures or symbols which highlight the key information.

Raised paper: Braille or moon lettering may be printed using a Braille printer or swollen paper. It allows individuals with VI to read documents and labels helping them to find their way around the setting. The SaLT and/ or VI advisory teacher will advise you if a learner requires raised lettering and will help source the equipment needed.

The communication environment

The environment is key in supporting communication and encouraging interactions. Teachers may want to complete the Communication environment checklist (appendix iii) to support this. All groups should have a visual timetable using text, symbols, photos and OORs or a combination as appropriate to their group and refer to it throughout the day. Individuals may have their own timetables indicating what is happening now/ next or showing all or part of their day. The design and layout will vary greatly depending on the make up of the class or group. For learners with visual or hearing sensory impairments the room may be plain and uncluttered, with displays arranged out of the immediate line of vision. The arrangement of furniture will facilitate the best position for interactions, and where appropriate allow flexibility to work in groups, pairs or with adults. The lighting, background noise, residual smell and temperature can all impact upon an individuals' ability to engage in communication exchanges. It is vital that where AACs or VOCA are being used by groups or individuals they are readily available in the room, and throughout the curriculum. It is important that both the setting and the communication tools are tailored to the individual learners. Teachers will also take into account the fact that learners may be using separate aspects of different communications tools, which may vary for their receptive and expressive communication interactions. Individuals working at the same communication level may be using different resources and techniques. They may have physical or developmental

barriers to using certain forms of communication which need to be accounted for. Our interpretation of the 'Total communication environment' is using any of the tools available in a targeted way to encourage our children to develop communication skills and a desire to interact, rather than using all the tools available with everyone.

Assessment and recording

The speaking and listening aspects of the National Curriculum or P levels will continue to be the main tools for assessing communication progress and setting individual targets, but teachers may also use specific communication assessment tools such as the *Communication Matrix*. Teachers may include additional assessment targets in a child's IEP. Assessment will be carried out at the end of each session against the children's individual targets using the agreed marking format (see assessment policy). Staff may also carry out regular observations, both planned and informal which may include video footage or photographs, which will inform the teachers' judgements. Assessment should take into account input from the SaLT or SEND support service if they are involved. Passports should be updated as the assessment results indicate changes in their skills and motivation.

Communication passports

Non-verbal students at Riverbank have a passport including some key points regarding expressive and receptive communication skills. These documents are available on the staff shared resources drive and a copy will be in classroom inclusion folders, so they are available for anyone working with the student including visiting professionals.

Staffing and resources

Classroom teachers are responsible for delivering good communication practice within their class and disseminating the information regarding learners' communication to other staff and families. They must recognise pupils who require additional support or those for whom English is an additional language and provide the resources to aid communication. The SaLT may work with individuals or groups in their classes, and will work with individuals on their case load as often as prescribed on their plan, but will be available for additional support or advice if requested by the class teacher or SENCo.

Most resources will be made or purchased by the class. Early communication devices are often linked to ICT and the development of cause and effect, so Big Macks or other switches may be available via the ICT budget, dependent on other commitments at the time. Each class has their own digital camera and access to 'Communicate in Print' on the computers to enable them to make photographs and symbols using the agreed originals.

Coventry total communication group have produced a standardised objects of reference kit for each school free of charge which has been delivered along with training on their

use. The school is responsible for funding and sourcing additional objects and maintaining the resources.

VOCA equipment

Where it is felt a pupil requires 'high tech' (VOCA) equipment a referral must be made by the SaLT, encompassing the views of the teacher. When an assessment has been successful the prescribed equipment should be checked and set up by the Company Rep. or the SaLT initially and any issues reported immediately. Training for school staff will be booked by the communication coordinator who will retain responsibility for the specialist equipment and ensure it is used appropriately and stored safely. Any faults or breakages should be reported immediately to the communication coordinator. It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure the pupil has regular use of their equipment and it is incorporated into the wider curriculum.

Speech and Language Therapy

The Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) visits the school and may work in the classrooms with groups or individual children, depending on their targets and communication programme.

Work may include;

- Assessment of individuals' communication abilities and how they communicate across the curriculum within the classroom.
- Identifying student's response to strategies used (signs, symbols, pictures, objects, text speech etc).
- Looking at opportunities for functional and social use of communication.
- Identifying students with specific communication needs to target for Therapy.
- Discuss strategies and advise the teacher.
- Identifying and delivering training where appropriate.
- Building relationships with families through reports, telephone contact, home visits, training sessions etc.
- Working with students with eating, drinking and swallowing needs.

Equal opportunities

Opportunities to develop communication skills will be made available to all students regardless of gender, race or ability. The school recognises and values the importance of a student's first language and that by supporting the student in their first language (where ever possible) provide a bridge to learning both in English and curriculum subjects. Their preferred method of communication will be available to them where and whenever it is practically possible and no individual will be denied the opportunity to communicate.

List of appendices

- i Communication Matrix
- ii Affective communication assessment
- iii Communication environment
- iv Example of communication passport
- v Scope materials
- vi List of agreed OORs
- vii Body signing