



PS39 INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION POLICY

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1. Introduction

All students at Portfield School have a diagnosis of autism. A key component of this diagnosis is differences in understanding and use of communication.

The right to communication is a basic and fundamental human right. We use a neuro-divergent affirming approach to the support given for communication where diversity in communication style is recognised and welcomed. As a school, we value each student's 'voice' and strive to create an environment which facilitates communication in all its forms, allowing participation in every aspect of school life.

2. Aims

An Inclusive Communication approach is used with the aim of ensuring that students are;

- Provided with a consistent and appropriate communicative environment which provides opportunities and reasons to communicate.
- Supported to develop effective functional communication skills
- Respected and valued in their choice of communication style.
- Empowered to develop meaningful relationships with each other using their chosen communication method.
- Enabled to access learning across all our learning environments

3. Statutory requirements

- Human Rights Act 1998
- Children's and Family's Act 2014

4. Definitions

Communication is a reciprocal, dynamic process involving at least two people where each person is defined as a communication partner. It involves one person (the initiator) conveying a message and a person/s (the receiver/s) then responding. The message can be conveyed in a number of different ways but is broadly described as being verbal (spoken words, word approximations, tone of voice etc.) and non-verbal (gestures, use of body, facial expressions, through pictures, written words etc.).

Communication can be both intentional where a message was intended to be conveyed by the initiator, or non-intentional where the initiator has conveyed a message without a clear intention to do so but where the receiver/s have still understood the message.

Inclusive Communication (previously defined as Total Communication) recognises that all human beings use many ways of understanding and expressing themselves and encourages, supports and enables people to use whatever ways of understanding and expressing themselves that they find easiest (RCSLT, 2023).

5. Implementation of an inclusive communication approach

We understand that for communication to occur there needs to be Means, Reasons and Opportunities to communicate (Money and Thurman, 1994).

Means of communication: This is the 'how' of communication. This includes both verbal and non-verbal methods of communication. It involves both expressive communication (ability to express what we want to communicate) and receptive communication (understanding of what has been communicated by others.)

Reasons to communicate: This is the 'why' of communication.

Communication happens for a wide range of reasons such as to greet, request, share information, make choices, express feelings, make jokes etc. Communication happens to meet our wants and needs as well as to engage socially.

Opportunities for communication: This is the 'who', 'where' and 'when' of communication. For communication to happen there needs to be at least two communication partners as well as a time and place for this to happen on a regular basis.



Figure 5 Money and Thurman's model of communication (1994)

5.1 Means of Communication

Students use a wide range of communication methods and it is recognised that they may move between using different communication methods depending on their state of emotional arousal, where they are, with whom and about what they are communicating..

It is also recognised that students may have different communication preferences for their expressive and receptive communication e.g. show a preference for using symbols to express themselves but benefit from speech, sign and symbols to process and understand information.

In order to facilitate this, each student has information about their communication style as part of their Pupil Passport. To help develop their communication skills further, each student has a Communication and Interaction target as part of their Portfield School Learning Journey (PSLJ), which defines the skill they are working on and how they will be supported to achieve this. This target is reviewed each half term.


The therapy team includes Speech and Language Therapists who work alongside the class teams to help identify each student's communication preferences and skills, and provide support to embed these methods into day to day communication. All staff use spoken language to communicate and they adapt the complexity and amount of language as well as the speed and tone of delivery to suit the individual they are speaking with. Staff understand that processing speed and capacity vary between students and does not necessarily reflect the student's expressive skills. In addition, staff may use and support students to use a variety of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) methods to enable communication to happen.

5.1.1 Joint attention and engagement

Some students communicate predominately through non-verbal communication methods such as eye contact, vocalisations, gesture and body proximity. In order to extend to these skills, and to develop the foundation skills of joint attention and turn taking, interventions such as Attention Autism, Intensive Interaction and the Shared Attention in Play Programme (SAPP based on PEIC-D) are used. Students participate in dedicated sessions focused on these interventions but staff also integrate these approaches into the way they work to facilitate and help generalise communication skills across the day.

5.1.2 Visual communication systems

Presenting information visually is generally found to support processing and memory and this can be particularly true for some individuals with autism whose visual processing skills may be a strength. Visual means of communication are broad and are considered in terms of how symbolic they are. The least symbolic being where the visual link is most concrete and the most symbolic being where the visual link is most abstract. Visual approaches are embedded across the school but are also tailored to each student's level of symbolic understanding to enable reciprocal communication to occur. The visual systems used are outlined below;

Least Symbolic  Most Symbolic		
	Objects	This is where an object is used to represent an activity or place, called objects of reference e.g. where a plate is used to represent lunchtime. Additionally objects are used to aid choice making e.g. an apple or banana is held up to choose between.
	Photographs	This is where some kind of picture is used to represent an item, place, activity, action or feeling. These are used in a wide variety of ways such as on; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A choosing board, CORE Board or communication book to provide a way of requesting. - A visual schedule or 'now and next' board to communicate the sequence of events. - Picture Exchange Communication (PECS)* books to enable requesting and/or commenting. - Colourful semantic grids to aid sentence construction.
	Pictures	
	Symbols	
	Gestures	This is where a spoken word is supplemented with the use of a gesture or a standardised hand movement such as when signing. We use Signalong, a sign supported English system, whereby key words in the sentence are signed whilst speaking to provide additional cues to meaning.
	Signing	
Written words	This is where written word/s are used to supplement understanding of verbal information. Written words are used in the form of word/mind maps, task planners, narrative planners, social stories etc.	

*Whilst PECS is used, hand over hand is not advocated, and therefore whilst students move through each phase, physical prompts are not employed.

5.1.3 Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs)

A VOCA is a speech generating communication aid where a user can select from a variety of symbols and/or photographs as well as free type in order to communicate using spoken language. These can be 'low tech' communication aids such as a 'GoTalk' device which enables students to communicate spoken single words, or 'high tech' communication aids which are computer based (on a device such as an iPad) and enables students to self-construct spoken sentences from a bank of symbols and photographs or by free typing. This type of communication aid is used by students who have very limited spoken language but whom have the prerequisite skills and motivation to use a device. If a VOCA is found to be appropriate for a student, the

Speech and Language Therapist completes an assessment of their skills and makes an application for this to be funded via their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). If a student uses a VOCA, the Speech and Language Therapy team provide support on using the device for two way communication as well as updating and maintaining the device.

5.1.4 Spoken Language

Many students use spoken language to some degree. This may be single words or the use of complex sentences at a conversational level. To enable the development of spoken language skills a range of approaches are employed;

- Colourful Semantics, Word Aware strategies, modelling of vocabulary and language structures in context/play and teaching of concepts through multi-sensory activities to support the acquisition of new vocabulary and understanding of semantics (word meanings).
- Teaching of specific, spoken grammatical structures through multi-modal activities using written words, actions, symbols and objects, as well as Shape Coding.
- Narrative Intervention Programme and Speaking and Listening through Narrative Programme to support the linking of sentences and spoken storytelling.
- Talk about sessions to support the understanding of social conventions and understanding of own communication style.

5.1.5 Behaviours of concern as communication

Some students may hit, kick, bite, abscond etc. These are described as behaviors of concern as they put the individual and/or those around them at risk of potential harm. These behaviours may be intentionally used to express feelings or to communicate. The same behavior may be exhibited but without the intention of expressing a particular message and instead, those around them infer what is meant from what they know of the individual, the situation and circumstances. We therefore recognise that whilst all behavior communicates it is important to differentiate between intentional and non-intentional communication when considering the function of a behavior.

5.2 Reasons to Communicate

Communication is central to our approach and therefore reasons to communicate are woven throughout all activities at school. Zones of Regulation are used during morning greeting and throughout the day to encourage students to communicate their feelings as well as identify what they need to ensure they are well regulated. Choices are regularly given to ensure that students can make requests and have influence on what they do. They are invited to school council to enable active decision-making which impacts the whole school. Students are facilitated to develop relationships with each other during social times of the day by sharing stories which relate to themselves and their experiences with each other. For those for whom this is appropriate, they are encouraged to have discussion with each other as a way of learning more about a topic and understanding each other's points of view.

5.3 Opportunities to Communicate

The school environment is underpinned by our purpose –designed 'therapeutic classroom' standards. These define how an inclusive communication environment is implemented within each classroom and is adapted to meet the needs of each class. It ensures that students have opportunities to communicate throughout their day and that their communication partners include both school team members and their peers, in order to facilitate peer relationships.

To support staff in their role as communicative partners for students training is provided via the regular staff CPD rota.

6. Speech and Language Therapy

The Speech and Language Therapy team sit within the multi-disciplinary therapy team. They provide therapy through an integrated model whereby therapists and education colleagues work in collaboration to ensure that an inclusive communication approach is embedded into the school provision.

The Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) provide indirect input at universal level with all the students through delivery of specialist staff training, participation in relevant aspects of whole school planning, reviewing of therapeutic classroom environments and provision of advice and support to education colleagues as requested. For students whose speech and language needs require more in-depth support this is delivered via targeted intervention. This includes a combination of joint target setting with education colleagues, supplemented with a speech and language programme (if required), and group class based interventions. For those with the most complex or significant speech and language needs, specialist intervention is provided by the addition of direct therapy with an SLT.