



1. INTRODUCTION

Eagle House School (Mitcham) is an independent day school, which provides an appropriate education for primary-aged pupils who hold a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education, Health & Care plan for an autism spectrum disorder and associated social and communication difficulties. This will include children and young people with mild, moderate or severe learning difficulties. Eagle House School provides a broad and balanced curriculum within a small, caring and nurturing environment.

This policy is guided by the Ace Centre's document "Developing Augmentative and Communication Policies in Schools" (2001).

Communication is central to life and learning. It is a fundamental human right. Through communication we build social relationships and knowledge, make our needs and feelings known, and share ideas with others. Communication involves listening, understanding and responding, and also links to literacy skills.

Communication is at the core of our work with pupils at Eagle House School. Since communication difficulties are an intrinsic part of the diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder, all the pupils will have some degree of difficulty in this area of development. We recognise that Eagle House School should be a Total Communication environment where pupils can learn, play and have fun alongside others while taking part in everyday social activities as well as educational ones.

In support of pupils' communication, the school employs specialist Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs) who work in partnership with class teachers, parents and school staff to ensure that the communication needs of all pupils are being met and that the speech and language requirements as detailed on their statement or EHC plan are being fulfilled.

All forms of communication are acknowledged and valued. By their very nature, a large proportion of pupils at Eagle House will rely heavily on visual strategies, both as an alternative and augmentative means of expressive communication, and to aid their understanding of spoken language and the world around them. Eagle House School recognises that specialised communication support strategies such as the use of photographs and symbols, visual timetables, structured laying out of materials and rooms to ensure visual/contextual cues are available, objects of reference, sign language, etc. may be needed to ensure all pupils are given the optimum communication experiences they need to develop and share successful communication.

The importance of communication in empowering pupils and ensuring their access to the curriculum is recognised. All those involved in a child's education should possess the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to ensure that effective communication is achievable for all.

Each individual should know that their communication is valued and that every day they have been listened to by others and that they in turn have shared communication with others.

At Eagle House School, our overarching goals are to help pupils:

- develop spontaneous and functional communication skills
- develop good relationships with others

- maintain a well-regulated emotional state for learning and interacting
- maximise their opportunities to take part in daily life
- develop their individual personalities and socio-emotional wellbeing

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of communication at Eagle House School are as follows:

- That pupils who require specialised forms of communication or supported communication strategies are understood by staff and fellow pupils and know that they are understood.
- That pupils' communication strengths and difficulties are fully assessed and supporting communication aids are integrated into the curriculum and across the school day. Assessments are reviewed at key transition stages and additionally when any other significant change occurs in the life of the individual that might make further assessment beneficial. This is in addition to the continuous monitoring and assessment that is necessary to ensure the progress of the individual's communication skills.
- That assessment is collaborative and includes the family of the pupil and anyone who may add to the understanding of the individual.
- That the school community works together to develop communication systems that are specific for the individual and seeks to work with other settings to produce an integrated approach to communication.
- That the school has a high level of expertise to call on from among the school staff and has ready access to other professionals who are well trained and experienced and have skills relevant to specialised forms of communication.
- That communication is recognised as cross-curricular and is vital in order to ensure access to the curriculum/learning opportunities.
- That the assessment and communication plans have due regard to the individual's ethnicity, culture, religion and heritage.
- That the assessment is coordinated by a speech and language therapist who is given an agreed amount of time to complete this.
- That results are shared and clearly identified in the educational programme.
- That the communication strategies for the individual pupil are integrated into the detailed educational planning and are reviewed along with the Personal Development Plan (PDP) and at EHCP/statement reviews.
- That all members of the school community in the broadest sense need to be prepared to be involved in the assessment and implementation of the policy where appropriate.
- That staff receive regular INSET from appropriately trained members of the school community on communication.
- That identified key personnel are trained to a level, which gives them the knowledge and

understanding to support pupils with specialised forms of communication and the skills needed to support staff in developing the expertise needed to teach in ways that further develop the pupils' communication skills.

3. APPROACHES

Communication is seen as an individual priority for many pupils at Eagle House School as reflected in their Statement of Special Educational Needs and it will therefore frequently be a priority target in their PDP. We know that not all pupils will follow the same route in learning and many show atypical development. Specialist approaches to communication development add to our practice.

Teaching approaches will support the pupil's movement through stages of communicative development by providing opportunities for interaction and communication learning during everyday activities and routines as well as during school lesson time. Communication skills will develop when pupils:

- Interact and develop trusting relationships with others, while having fun.
- Learn to pay attention to others and share the focus of their interest.
- Enjoy and understand two-way communication.
- Understand what others say and mean.
- Have structure, routine and predictability in their lives.

Teachers support communication development by:

- Following a pupil's lead and including their interests.
- Providing frequent opportunities for communication through play, music, books, etc.
- Observing, waiting and listening to what the pupil is doing before adapting and adding new experiences.
- Using familiar routines to build skills, interpret the pupil's communication and support understanding.
- Establishing joint attention and developing turn taking e.g. using 'the little group Approach'
- Play "people-games" that incorporate repetition and movement e.g. Intensive Interaction.
- Matching adult language to the pupil's level.
- Modelling, reinforcing and extending appropriate language, sign/visual symbol use (Makaton, PECS, PODD) so that the pupil links the communication to what they experience.
- Supporting pupils in using their knowledge of communication to underpin their literacy development.

Specialist approaches offer opportunities to:

- Create a communication-enabling environment which uses a range of consistent supportive strategies (objects of reference, signing, symbols, verbal, etc.) so pupils can

understand expectations, access the curriculum and express themselves.

- Devise specific tasks to promote comprehension and expressive skills.
- Help pupils to develop alternative and augmentative communication strategies where needed to express themselves and understand others e.g. PECS, Makaton, PODD.
- Develop new routines to enable understanding.
- Recognise that all behaviour is a form of communication.
- Develop appropriate ways of helping pupils express their needs, opinions and feelings.
- Recognise that communication strategies are important in behaviour management.
- Develop pupils' ability to control their lives through appropriate communication rather than inappropriate behaviour.
- Support emotional regulation by making expectations clear and using visual support e.g. TEACCH Schedules and Work Systems, Traffic Lights, the 'Zones of Regulation'.
- Use Social Stories™ and Comic Strip Conversations to develop social understanding and communication.

A fundamental pre-requisite of these approaches and their components is to involve parents, carers and other family members in the process of supporting communication development and underline the fact that their input is vital.

In order to help the pupils develop communication skills, we need to have knowledge of:

- **Individual Pupil:**
 - The pupil's communication impairment, other specific difficulties associated with their autism as well as any other diagnosed conditions.
 - The pupil's strengths and difficulties, sensory preferences and preferred learning style.
 - What motivates and engages the pupil.
 - Shared information between parents, carers and other practitioners.
- **Communication development, impairment and teaching approaches:**
 - Communication and its development.
 - Communication impairment and, in particular, a thorough understanding of social communication disorders and the Triad of Impairment present in autism spectrum disorders.
 - Our own use of language, remembering the importance of gaining the individual's attention first, using simple, clear and explicit language, and not overloading with verbal information.
 - A range of informal and formal assessment procedures.

- Learning theories and the theories of autism.
- Commitment to collaborative working.
- Pupil-centered and specialist approaches to communication e.g. SCERTS, Intensive Interaction, TEACCH, PECS, PODD, 'the little group Approach', talking mats, etc.

4. COMMUNICATION AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Communication is a key skill embedded within the National Curriculum. It is recognised as being fundamental to participation and achievement in all curriculum areas.

'The development of communication is valued not just as a vehicle for teaching the curriculum but as the core of the curriculum.' (Latham and Miles 2001, p 108)

Communication is a cross-curricular skill, which impacts on all aspects of teaching and learning. Therefore it must be acknowledged at all stages i.e. when planning, teaching, recording, evaluating and assessing and when monitoring and reviewing at both a personal and whole school level. Teaching staff should work collaboratively with the school Speech and Language Therapists to ensure the pupil's communication needs are met at all of these stages.

5. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

The following will be used to support pupils when necessary, and as appropriate to their individual needs, to reduce reliance on adults:

- Visual prompts, including the use of symbols and signs, e.g. simple written instruction to tell pupils how to behave appropriately.
- Written or visual symbol timetables to help pupils understand what they are doing now and what will happen next.
- Tasks will be broken down using written or symbol prompts to encourage independent working and help pupils to complete individual tasks.
- Pupils will be given visual prompts to help them move on to new tasks.

Pupils will:

- Not be asked to copy or repeat sentences 'parrot fashion' unless as part of modelling communication as detailed below.
- Be given opportunities to request objects, actions and information and also to give their opinions e.g. talking mats.
- Be given supports to help them deal with change e.g. Social Stories™.
- Be given strategies and be expected to actively ask for help and/or clarification and/or say they don't understand.
- Be discouraged from the use of masking behaviours (e.g. smiling or nodding in agreement when they have not understood). They will be given more appropriate methods of communicating what the problem is.

- Be helped to understand the need for and be given the skill to use varied styles of communication with different people in different situations, e.g. communicating with peers at break and responding to a teacher's questions.
- Be given opportunities to develop skills of working on their own and in groups.

6. STAFF PRACTICE

All staff need to be aware of the following and refer to their individual copy of the Eagle House Group, Autism Best Practice Handbook (page 10 Communication):

- Do not make assumptions about pupils' understanding or behaviour.
- Use clear and unambiguous verbal and non-verbal language.
- Do not use sarcasm, e.g. 'That was really clever'; inference, e.g. 'Were you in a rush getting dressed this morning?' meaning sort out your uniform; ambiguity, e.g. 'Can you finish this and then put it over there?' – pupil might not understand what 'this' or 'it' or 'over there' means; hidden meanings in jokes and verbal humour, e.g. 'What's green and hairy and goes up and down?' 'A gooseberry in a lift'; double meanings e.g. 'Why were the numbers unhappy?' 'Because seven, eight, nine!' (double meaning of eight = ate).
- Encourage pupils to initiate communication e.g. pause, set up specific opportunities to communicate.
- Give pupils regular opportunities to communicate about what people might say, do, think and feel e.g. use comic strip conversations, the 'Zones of Regulation'.
- Do not speak for pupils, rephrase or repeat what they have said to allow for slow processing time. Some pupils require much longer time than normal in order to make sense of what they have heard and/or plan what to communicate in response.
- Encourage meaningful conversations rather than encourage off-topic communication.
- Offer choices in a structured manner that enables the pupil to develop skills to make more and more complex choices throughout their life.
- Provide equal opportunities for all pupils to communicate in groups by reinforcing good listening and turn-taking skills.
- Learn how to present work individually and in groups to avoid set up for failure and/or 'shutdown'.
- Move the pupil on when s/he becomes resistant to complete the current task.
- Use modelling to demonstrate a desired verbal and/or non-verbal behaviour to the pupil, so that the pupil has a clear example to copy.
- Modelling should be used when a pupil has communicated or behaved in an inappropriate way to show the pupil exactly how to change the behaviour to be more appropriate.

- Give the pupil a clear explanation about why their initial communicative attempt/behaviour was inappropriate. This explanation should be short and clearly stated, e.g. "You sounded really rude then. You used the wrong tone of voice. I'd like you to say it like this _____". Follow with a model of the desired behaviour.
- Beware of modelling inappropriate behaviour inadvertently, e.g. laughing when a pupil is sarcastic toward a teacher; making facial expressions at another member of staff as a comment on pupil behaviour; when asked to do something by another staff member, not being rude in response; not talking about pupils in front of them, etc.

7. BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are extremely important to enable pupils to function effectively and reduce anxiety levels. Staff will help by:

- Clearly defining the beginnings and ends of tasks and lessons.
- Use set time limits with visual or auditory feedback of the passage of time, e.g. use of sand timers or egg timers, giving non-verbal or countdown warnings towards the end of lessons/sessions.
- Informing pupils when their verbal/non-verbal behaviour is inappropriate towards staff and other pupils.
- Having realistic expectations of individual pupils – e.g. what they can actually achieve in the time.
- Recognising that sometimes, challenging situations require the pupil to develop new skills, even if these may engender some degree of anxiety.

8. REFERENCES

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Prizant,B,Wetherby,A, Rubin,E,Laurent,A & Rydell,P (2006) *The SCERTS Model*

Gray, C, (2001) *the New Social Story Book*

Hewett,D, and Nind, M, (1998) *Intensive Interaction*

Potter & Whittaker, (2001) *Enabling Communication in Pupils with Autism*

Knowles,W & Masidlover,M, (1982) *The Derbyshire Language Scheme*

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Gilham, J, (2015) 'the little group Approach' *Training Manual*

Murphy J & Boa S. (2012) Using the WHO-ICF with Talking Mats as a goal setting tool. *AAC Journal*

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Winner, M, G (2011) The Zones of Regulation – A Curriculum Designed to Foster Self-Regulation and Emotional Control

9. POLICY REVIEW

It is the responsibility of the Head of Education supported by the other members of the school's Senior Leadership Team and Senior SaLT to monitor this policy. It should be reviewed annually or when new legislation is published. The Head of Education reports on Eagle House School (Mitcham) matters to the CEO/Directors.

10. RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTATION

- ❖ Teaching and Learning Policy
- ❖ Curriculum Policy
- ❖ Literacy and English Policy

Appendices:-

- *Procedures and Responsibilities for Visual Supports*

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Due to the broad range of abilities in our pupils/students, communication is personalised according to the needs of each individual.

Visuals to be used at all times

Classrooms

- Visuals should be differentiated according to the pupils' level of understanding.
- Symbols or other visual systems should be provided as a minimum in ALL classrooms regardless of level of ability as follows:
 - Reward charts
 - Timetable – first/then boards to supplement timetables for those who find transitions and a full timetable too much
 - Visual strips introducing activities e.g. morning routine, playtime, lunchtime, going off-site, assembly, tidying up before home time, etc.
 - Topic/activity specific PODD communication boards or single displays
 - Social stories to help students understand social situations
 - Activity choice boards
 - Class rules/expectations
 - White boards to draw visuals
- Visuals should be used at playtime, in all communal areas and offsite.
- For pupils in Mitcham and for students from the lower pathway at Sutton, a core set of standard symbols are used throughout the school as agreed with the SaLTs, e.g. wait, stop, good, toilet, calm, break.
- Staff should print out and laminate the core symbols for their lanyards. Each class will then decide on further key symbols to include on the lanyard that are appropriate for the pupils they are working with.
- All symbols should be from Boardmaker; there is a symbol dictionary on the shared drive. Photographs and drawings are also used where appropriate as agreed with SaLTs.
- Each transition should be supported by a visual strip.
- Each activity should be supported by a visual strip/single page PODD sheet/PODD book.
- When going off-site, a white board and pen or notepad should be taken in case instant drawings are required.

Total Communication Environment

- Staff should use reduced levels of verbal language and use visuals to support understanding of key words.
- When staff are working with students who use an Augmentative and Alternative Communication system (AAC), they should use the AAC the student is familiar with.
- Many of the pupils use a Pragmatic Organisational Dynamic Display (PODD) communication system as this best meets their needs at this time, allowing more flexibility and a wide range of vocabulary in line with normal developmental patterns. The decision on what AAC is used is based on assessment by SaLT and regularly reviewed. Any pupil entering the school using another communication system e.g. Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), will be supported to use the system they are familiar with.
- Elements of different systems may be used alongside each other as part of a total communication environment (where all forms of communication are valued and supported).
- The use of any AAC systems is regularly reviewed and pupils may transition to a different system following assessment if another system may better meet their communication needs.
- In addition staff should use Makaton signs to reinforce the spoken word. A core set of useful Makaton signs will be taught to all staff as part of the Induction process.

Training

- All staff should be trained in the use of PODD and Makaton by staff who are appropriately qualified.
- All staff are trained to use the core symbols and signs at induction.
- The speech and language therapists run regular training for staff and parents in the use of PODD and also hold PODD chats where staff practice communicating with each other using the PODD system.
- Some staff should also be trained in the use of PECs, depending on the needs of students in class.
- For more able pupils, staff should be trained in the use of visuals using the written word.
- All staff should be trained to write social stories and use the Boardmaker programme by staff who are appropriately qualified.

SaLT Responsibilities

a) Assessments

- Assessing the Communication needs of pupils/students during the first 6 weeks following admission.
- Detailed baseline communication assessments are administered according to whether the pupils are high functioning, moderate or lower functioning.
- These assessments will then inform class teams on the level of communication, the system to be used and the need for differentiation of work, in terms of pupil's understanding.

- Updating the statement audits when new students are admitted and annually thereafter.
- The baseline assessments will be repeated on an annual basis to assess progress.
- Under the SaLT's guidance, school staff will be trained to administer the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS), which will be carried out on an annual basis for all pupils, where appropriate. The SaLTs will be responsible for collating the data and incorporating it into their assessment recording system.

b) Programmes

- The SaLTs are responsible for collaborating with teachers and other members of the curriculum access team to review and develop PDPs and programmes.

c) Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems (AACs)

- To advise staff on which AAC system should be used for a particular pupil, e.g. PODD, which style of book would be most appropriate in terms of size and layout, and when more vocabulary should be added to the system. This will be monitored closely and reviewed at regular intervals.
- To advise the class teams about the resources required for each pupil and also class-wide resources to support receptive and expressive language development.
- Creating school-wide communication strategies for communal areas to set the standard across the whole school, e.g. social stories for school wide events or issues, labelling communal areas, etc.
- Support class teams in making PODD books but these should be made predominantly by each class team with the support of the Learning Resource Assistant.

Teacher responsibilities

- Maintaining the visual systems in their class as described above
- To follow any strategies as agreed with the SaLT
- To run programmes as agreed with SaLT
- To refer to the CA Team if they have specific concerns or when they need advice on how to progress, using the CA team referral system
- To liaise with the SaLT when setting communication goals and ensuring they differentiate according to the needs of each child in their planning
- Creating a classroom environment that supports communication
- Ensuring that opportunities for communication and further development of these skills are embedded throughout the day
- Ensuring strategies and programmes are followed
- Ensuring that PODD books and other communication systems accompany children at all times
- Ensuring that LSAs are delegated to create and use resources as necessary
- Carrying out a self audit of the communication environment in their class room on a termly

basis

- Ensuring classroom displays conform to the criteria in the school Display Policy

LSA responsibilities

- At the direction of the teacher, maintaining the visual systems in their class and using them
- Symbols or visual systems should be present and used continuously throughout the school day including external off-site visits
- Ensuring that PODD books and other communication systems accompany pupils at all times
- To keep all visuals safe, in good repair and to ensure that new ones are made if damaged or lost
- Keeping all visuals up-to-date and current
- To follow any strategies as agreed with the SaLT
- To run programmes as agreed with the SaLT
- To create visuals as necessary on the advice of SaLT

Learning Resource Assistant Responsibilities

- Management of the resources that support teaching and learning in the school
- This includes the management of curriculum and topic based resources/ equipment and CA team resources that enable the curriculum to be delivered
- They are not responsible for making individual class room based visual support, which is the responsibility of the class team
- Along with the CA Team, producing school wide resources such as communal area visuals, whole school social stories etc.
- Maintaining a stock of the core lanyard symbols
- Maintaining a centralised system of core visual support templates for the class teams to use and adapt
- Maintaining the quality of the visual support across the communal areas of the school by means of a termly whole school audit
- Maintaining the resource making equipment across the school e.g. such as laminators and any broken or faulty equipment needs to be reported to them via the referral system