



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 (EHS) 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.

Collaborative Working

Communication is at the core of our work with pupils at EHS. 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 EHS 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 an onsite team of 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. At EHS we work collaboratively to promote a communication friendly school.

All forms of communication are acknowledged and valued. A large proportion of pupils at EHS will benefit from visual strategies (e.g. signs and symbols), both as an alternative and augmentative means of expressive communication, and to aid their understanding of spoken language and the world around them.

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. The SaLT team offer a wide range of training for all staff (e.g. induction sessions, refreshers, specialist training, Elklan accredited training, etc.).

At EHS, our overarching communication 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 and communicate with confidence
- develop their individual personalities and socio-emotional wellbeing

2. COMMUNICATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

- To develop and promote each child's functional communication, through verbal and alternative and augmentative forms including PODD, signing and other AAC systems.
- To enable each child to access the functional curriculum and support educational progress by providing functional based therapy and strategies where the child's needs are greatest e.g. in the classroom/playground.
- To work collaboratively with staff and parents to ensure a holistic provision is provided for all pupils including behavioural functioning and emotional wellbeing.
- To collaboratively assess pupils' communication strengths and difficulties and ensure supporting communication aids are integrated into the curriculum and across the school day and utilised in the home settings.
- The communication assessment is coordinated by a SaLT and results are shared with staff and parents and clearly identified in the educational programme.
- Communication goals and 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 staff receive regular INSET from appropriately trained members of the school community on communication.
- Staff are trained to a level, which gives them the knowledge and understanding to support pupils with specialised forms of communication and ways that further develop the pupils' communication skills.

3. APPROACHES

Communication is seen as an individual priority for many pupils at EHS as reflected in their Statement of Special Educational Needs/EHCP 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.

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; offering an irresistible invitation to learn.
- 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.

Staff 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. PODD, PECS, Makaton.
- Develop new routines to enable understanding.
- Recognise that all behaviour is a form of communication and that communication strategies are therefore important in behaviour management.
- Develop appropriate ways of helping pupils express their needs, opinions and feelings.
- 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, staff 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 e.g. ADHD
 - 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.

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

Speech and Language Therapy Service

The Senior SaLT carries responsibility for specific projects and line manages the other SaLTs.

This includes:

- Regularly reviewing the speech and language therapy service offered at EHS.
- Input into the school development plan relating to communication needs of pupils
- Responsibility for service development to meet the changing needs of the pupils at EHS. This is monitored through the SaLT development plan

4. REFERENCES

- Mesibov, G & Howley, M, (2003) *Accessing The Curriculum For Pupils With Autistic Spectrum Disorders*
- Bondy,A & Frost,L, (1994) *The Picture Exchange Communication System*
- Latham & Miles (2001) *Communication, Curriculum and Classroom Practice*
- 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*
- Gray, C. (1994). *Comic Strip Conversations*
- 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* 28(1) 52-60
- Winner, M, G (2011) *The Zones of Regulation – A Curriculum Designed to Foster Self-Regulation and Emotional Control*

5. 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.

6. RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTATION

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

Appendices:-

- *Procedures and Responsibilities for Creating a Communication Friendly Environment*

Document:	Communication Policy
Date adopted/written:	January 2013
Last Reviewed:	September 2017
Next review:	September 2018
Version:	Final



At EHS we aim to create a communication friendly environment that supports pupils to overcome barriers presented by their Autism and gives pupils the skills to communicate with confidence.

Staff at EHS work collaboratively to support the communication needs of all pupils.

Many pupils benefit from the use of visuals to support their understanding, expression and independence. It is important that visuals are embedded in the environment and used consistently throughout the day.

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

Communication friendly Classrooms

- The following visual supports should be made available to all pupils:
 - Reward charts
 - Timetable – first/then boards to supplement timetables for those who find transitions and a full timetable too much
 - Visual schedule for use within sessions/activities- e.g checklist of activities
 - 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™ and Comic Strip Conversations to help students understand social situations
 - Activity choice boards
 - Class rules/expectations
 - White boards to draw visuals
- These visuals should be visible in the classroom environment and actively referred to throughout the day.
- Visuals should be differentiated according to the pupils' level of understanding.

Communication friendly Playgrounds

- It is important that visuals are available in all areas across the school, including all communal areas and playgrounds e.g. Individual PODD book to be carried with pupils through all areas, Playground PODD boards, staff set of core keyring symbols.

Communication friendly Offsite visits

- It is important that visuals are available in every environment and that pupils continue to have access to visual support when accessing offsite trips e.g. Individual PODD book to be carried with pupils, swimming visuals, staff set of core keyring symbols and Social Stories™.
- When going off-site, a white board and pen or notepad should also be taken to enable new visuals to be created where required e.g. transition strip, Social Stories™ and Comic Strip Conversations.

Total Communication Environment

- All staff should be aware of their own communication and adapt it in order to support the understanding of all pupils.
- Staff should use reduced levels of verbal language and use visuals to support understanding of key words.
- All staff have a core set of standard lanyard symbols, which are used throughout the school as agreed with the SaLTs, e.g. wait, stop, toilet, wash hands, break.
- As part of induction all staff receive a printed copy of a set of single symbols. Staff are expected to then cut 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.
- To support consistent use of symbols across the school, Boardmaker symbols are used across all resources; there is a symbol dictionary on the shared drive. Photographs and drawings are also used where appropriate as agreed with SaLTs.
- Transitions should be supported by a visual strip where appropriate e.g. use of a now and next board, or transition drawn onto a whiteboard.
- 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 and has been recommended by their SaLT.
- 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.

SaLT Responsibilities for creating a communication friendly environment

- To assess the communication needs of pupils and advise staff on which AAC system is most beneficial 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.
- To offer training for staff relating to creating communication friendly environments e.g. use of Boardmaker, PODD, and Social Stories™.
- Recommending 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 for creating a communication friendly environment

- Maintaining the visual systems in their class as described above
- Creating a classroom environment that supports communication
- Ensuring that opportunities for communication and further development of these skills are embedded throughout the day
- Ensuring that PODD books and other communication systems accompany children at all times and are maintained as required
- 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

LSA responsibilities for creating a communication friendly environment

- At the direction of the teacher, maintaining the visual systems in their class and create new visuals as necessary
- 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 and are maintained as required
- 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

Learning Resource Assistant Responsibilities for creating a communication friendly environment

- In collaboration with the CA Team, producing and maintaining 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. Any broken or faulty equipment needs to be reported to them via the referral system