

PENS MEADOW SCHOOL

TOTAL COMMUNICATION POLICY

Date of Policy: November 2014 **Policy review date:** November 2016

Member of staff responsible: MBP/KP

This policy is the result of collaboration between staff of Pens Meadow School and the Speech and Language Therapy Team (S<). It will be reviewed regularly, taking account of new research and approaches to Total Communication within the context of Pens Meadow School.

What is communication?

Communication is fundamental to teaching and learning in Pens Meadow School. It is a two-way process through which information, ideas, thoughts and feelings are passed between individuals and/or groups of people. Communication is central to life, human rights, inclusion and all areas of human development.

The development of communication skills for all learners at Pens Meadow is an integral part of the curriculum and should not be seen in isolation.

The term 'Total Communication' encompasses all aspects of alternative and augmentative communication.

Pens Meadow School aims to:

- Provide opportunities for learners to develop a meaningful and functional system of Total Communication using verbal and/or non-verbal communication. This may include:
 - gestures, body language, vocalisation, eye pointing and facial expression
 - use of photographs/pictures/symbols/schedules/first you, then you strips
 - Makaton signing
 - Objects of Reference
 - Objects of Reference bags/mats
 - on body signing
 - PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)
 - Communication passports
 - Switch access and use
 - Voice output communication aids/AAC equipment

- Social stories
- Ensure that all learners feel included with their preferred method of communication which facilitates the opportunity to be understood, responded to and to make decisions.
- Integrate fully our approach to communication within all aspects of the curriculum, with particular regard to literacy and its elements of speaking and listening.
- Enable access to the curriculum through a Total Communication approach.

The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum states:

'Teachers should take specific action to provide access to learning for pupils with special educational needs by:

- Providing for pupils who need help with communication, language and literacy...through
 - using visual and written materials in different formats, including large print, symbol text and Braille
 - using ICT, other technological aids and taped materials
 - using alternative and augmentative communication, including signs and symbols...' (DfES/QCA, 1999, p.34)

School Improvement Planning

Communication is a priority within the School Improvement Plan in order to maintain and further improve teaching. This will be done by extending the consistent use of Communication Passports within the Primary Department.

Working with the Speech and Language Therapy Team (S & LT Team)

Pens Meadow School works in partnership with all agencies and has specific links with the speech and language therapy team who work in school on a weekly basis.

Individual learners are assessed at the request of the school/ class staff/ parents, and an agreed approach to communication is devised. This forms an integral part of the learner's individual education plan and holistic approach to their communication. Opportunities to develop these skills are facilitated through the curriculum.

In a minority of cases the S & LT team may have direct focused intervention with learners; this may specifically relate to establishing a system of communication e.g. assessing the learner for a communication aid. This may involve making referrals to ACT (Access To Communication And Technology) Selly Oak Birmingham. Once the system of communication is established, all staff should work closely as part of a team, ensuring consistency of approach and use.

It will sometimes be necessary for SLT and/or the Communication HLTA to carry out home visits or meetings with parents/carers.

The S< team continue to work closely with Pens Meadow School supporting a range of Continuing Professional Development opportunities linked to total communication. Pens Meadow School recognises the importance of regular liaison with the S< team and the Leadership Team is committed to this through the identification of training, development and any learner-centred issues.

Working with Parents and Carers

Pens Meadow School is committed to supporting Parents and Carers in the development of their child's communication. This may involve joint meetings with the S< team and the Communication HLTA and regular home-school liaison. Parents and Carers are aware of our 'open door' policy and are welcome to visit school to observe and discuss any aspect of their child's approach to communication. Where it is considered appropriate, and in consultation with the Parents & Carers, Pens Meadow will provide resources to support the pupil in the home environment (e.g. symbols, books).

Termly Makaton parent/carer coffee mornings are held within school, run by Andy Thomson/Hayley Gibbs (S<) and Michelle Bywater Price (Communication HLTA). These provide parents/carers the opportunity to learn that term's Makaton signs and discuss any Makaton/communication issues.

Assessment, recording and reporting

The S< team will make an initial assessment of a learner on request. This may involve individual work with the learner, consultation with class staff, learner observation and parental liaison. Ongoing assessment is then facilitated by class staff as part of their agreed curriculum monitoring, including the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). All IEPs should be pupil accessible, with pupil friendly targets on display in each classroom. These pupil friendly targets should be referred to during teaching and learning throughout the school day.

A formal S< report is provided for each learner's annual review of their statement of Special Educational Need, and an annual written report is produced by the school at the end of the educational year. Parents and Carers also have the opportunity to discuss their child's progress at termly Parents' evenings. Both the school and the S< team are happy to provide reports at times other than these for specific purposes e.g. reassessment.

It may at times be necessary for S< and Communication HLTA to observe pupils within their class/group in order to assess and provide constructive support and advice.

Using symbols

Pens Meadow School has an agreed set of symbols which are used as markers to identify key areas of the school. Each classroom has a visual timetable on display, using a standardised set of symbols, which may be adapted according to the needs of the learner.

Pens Meadow School uses a bank of symbols to support individual learners and these are taken from the PECS© system, Makaton©, Communicate In Print, Widgit package©, PCS Mayer Johnson Rebus© and PCS Mayer Johnson Boardmaker©. The most appropriate symbol according to the needs of the individual learner is used, rather than dictating one specific system. This allows for flexibility and responds to the individual need of the learner.

Makaton

Makaton signing is used as a system of communication in Pens Meadow School. All staff are provided with training opportunities to develop their skills in this area and its use is tailored to individual need.

All teaching and support staff are invited to attend weekly Makaton briefings, which take place on Tuesday mornings between 8:30 – 8:45. The aim of these briefings is to keep staff up-to date with that terms Makaton signs and provide opportunities for practice and further professional development.

In the past, Total Communication training has been provided by Michelle Bywater Price (Communication HLTA) for Pens Meadows transport providers, including drivers and escorts.

Objects of Reference

The use of Objects of Reference is recognised as an intrinsic part of our approach to Total Communication. An Objects of Reference timetable is available and is being used throughout school, to develop the learners understanding of routines and activities. All school bathrooms are also marked with an Object of Reference.

Object of Reference bags were introduced in school in the summer term 2011. These bags have been distributed to identified pupils and training has been provided to all staff members including MDSA's.

OOR in house training/update will be delivered to all staff on an annual basis.

On body signing

On body signing has been introduced throughout school to identified pupils who have multi sensory impairments. This is a system of signs completed 'on – body; providing tactile cues for the individual. An agreed set comprising

initially of 18 signs has been introduced to the pupils concerned and all staff have received training and will continue to receive regular updates as necessary. On body signing training has been delivered to MDSA's in the past and should be re-visited in the near future.

Multi disciplinary group

For a number of years now Pens Meadow have been involved with the development of a multi disciplinary communication group within the Dudley borough. The aim of this group is to provide continuity of the use of OOR across as many Dudley Special Schools, Pre school groups for children with special needs, post 16 and adult service user groups as possible. The group try to meet up at least four times every year.

The group agreed on a set of OOR and these were introduced at Pens Meadow in 2011.

The group have also successfully developed a set of On Body / Tactile Signs which are used by pupils and clients who are unable to access Makaton signing in the traditional manner due to having profound and multiple learning difficulties and particularly those with visual impairment. The thought process was that this would be extremely useful for these signs to be used consistently across schools in the borough and beyond, particularly alerting children and adults to what was going to happen to them and to support their understanding of transitions and routines. The signs were developed independently, but with a working knowledge of Makaton.

The On Body Signing has been trialled and used with great success, so the Multi disciplinary group are now looking to formalise and publish it.

Equal Opportunities

All learners are entitled to appropriate support and intervention relating to the development of their communication, regardless of their race, culture, gender, disability and socio-economic background.