



PensMeadowSchool

Living, Growing, Learning

Total Communication Policy

SEPTEMBER 2020

NEXT REVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 2022

Staff Responsible: Communication HLTAs

Disclaimer

Pens Meadow School makes every effort to ensure that the information in this document is accurate and up-to-date. If errors are brought to our attention, we will correct them as soon as practicable.

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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.

We have a team of four Communication HLTA's that work at Pens Meadow School.

These are as listed below alongside their areas of responsibility:

Michelle Bywater Price – Communication for understanding

Karen Portman – Communication for emotional well-being.

Craig Pugh – Communication for life and learning

Samantha Hunt – Communication for engagement

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 provision and should not be seen in isolation.

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

At Pens Meadow School the pupils have a range of communication difficulties. It is important to recognise these as soon as possible as it is through communication that pupils' progress and learn.

Pupils learning difficulties including autism may mean they are non-verbal, have limited language or have functional language use.

It is crucial to understand that the spoken language is different to social communication. Social communication includes body language, eye contact, hand gesture, tone, intonation and volume and many people with ASD lack those skills, which is why we put communication systems in place to support them.

A pupil that does not or cannot speak doesn't necessarily have nothing to say and it certainly is no indication of their level of understanding.

At Pens Meadow School we operate a Total Communication Environment, which provides a range of approaches to enable the pupils to communicate effectively. This Communication Policy promotes the use of effective communication which staff and visitors are expected to follow consistently.

Pens Meadow School aims to:

- Understand the world from the learner's perspective and the frustrations/difficulties that they can face.
- Ensure that our learners are equipped to communicate effectively in adult life
- Provide opportunities for learners to develop a meaningful and functional system of Total Communication using verbal and/or non-verbal communication.
- 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 and choices.
- Integrate fully our approach to communication within all aspects of the provision, with particular regard to literacy and its elements of speaking and listening.
- Enable access to provision through a total communication approach

This may include:

- Aided Language Displays (ALD's)
- Communication books
- Gestures, body language, vocalisation/speech, eye pointing and facial expression
- Intensive Interaction
- Makaton signing
- Objects Of Reference (OOR)
- On Body Signing
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Photographs/pictures/symbols/schedules/first you, then you strips
- Social Stories
- Talking Mats
- Voice Output Communication Aids/equipment (VOCA)

[For further information or guidelines regarding any of the communication support systems mentioned above, please refer to Pens Meadow 'Total Communication Information Pack' which can be obtained via the school office.](#)

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 socioeconomic background.

We all communicate in different ways and each way should be equally respected and encouraged.

Communication is vital to every aspect of our lives. It impacts on our relationships, choice, control, emotions, self-esteem and self-expression. Therefore it is fundamental to our wellbeing and quality of life.

Using total communication approaches helps people with learning disabilities develop their understanding and expression in order to communicate more effectively.

- **Communication is a basic human right**
- **Total communication is an approach, which includes all the ways we communicate**
- **Total communication is about building relationships and self-esteem**
- **Total communication is for everyone**

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 pathways to learning.

In some 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 is sometimes necessary for SLT and/or the Communication HLTA's 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's 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).

Assessment, recording and reporting

The S< team or Communication HLTA's 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 the learners agreed pathway to learning. Monitoring, includes the use of information taken from the IEPs (Individual Education Plans), EHCP's (Educational Health Care Plans) and S & LT Targets. All these documents are available on the learner's individual clipboards. Targets should be referred to during teaching and learning throughout the school day.

Each learner in school has a Communication evidence book which should be used for recording progress and achievement towards communication targets. This may take many forms such as written statements, photographs or post it notes.

An annual written report is produced by the school at the end of the academic year. Parents and carers also have the opportunity to discuss their child's progress at termly parent's evenings. Both the school and the S< Team are happy to provide reports at times other than these for specific purposes e.g. re assessment.

It may at times be necessary for Speech & Language Therapy Team and Communication HLTA's to observe learners within their class/group in order to assess and provide constructive support and advice.

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 and On Body Signing 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 and implemented 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.