

# Woodfield School Communication Policy



This policy talks about communication at Woodfield in general terms, however adaptations may be made for individual pupils if agreed with the Communication Lead and/or with the SENCo.

All staff are trained in basic communication skills as part of induction and further training is given through TA Inset etc. Much communication training is learnt 'on the job' e.g. by working alongside the Speech & Language Therapist (SaLT) or Communication Team in groups. Teachers are being Scerts and PODD trained on a rolling basis and we also offer training in PECS and Elklan. Support staff are trained according to the needs of pupils in their class. Each class has a lead H6 or H4 who is responsible for Communication. This individual has regular training and meetings with the communication lead and feeds back to the rest of the class team in class meetings.

At Woodfield we believe that communication is vital for all that our pupils do. An individual may be trying to tell us something, but they just do not know how to do this appropriately, at times. Our ethos is that we do not have naughty or difficult pupils as "Behaviour is Communication".

## SCERTS

SCERTS is an evidence-based framework which focusses on social communication, emotional regulation and transactional support. As a result we feel that SCERTS is an important part of our curriculum and supports how we develop communication across the school.

We use the SCERTS framework to sequence our teaching and learning throughout the school and have developed three pathways based on the framework:

*Social Partners* – Pupils may develop the ability to communicate intentionally with gesture, objects and/or vocalisations.

*Language Partners* – Pupils communicate for a purpose using symbols, photos, signs and/or words

*Conversation Partners* – Pupils use words, phrases and sentences to communicate and learn to engage in social conversation. They also begin to learn to understand the feelings of others.

All pupils are set learning objectives to work on within their stage of working and have communication targets that focus on joint attention and symbol use (or photos/ signs/ object cues/ words).

## Total Communication

In whatever form a child attempts to communicate, it will be valued, listened to and nurtured. We believe in a 'total communication approach', where staff will look to understand body language, eye contact/facial expression, signs, symbols (incl. picture exchange), photos, Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) and vocalisations/speech. Any combination of such attempts to communicate will be understood and reinforced positively and modelled by staff.

## What is Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC)?

Augmentative communication refers to all types of communication which support understanding and production of speech and therefore enhances an individual's ability to successfully convey meaning to others. These could include, for example, sign language or picture based systems. This would be needed for many of our pupils who cannot use words or intelligible approximations to request items, comment about interesting things, respond to simple questions etc.

Our pupils benefit from a clearly structured day. Objects / symbols / photos / AAC will help with this and will allow our pupils to anticipate and make decisions by repetition of routines. Staff are encouraged to not only accept, but to use a combination of methods i.e. a 'total communication

approach', when addressing the pupils, to ensure that our pupils get as much information from an instruction or a lesson as they can. This needs to be appropriate and relevant to the individual. Alternative means of communication will never replace speech, and instructions will always be given in a calm and clear manner.

Many parents wish for the ultimate communication for their child to be speech. It may be necessary to help them understand the power of alternative communication for their child, whilst never giving up on the progression towards speech or other functional communication.

At Woodfield we have a protocol for using objects, symbols and/or text to build up pupils' schedules according to individual need. Not all pupils will use these systems, and they are NOT sequential. It is most important that pupils have exposure to a wide range of communication methods/AAC and modelling from the start.

### **Why do we use AAC at Woodfield?**

Alternative communication methods have the potential to reduce confusion, which might lead to unwanted behaviour. By presenting an additional object/symbol/photo etc. you are telling the pupil what is going to happen.

Many pupils benefit from consistent use of symbols, objects or signs:

- To aid communication
- To help understanding
- As an aid to memory
- As an access to timetables and routines.
- To encourage independence by helping pupils to know where they are going.

### **Is this needed? How do we use AAC at Woodfield?**

When presenting an object/symbol/sign, you should say the name and explain the meaning, e.g. "John, here is the coat, we are going outside". We should also use signs and gestures to reinforce this message, where appropriate. It is vital that all communication methods are modelled to pupils.

Place the object/symbol where the pupil can feel it or see it and **allow time for exploration or processing**. If the pupil makes any attempt to vocalise or sign, the adult should respond; this will help to promote acquisition of communication. Staff should remember that pupils may need time to process requests and should be given time to communicate in any appropriate way. Visual support should be available for pupils who need it, when they need it. Staff should be mindful that verbal communication from adults may need to be limited.

If a pupil is using objects or symbols and it is time for a lesson such as PE that takes place in a different room, it may be helpful to use the 'place' first in the classroom to tell the child where to go (Hall/Outside), and the lesson i.e. PE when you arrive. The teacher will know the child and how much information they can cope with, and this may not be necessary for all. However, this minimises any misunderstanding, such as going to the hall which they think is for exciting PE and when you get there it is assembly which they do not like. Be clear about what you are telling them, broken down into stages if necessary.

### Examples of communication strategies used at Woodfield:

#### **Intensive Interaction:**

At Woodfield we believe in the positive impact on our pupils of the Intensive Interaction Approach (Dave Hewitt). Intensive Interaction involves a variety of techniques to facilitate the fundamentals of communication, which may include

- enjoying being with another person,
- turn taking,
- sharing personal space,
- using and understanding eye contact,
- facial expression,
- physical contacts and
- other non-verbal communications.

It is a learner led process where the role of the practitioner is to be responsive and in tune to the learner to enable communication to develop at their pace. Intensive Interaction can take place anywhere, at any time but some pupils will have it written into their timetables. Several staff are trained in this technique.

### **Objects Cues/Touch Cues:**

The use of concrete objects helps a pupil to understand what is happening and with consistent use can help that pupil to anticipate and therefore provide meaning to their situation, as well as give meaning to routines etc.

At this level of communication a child first learns to recognise objects that are meaningful to them, but they have not yet generalised this skill, e.g. a child knows that their own lidded beaker or bottle represents 'drink' but does not yet know that any cup/beaker of any colour also means drink.

Object cues are not the same as objects of reference. Object cues are often used for pupils with a visual impairment and multiple disabilities to help them understand the here and now, for example their swimsuit or towel would be an object cue. Teachers using Object Cues should liaise with the SENCo and SaLT as generally they need to be individualised for the pupil and will only be introduced a few at a time.

We also use touch cues, where the adult's hands will give a physical prompt directly on the pupils' body, used in a consistent manner, to give a specific message about what is about to happen thus supporting receptive communication. Touch Cues signal the communicators intent and may reduce the startle reflex caused by sudden or confusing interactions. Touch cues should be clear, emphatic but gentle tactile signals so that the pupil can easily discriminate them from other physical contact. An example of a touch cue would be tapping a pupil three times on the elbow to communicate that they are going to be supported to stand.

### **Objects of Reference (OOR):**

These are described as '*Everyday objects that are used consistently to provide specific information*' (Rowland and Stremell Campbell).

Objects of Reference (OOR) can be more abstract than object cues, as long as they are consistent for the individual. They are not suitable for everyone and advice should be taken from SaLT and Communication Lead. Pupils with learning disabilities may have difficulties understanding and using a symbolic system. Their ability to associate between events/time/access is impaired; therefore the alternative is to use a tactile system such as OOR. Woodfield use a differentiated scheme of OOR, meaning that all pupils use the same object for consistency and ease of use but that object itself may vary, for example all pupils use a cup to represent a drink but pupils may use their own particular cup.

### **Signing:**

Woodfield uses Sign Supported English based on Makaton where there is an appropriate sign. This is supplemented with BSL where Makaton does not have a sign. Please note that many Makaton and BSL signs are the same.

All classes have a Woodfield Signing Dictionary - these are the signs you should be using. Names of people and places (proper nouns) are signed using the initial letter e.g. V for Vicki.

If you would like to request that an additional sign be added to the dictionary please pass it onto the Communication Team. The dictionary will be updated regularly.

If you need to know a sign urgently please check in the Woodfield Signing Dictionary first or, failing that, check on the Makaton database. This is located on the computer in the PPA room or on Jayne's computer. If you cannot find the symbol on the database please speak to our 'signing lead'.

### **Photos:**

These are only used for certain individuals, but are an option where a pupil has difficulty with the more abstract transfer to symbols. Not all pupils will need this stage and photos can be very ambiguous and need to be used with care. They are not always ideal for autistic pupils due to the fact that the child may focus on detail rather than the 'whole'. If in doubt discuss with the Communication Lead or SaLT.

### **Symbols:**

Symbols give extra visual information about the words used in the message making it easier to understand. They can be used to give information and create opportunities for students to communicate.

The symbols used in school are almost always coloured symbols as a preparation for the colourful world that we live in. This is particularly helpful for flags and fruit where the colour helps to give the symbol meaning. Please bear in mind that some autistic pupils may focus on the detail e.g. a packet of crisps is a blue symbol, so will they only eat cheese & onion? Care must be taken as these pupils may be better started on black and white symbols for their work so that there is clarity of meaning, although they will encounter coloured symbols around the school.

Staff also need to read back any symbol sentences they have written to ensure that the symbol makes sense for the meaning/context of the word e.g. when typing 'us' and the American flag comes up.

For use on displays and in social stories, the adult needs to think of the audience. If appropriate, we would use key words only as symbols or a single photo. This also needs to be differentiated for individuals or class groups.

All staff must also take into consideration that when typing, you use a font that is suitable for the purpose in which you are using it.

For schedules there are two sizes of symbol and then in addition there is PECS size. Font sizes should try to be standardised to look consistent and smart around school.

PECS GRID = 30 text and 24 graphic  
6 SYMBOL GRID = 36 text and graphic  
15 SYMBOL GRID = 30 text and graphic

We hold a stock of spare symbols and staff can take from this stock before having to make their own. If you need to make symbols, standard grids on the server will ensure that you use the correct size (look in Curriculum/Resources/subject symbols). Although grids are standardised for the majority, a few individuals will have different sized fonts/symbols for identified reasons.

### **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS):**

PECS is a way of using an exchange of pictures in order to tell another person your message. PECS is useful for pupils who do not yet understand the fundamentals of a communication exchange. A picture or symbol is physically handed from one person to another and the idea is to help a child to **initiate** communication rather than an adult always anticipating their need. Many pupils will use a PECS style system to help them in a structured way to understand the power of communication through objects/symbols or pictures. If you do not understand why a pupil uses a particular system please ask. The PECS Training Manual (Frost & Bondy 1994) describes six phases that the pupil moves through

and it is important that these are done in the correct order. It is also important that staff model picture exchange regularly to pupils to enable them to increase their vocabulary.

### **Communication Books**

Communication books are symbol and/ or photo based systems that give the means for a child to communicate. These are made personally for the child and are based on their interests and activities and designed with class and communication team to be at the right level for the child to access while still having new vocabulary in the book to model to the child. A communication book should include core and topic vocabulary. Adults should use this to model symbols as they speak to the child and also to offer the child opportunities to make choices and requests.

### **PODD**

PODD is a communication system that can be used in communication books, and put on a high tech device. PODD (Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display) a tool developed while striving to support the development of communication autonomy. This means have the goal of allowing the individual to be able to say what I want to say, to whoever I want to say it to, whenever I want to say it, however I choose to say it. For PODD to be successful it is fundamental that there is a consistent and shared communication ethos for all the environments the pupil experiences. The core part of this ethos is adults and others modelling using the PODD form of AAC to communicate with the pupil at all times. PODD is able to accommodate both direct and indirect users and we are also able to adapt for visual impairments and individualise to the pupils needs.

### **Aided Language Displays (ALD)**

An Aided Language Display (ALD) is a symbol display on a single page containing relevant symbolised vocabulary for a specific activity.

Aided language displays are used for:

- teaching new words
- extending the length of sentences
- using new language functions (making requests, instructions, comments, questions etc.)
- ALDs can be used to facilitate speech and/or instead of speech.

It is really important that an ALD is available to a child who is using it at all points throughout an activity and that adult's model using the symbols alongside the words and give the child time to respond.

### **Colourful Semantics**

If a pupil is able to put symbols/words together to form a short sentence we will consider a form of 'colourful semantics', which will be discussed with SaLT and Communication Lead. It is aimed at helping children to develop their grammar but it is routed in the meaning of words (semantics). Colourful semantics reassembles sentences by cutting them up into their thematic roles and then colour codes them.

Woodfield use a simplified form of this where different words are represented by different coloured backgrounds to help the pupil construct a sentence. This is a complex system for most pupils with SLD but will be appropriate for a few pupils.

The colours are consistently agreed in a 'Woodfield system', and you will need to see the Communication Team for the correct shade of colour. Grids will be set up on the server i.e.

Nouns (snacks etc) = Yellow background to the symbol

Verbs (doing words) = Green background to the symbol

People (names) = Light Blue background to the symbol

Instruction (on AAC only such as 'go back') = pink/ red background to the symbol

### **Written Schedules:**

When the pupil has become familiar with symbols they may then be given a written schedule. Initially, for pupils who require structure this may take the form of a 'Now/Next' board where the 'next' item is usually something motivating. Please see the Autism Manager or Communication Team for further information. For a more complex schedule, lasting half a day or more, words can be presented either with velcro to remove each activity/event as it happens or as a list which has each activity crossed off as it is completed by the pupil. The schedule should run left to right or top to bottom, depending on pupil preference. This can be personalised to suit the individual e.g. on a board with favourite characters that motivate placed around the words.

### **Timetables:**

Pupils using written schedules move more easily to using timetables as all secondary pupils do, carried around in their pockets.

This protocol can be adapted for pupils with a visual impairment; symbols can be produced so that they are raised and therefore are tactile. Please see the SenCo if you feel this would be required for V.I., and individualised schedules/ timetables will be best suited to pupil need.

### **Technical aids & Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCA's):**

For some pupils it is not possible to use symbols or objects to communicate. They may have a physical impairment that means they do not have the dexterity to handle paper symbols etc. In this case a **switch**, which can be used to give a single voice output, may be an option. There are many different types of switches and it will be the job of the Communication Lead in conjunction with the SaLT and the Occupational Therapist to decide which the best option for an individual pupil is. **Single switches** can then lead on to more than one switch and ultimately to ever more **complex machines** with voice output, if appropriate to the individual.

Whilst school holds a set of switches and machines to trial with pupils, any more complex/ expensive machines will need to be funded through alternative sources. All cases are individual, and we work together to ensure that their needs are met on an individual basis. Just because one pupil has a particular type of device does not make it suitable for all. Ask the Communication Team if you feel a pupil in your class is ready to move on.

As technology moves on, all Classes now have access to **iPads** and symbols/ communication systems are accessible for some pupils via touch screen technology, such as **Clicker grids**. If a pupil has an electronic device for communication, this must be for the sole use of communication only. Do not download any other apps onto this device. It will be programmed by the Communication Team or specified person. We encourage class staff to identify new vocabulary to put on the device as a way of generalising the skills of the young person using this device. Please give lists of new vocabulary to the Communication Team each term or as needed. It takes time to programme devices, give us enough warning. The devices are generally allocated to individual pupils following assessment from SaLT and the Communication Team. Please consult with them if you feel another pupil is ready to move on.

### **Eye Pointing and Eye Gaze**

Another method of communication available to some pupils who may have physical impairment that means they do not have the dexterity to handle paper symbols etc. is eye pointing. Eye pointing involves a pupil using their eyes to look in the direction of the object/photo/symbol that they would like to choose. For these pupils we start by encouraging them to use an eye gaze grid or E-Tran frame. This is a Perspex sheet onto which object/photo/symbols can be stuck on. The communication partner faces the user and holds the chart up between them. The user gazes at the object, symbol, photo or word they want to say. Initially one symbol or word will be placed at each corner. As the user and communication partner become more skilled, symbols can be added in the middle of each side. The method can be developed using colour or number coding systems so that more items can be accessed. Children for whom we believe eye gaze to be a suitable method of communication will be

decided with joint collaboration from SALT, the Communication Team and the Class Teacher. Movement through the stages is to be agreed with the Communication Team.

### **Who's Who?**

<b>Communication Lead</b>	<b>Vicki Jeffery</b>
<b>Speech &amp; Language Therapist</b>	<b>Lucy Williamson</b>
<b>SENCo</b>	<b>Samantha Drury</b>
<b>Signing lead</b>	<b>Chrissy Davies</b>

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