



Communication Policy

1. Rationale

At The Grove we believe that the ability to communicate is central to a person's sense of self and their connection to the world around them. We believe that communication is viewed as a meaningful interaction between 2 or more people and is key to a person's ability to learn, develop and function.

At The Grove, we follow a **Total Communication Approach**, which means that we recognise and value all forms of communication equally. These may include a combination of the following:

Non-Verbal Communication

- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Gestures and pointing
- Body Language (proximity, positioning etc)
- Signing (Makaton)
- Vocalisations

Visual Forms of Communication

- Use of objects
- Objects of Reference
- Use of photographs
- Drawings/diagrams/pictures
- Use of symbols
- Use of PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)
- Written Language

Verbal Communication

- Use of high tech voice output communication aids (VOCAs)
- Spoken Language

1.1 Ethos and Values

Everybody has a right to communicate using the approach that works best for them and the right to be communicated to in the way that best meets their individual need, so enabling them to understand the message being communicated.

At The Grove, we do this by:

- Respecting the individual's communication level and adjusting our own style of communication to

meet their needs.

- Having specific, measurable, attainable, realistic communication goals that are regularly reviewed and agreed with the young person and their family.
- Maximising the communication potential of every student
- School and home work in partnership
- Teaching Key Stage topics to enable consistent vocabulary development and facilitate communication between the students
- Ensuring students are provided with an appropriate and consistent communication environment where there is a consistent use of visual support throughout
- Every student's pen portrait details how they communicate expressively and how they should be communicated to
- Ensuring individual resources are readily available for students to use

1.2 Equal Access

Every student, no matter what their ability has a right to communication. Appropriate means of support for communication will always be sought no matter what a student's challenges maybe. Careful consideration to religious beliefs, culture and ethnicity will always be sought to ensure the most appropriate and effective methods of communication will be implemented across school and home.

1.3 Standard Resources and Strategies to Support Communication.

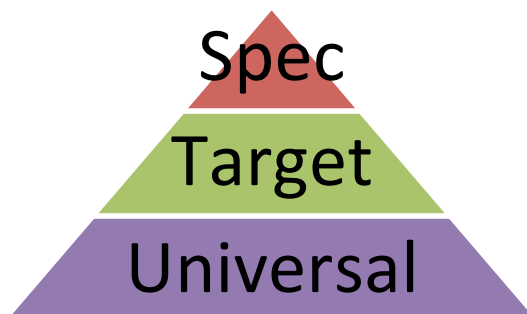
At The Grove we do recognise that each individual student has their own unique way of communicating through both expressive and receptive language.

However, in implementing our ethos and values, we do expect every class within the provision to provide an agreed set of standard resources and strategies which are **ALWAYS** available to support communication within the classroom. Where possible, we would expect these to be used throughout the provision as a whole and where possible, outside of the provision to enable consistency. This is not an exhaustive list and is flexible to accommodate the needs of our population of students.

1. **Individual schedules (used for transitioning from one activity to another)**
2. **Resources and areas labelled to promote independence**
3. **Clear class timetable presented in a format that all students can read**
4. **Use of choice boards**
5. **Voice Modulator Guide (Voice-o-meter)**
6. **Consistent use of labels**
7. **Communication Wall**
8. **Use of limited and simple language (this includes requests, instructions, questioning etc)**
9. **The 5 second language rule (awareness that for some students it can take AT LEAST 5 seconds to process spoken words)**
10. **Staff Visual keyrings to support communication in all**
11. **"I am working for....." visuals**
12. **Visual reminders of good choices ("I can earn merits by....." "I will remember to.....")**
13. **Consistent teaching of "surprise" and or "changes" on schedules and daily teaching**
14. **Pen portraits with current communication information for each student**
15. **Language and Communication targets on each student's PLP**
16. **Consistent use of PCS symbols for shared resources**
17. **Consistent use of Visual support (in the most appropriate format) when presenting information to ANY student**
18. **ANY student with a PECS book or individual communication aid MUST have this with them at ALL TIMES**
19. **Clearly designated work areas for independent working**

2. Role of the Team

At The Grove, we follow the **Balance System Approach to Communication**. This means that ALL STAFF have a responsibility to develop the communication skills of students and themselves.



Universal Support

This is the foundation of understanding, knowledge and skills in communication across our provision. The role of the Speech and Language Therapist at this level is to support, advise, assess and provide basic training. We ensure this level of support is maintained because;

- All staff read and implement the Communication Policy
- New staff undergo a basic communication awareness training during induction
- All staff follow recommendations on any student specific documentation regarding their communication and update when required (e.g. pen portraits, PLPs etc)
- All staff have a basic, working understanding of the communication systems throughout the school
- All staff take responsibility for ensuring resources are up to date and available for the students to use.
- All staff share a commitment to improving and adapting the communication environment for every student.

Targeted Support

This level of support is focused on individuals and may require training or specific planning to meet an individual's needs. We ensure this level of support is maintained because;

- Teaching staff devise communication targets in conjunction with student, family and other staff with support of SALT.
- Teaching staff complete, review and update pen portraits as needed
- Teaching staff complete, review and update PLPs as needed
- Teaching staff regularly assess and update Expressive language, Receptive language and Communication Progress on B-Squared.
- Regular training in specific communication approaches is delivered when required, by school staff or SALT.
- Therapeutic approaches are implemented by trained members of staff and are supported by other staff members (e.g. smiLE, lego therapy, intensive interaction, attention autism).
- SALT conducts specific observation or assessment of students to assist with targeted approaches
- SALT offers support in the implementation of specific therapeutic approaches
- SALT may co-facilitate bespoke groups where appropriate
- SALT will implement short term individual interventions where training a member of staff is required in a particular strategy or approach

Specialist Support

This level of support is focused on direct and indirect input from the Speech and Language therapist and may consist of;

- SALT will undertake specific and in depth assessment of students' communication skills who are of significant concern to the team due to:
 - Need for augmentative communication aid development

- Significant and severe communication skills or challenging behaviour
- Little progress in communication skills
- Deterioration in communication skills or behaviour
- SALT will provide individual intervention for those students who have significant communication needs and who the team agree would benefit from this intervention.
- SALT will train members of staff in the VERVE approach to communication, which focuses on building awareness of and developing their own communication style to best meet the needs of students.
- SALT will support staff to implement the SCERTS curriculum and approach and choose targets from this curriculum.
- SALT will support families as part of the MDT in developing their child's communication and their own communication skills within the home and community.
- SALT will liaise with and make referrals to other professionals.
- SALT will input to Annual Reviews of EHCPs in regards to students' communication skills.
- SALT will maintain good practice by attending courses, taking reading days etc for Continuing Professional Development.
- SALT will uphold excellent standards of record keeping, note taking and general clerical and administrative duties.

2.3 Role of Multi – Disciplinary Team (MDT)

The team includes; SALT and Occupational Therapy who visit The Grove on a regular basis. Outside professionals such as Educational Psychology and CAMHS also make up the team on a needs basis. Support is provided to access communication across the school and at home by, for example, providing equipment for good positioning, supporting sensory integration and ensuring good mental health.

3.Approaches to Communication

At The Grove, we use a range of different communication methods. The key message is consistency at all times supported by all staff ensuring that the students communication needs are met at all times.

We use a variety of methods to support communication through The Grove. This is not an exhaustive list but identifies the key approaches which all staff are expected to provide.

3.2 Intensive Interaction

"Intensive Interaction is a practical approach to interacting with people with learning difficulties who do not find it easy communicating or being social."

This approach helps the learner and their communication partner to relate better to each other and enjoy each other's company more. It helps them develop their communication abilities, confidence and competence as a communicator.

Intensive Interaction is a fun process. The communication partner is guided by what we know about how communication ordinarily develops for young children. S/he applies this knowledge in a way that is sensitive and respectful to the learner whatever their age." (British Institute of Learning Disabilities)

3.3 Attention Autism

Attention Autism was developed by Gina Davies, a Speech and Language Therapist

Attention Autism has a 4 stage process focusing on capturing and developing the young people's attention by offering an irresistible invitation to learn through surprising and visually appealing materials. Attention Autism relies on staff to work as a team. The Attention Autism programme targets the teaching of attention, communication and social interaction skills.

The 4 stages are:

Stage 1 Focusing Attention

Stage 2 Sustaining attention

Stage 3 Shifting Attention and

Stage 4 focusing, sustaining and shifting attention including a transition to independent working.

3.4 Object cues and Objects of Reference

The terms Object Cues and Object of References refer to the use of objects as a means of communication. They can be used to develop understanding, to help anticipation and memory, to develop choice and can be a bridge to other forms of communication. Objects are part of a total communication system and should be used in conjunction with other forms of communication such as signing and speech.

3.5 Photographs

Photographs help people begin to develop their symbolic understanding of the world around them. A photograph supports the students to develop a link between the visual representation of an object or event and the real thing. Photographs not only develop understanding but can also be used to establish expressive communication e.g. choice making or requesting.

3.6 Symbols

As symbolic understanding develops students are more able to understand the abstract qualities of symbols in relation to objects and events. At The Grove we use a combination of Picture Communication symbols (PCS) and Rebus symbols in colour with the students. Symbols are used throughout the environment e.g. timetables as well as directly during and outside of classroom sessions.

Symbols can range from the easily recognisable 'cat' to the more arbitrary connecting words e.g. 'to' and 'but'. Once the symbols are established by the student it is imperative that the same size and the same symbol picture are used consistently.

Symbols can be used with the written word underneath which can support students with their whole word reading and pattern matching skills. We use Communication in Print to support reading.

Students who use symbols as a means of expressive communication must have access to their symbols at all times so they can initiate interactions.

However some students will not naturally progress to using symbols as it can be too abstract for them if this is the case their communication needs should be met through the use of objects and photographs as appropriate.

3.7 PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

PECS is a structured approach to developing communication with a student by '**exchanging**' a photograph or picture symbol for a desired item. It is different from using Pictures or symbols alone as the emphasis is on the student to engage with a person before exchanging a picture for what they want. The fundamental principle is that the exchange is initiated by the student for a **motivating** item.

At The Grove, some of the students use the PECS approach. These students are identified by the SALT in collaboration with the class teacher/specialist HLTA as certain prerequisite skills are required. PECS is a very structured approach and has a defined hierarchy that has to be followed for it to become a successful communication system.

3.8 Makaton Sign Support System

Makaton is a language programme that provides signs, symbols and speech as a means of communication and to encourage the development of language and literacy skills. **It is not a sign language and is always used with speech (i.e. we sign and speak at the same time) and delivered using Standard English sentence structure.** Makaton is an effective programme because it helps to simplify language as only the keywords in a sentence are signed. (see appendix)

At The Grove, we use Makaton to support and develop receptive, expressive, and functional communication skills. It is used by staff as part of a total communication approach to support students understanding of language and facilitate and encourage their expressive communication even if that student does not use signed makaton expressively.

Staff knowledge is supported via an onsite Regional Makaton Trainer.

3.9 TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped children)

TEACCH originated in North Carolina and is based on the work of Gary Mesibov. Some of the aspects of this approach have been adopted by some of the pupils in the school. We use this approach to support the structure of the classroom environment for some pupils and to facilitate learning and understanding.

All of the students benefit from some of the approaches that are used within the TEACCH approach like concepts such as 'finished', first and next, being taught how to transfer learnt skills to everyday activities, starting work independently, and using clear concise language.

Every class in the school has a classroom timetable displaying what lessons the students will be having that morning, afternoon, day or week depending on the ability of the student. These timetables can take the form of objects, photos, or symbols depending on the level of the students using them.

Each student has their own timetable, for some, this is symbolised and based on the Communicate in Print programme. These schedules help to facilitate the smooth running of the classroom day and can help reduce some students anxieties about what may be happening throughout the day.

Each class can be assessed by the SALT using an environmental project to see if some of the physical approaches of TEACCH such as classroom organisation may benefit a student/students.

The ultimate aim of TEACCH at The Grove is to encourage the students to become more independent in their work and increase their attention to tasks, subsequently reducing some restrictive behaviours.

3.10 Spoken Word (oro – motor, expressive language skills and understanding language)

Spoken communication is made up of speech sounds, word meanings, putting words into sentences and grammar.

The use of speech is always encouraged and we provide models of clear speech and language for the students. Many of the children in The Grove use the spoken word to communicate. They may have difficulties with the organisation, clarity and fluency of speech sounds and words. We focus on functional communication ie the child must be able to express their wants, needs, feelings appropriately in everyday situations, this maybe with speech and/or supported by other forms of communication. For some children focused work on speech sounds may not be successful due to their developmental level, difficulties with awareness and generalisation skills.

Staff break down spoken language into short chunks to enable retention and understanding and often support it with a visual e.g sign or picture.

We aim to use language and concepts that are **appropriate for the level of the child's understanding**, whilst acknowledging the age and life experiences of the child.

Some children may benefit from oro motor exercises to help develop the coordination of the movements used for speech and to increase awareness of their mouths and tongues.

3.11 Social Communication Skills

Social communication skills are skills in interacting with other people. E.g. eye contact, turn taking, personal space, volume of voice, negotiating and resolving conflict. We regard these as an essential part of integrating into society.

At The Grove we facilitate the use of social communication skills through direct targeted work and also reinforcing and generalising these throughout the school day.

We practise these skills in real life situations such as going to the shops and buying what is needed for snack time, ordering a drink in a café etc.

Staff use good models of social communication in their interactions with each other and children within the school. We adopt the Alex Kelly Talkabout Curriculum to support Social skills learning.

3.12 – Lego Therapy

Lego Therapy is a social development programme which helps children and young people with autism spectrum disorders and related social communication difficulties. The programme is based on the highly structured, systematic and predictable nature of LEGO play which makes it appealing to children with social communication difficulties who are particularly attracted to systems.

Much more than simply playing with LEGO bricks, LEGO therapy includes the presence of a therapist who guides the children and encourages them to address and resolve their problems. Through LEGO therapy, children can learn to communicate with others, express their feelings, change their behaviour, develop problem-solving skills and develop a relationship with the world around them.

3.13 – smiLE Therapy

smiLE stands for Strategies and measurable interaction in Live English. It is a structured approach that breaks down a communication scenario (e.g. buying a ticket at a train station) into a sequence of steps which the students themselves as a group produce. The approach uses video as a means of demonstrating change and showing outcomes. It utilises role play, group working and a problem solving approach so that the students feel empowered and positive about their interaction skills.

3.14 VERVE Child Interaction Therapy (Video, Endorse, Respect, Vitalise, Eyes)

The idea is to support parents and other adults to fine tune the helpful communication strategies they are already using through the use of video as a way of developing their child's communication skills. The main aims are:

- To bring enjoyment and fun back to interaction - seeing the pleasure on one another's faces.
- Letting the child feel that they have chosen what to do.
- Letting them feel that they are needed. That we can learn from them.
- Experimenting with silence, whilst being in the listening space.
- Letting our child concentrate on what they want to. Giving them time to do things and experiment
- Waiting for them to invite us in by looking at our faces (which light up when they look)
- Saying a word only when we have been invited by their eyes.
- Repeating, Recasting or adding a word on to what they have said (when they are still looking)
- Stopping talking when they look away. Listening to their signal to stop.
- Showing them how helpful reading the feedback on faces is.
- Giving time to check we have understood each other and repair any misunderstandings

3.15 SCERTS

SCERTS (Social Communication Emotional Regulation and Transactional Supports) is a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to enhance communication and social – emotional abilities of individuals with autism and related disabilities.

In the SCERTS model, it is recognised that most learning in childhood occurs in the social context of everyday activities and experiences.

It is a child centred approach based on sound neurological and child development research and theory and it is structured to recognise where the child is currently functioning, where they most need support and how the people around them and the environment can best meet these needs. Our approach consists of using the framework to set targets and support our curriculum.

The use of “subject - Verb - Noun” (SVN) strips are used to enable students to communicate effectively with others. The approach is similar to PECS in that it allows the young person to use symbols to communicate with someone or be communicated to.

However, the emphasis is on social communication and helping the student to actively seek people in order to meet their needs and wants. By including the “person” as the subject, the student

3.16 SOCIAL STORIES AND COMIC STRIPS CONVERSATIONS

Social Stories are a concept devised by Carol Gray in 1991 to improve the **social** skills of people with autism. They are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.

Comic strip conversations, also created by Carol Gray, are simple visual representations of conversation. They can show: the things that are actually said in a conversation - how people might be feeling - what people's intentions might be.

Comic strip conversations use stick figures and symbols to represent social interactions and abstract aspects of conversation, and colour to represent the emotional content of a statement or message. By seeing the different elements of a conversation presented visually, some of the more abstract aspects of social communication (such as recognising the feelings of others) are made more 'concrete' and are therefore easier to understand.

4 Resources

Making communication resources, such as objects, photographs, symbols and timetables etc. is a shared responsibility. We recognise that making resources is very time consuming.

At The Grove we aim to share communication resources between all staff, and resources such as photographs are stored centrally on the computer network.

Each class has access to standardised symbols for visual timetables that are stored on the computer network.

The SALT is available for advice on appropriate communication resources for school and parents.

5 Programmes (prioritisation)

The SALT will develop programmes in conjunction with the staff team where appropriate to support a child's communication skills. They can be:

- Individual, e.g. targeting specific skills for that child and for school and / or home
- School based, e.g. social stories
- Classroom / curriculum based, e.g. to generalise skills learnt in therapy sessions
- Pen Portraits – to support other people's understanding of a child's communication and appropriate strategies to use. See appendix.

6. Monitoring

The SALT will meeting regularly with class teams to discuss any communication needs that need to be addressed. The SALT will also support the monitoring and assessment of communication targets. Expressive Language, Receptive Language and Communication will be tracked and assessed on our B squared system, termly analysis will inform any further interventions required. Communication in practice will be monitored through termly learning walks and formal observations.

In addition, we carry out the following:

- Regular staff training for staff
- Regular meetings between SALT and school (and class teams)
- Regular monitoring of the use of the policy
- Regular liaison with parents at Parents' Evenings/Meetings
- Yearly annual review reports on the child's communication skills to share progress with other professionals and parents
- Home visits
- Parents groups

- Video of good practise
- Update service delivery on a 2 yearly basis / or where necessary
- Keep up to date of developments on communication (CPD)
- Regular MDT / SALT meetings
- Regular supervision by SALT

7. Working with parents

At The Grove, we recognise that parents have a wealth of knowledge and experience of the range and means by which their child communicates. We work with parents to develop a shared understanding of the quality and range of communication taking place both at home and school, by:

- running parents' groups
- training for parents (e.g. Makaton, PECS)
- home visits where necessary
- liaising with parents at termly Parents Evenings/Drop in Meetings
- providing SALT programmes
- SALT provides advice on communication development and ideas for activities at home

8. Transition

Transition is an important part of a student's life and we believe in empowering the student. We recognise that it can be a challenging time for students and their families and we support them to prepare for the change.

We ensure that information on their communication skills is transferred between classes and educational settings in the summer term at transition meetings.

The students are prepared for transitions through a variety of means, e.g. visits, social stories, discussions, photos, specific groups.