

PERCY HEDLEY SCHOOL

AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION POLICY

DEFINITIONS

Augmentative Communication - refers to an approach which is in addition to natural speech.

Alternative Communication - refers to an approach which is clearly a substitute for natural speech or handwriting.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication - typically shortened to the generally used term of **AAC**, includes both the above definitions.

Percy Hedley School has a policy of **TOTAL COMMUNICATION**. This means that pupils are actively encouraged to use every available form of communication. This may include any of the following systems aided or unaided (refer to chart 1) such as nonverbal methods of communication; facial expression, body language, gesture and vocalisations, together with formal communicative methods of speech, words, BSL signs in SSE order, symbols and Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCA's). Pupils are both encouraged and supported to use whatever system they feel is most effective for each given situation. This means in practice that their communication systems and methods are respected and promoted.

"Communicative competence is about people. It is not about computer technology or other AAC systems" JL 1997

RATIONALE

- UN and WHO charters state that all children should have access to communication in whatever form is appropriate. The ability to communicate is fundamental to social, emotional, physical and educational development and well being.
- Percy Hedley School is committed to enabling children to reach their potential in all areas. Communication is a vital key to developing life skills and educational opportunity.
- Children referred to Percy Hedley School frequently have severe communication problems which influence their social and educational progress. Such children benefit from the provision of augmentative and alternative communication systems either in the short term or long term.

AAC is chosen -

- To ease frustration.
- To empower a child to exert an influence on the environment by making needs and wants known through choices etc.- leading to the development of communicative independence.
- To develop communication skills such as language concepts and expression, social interaction, socio/ relational skills, peer relationships, emotional / personal development.
- To develop functional communication skills for all individuals to communicate not only needs and wants, but to express their feelings, social closeness and creativity, aiming for communicative competence.
- To enable students to access the curriculum or modified curriculum where possible.

THE AIMS OF THE ALTERNATIVE, AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM.

- To assess each pupil's communication need and offer tuition in the most appropriate

- forms of alternative and augmentative communication for those students whose unaided means of communication (e.g. speech or signing) is inadequate or unavailable.
- To provide aided AAC systems as part of a total communication approach.
 - To give pupils a means of becoming an active communicator in social situations.
 - To teach core communication skills and core vocabulary within a carefully structured programme.
 - To give pupils access to the wider school curriculum.
 - To foster pupil's communication skills and learning throughout the curriculum.

Janice Light says the focus of AAC teaching is to develop functional skills for life. "This is evaluated based on actual outcomes in response to the demands of the daily environment" 1989.

(see also CARE pathway diagram)

ASSESSMENT

Identification of a potential AAC user is the responsibility of the Speech and Language Therapist (S.a.L.T) who will assess the individual and decide when and where the chosen system is to be implemented.

A potential AAC user may exhibit one or more of the following;

- Attempts to communicate but fails consistently.
- Shows communicative intent.
- Speech is unreliable / limited and is dependent upon situation context and familiarity of listener.
- Speech is unintelligible / nonexistent
- Severely delayed spoken language skills.

Assessment needs to be a collaborative approach which takes account of the views of parents, colleagues and where possible the student, to ensure all factors such as the communication needs of the student, their language development, medical, sensory and physical skills are fully understood and taken into account.

Where appropriate standardised language assessments are completed by Speech and Language Therapists. Equally important is the informal observation and assessment of the student's interaction with familiar adults and peers, and the noting of the interaction behaviour of the student's communication partners. Intervention cannot be limited to the student but must include and take account of care givers' abilities and planning for communication opportunities in the student's environment. e.g. Continuum Of Learning - Kovach, Early Communication Assessment, Recording AAC users spontaneous messages

Joint assessment with S.a.L.Ts also occurs to provide for a continuity of approach across key stages. Students will usually demonstrate communicative intent and comprehension of language with a Low Tech AAC system prior to High Tech systems being introduced. Pupil's skills and AAC systems need regular evaluation and reassessment to establish that they continue to meet their communication needs.

The S.a.L.T. department uses has little of it's own assessment equipment and therefore uses mostly loan equipment in order to trial a variety of devices and access methods before reaching a decision about which system works best for a student.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Implementation of AAC systems for students is carried out in collaboration with parents and

staff to enable students to practise and reach individual targets. S.a.L.T. goals are set each term for students. Therapy may include both 1:1 and small group work. Generalisation and practise of new skills needs then to occur in real social contexts and is monitored via the **I.E.P process**.

"The acquisition of communicative competence is fed by social experience" Hymes 1972

"Communicative competence needs to be learned. Becoming a competent communicator is a step by step incremental process" (Janice Light 1997). Light also says that the social confidence is the most difficult challenge for AAC users to develop.

- Ongoing liaison and multi-disciplinary working is continually needed e.g. with OT's and medical physics to resolve issues such as seating, positioning or switching. Also liaison with parents, teachers, classroom assistants and residential staff is vital to set targets, review progress and make sure that realistic and appropriate expectations are made of the student. This is with the aim that students will practise and carry over skills into the different environments.
- Therapy planning always takes account of the long term communication needs of the student and so is weighted more in favour of skills and vocabulary which prepare the student for adult life. Therefore the content of AAC systems should be balanced more heavily in favour of a core life vocabulary, with the extended fringe vocabulary for curriculum subjects provided through symbol lesson topic sheets. Teachers take responsibility for ensuring that AAC is available at the appropriate level to the pupil in all curricular areas, following the guidance of the AAC team.

RECORDING PROGRESS

- Recording and reporting occurs both formally at Annual Review meetings and informally within team meetings, and through parental contact. **New recording and evaluation processes in the S.a.L.T department with students now includes summaries from four skill areas (The Continuum of Learning by Tracy Kovach).**

. Longitudinal evidence of student's linguistic progress and communicative effectiveness is also collected in SALT records PLF files, specifically covering speaking and listening and written English. Some students in Key stage 3 and above are registered and gain certificates at Entry Level 1 or Entry Level 2 via the City and Guilds Certificate in Effective Alternative and Augmentative Communication skills.

TRAINING

- S.a.L.T's provide or arrange training for class and residential staff, parents and older students to develop knowledge of the AAC systems and devices and also to develop attitudes, culture and strategies which are supportive towards AAC users. Care and maintenance of AAC equipment becomes a shared responsibility of students and carers.

PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- S.a.L.T's keep up to date with recent developments of technology, research and practice through reading articles, attending courses, lectures and equipment demonstrations. PHS maintains close links with "Communication Matters" the national organisation for AAC users and professionals and "ISAAC" the international organisation for AAC matters.

RESOURCES

- Students require considerable input on a very regular if not daily basis when they are first learning to use an AAC system. A quiet therapy room is needed to provide an environment

without distractions and where success or mistakes can be experienced without an audience. Learning to use a communication device has been likened to learning a foreign language and requires upwards or in excess of 200 hours therapy and learning time.

- There is also a big burden of administration and preparation of devices and systems, for programming and designing AAC systems or specialised supportive teaching material. Regular backup and maintenance of equipment is needed to make sure students are not left without communication systems for longer than absolutely necessary.
- Low Tech and High Tech systems require much therapy time for essential maintenance, programming, backup, trouble shooting and upgrading. When equipment fails it is always urgent for the student, and considerable time may be needed to trouble shoot and to phone manufacturers for assistance.

PHS is less inclined to purchase assessment devices as the technology goes out of date so quickly. Neither do we have an equipment loan bank. PHS will arrange for the loan of equipment for pupils from the local Regional Communication aid service i.e. RCAS and ACE North, or from VOCA manufacturers for short term trials with pupils during the assessment or reassessment process.

Funding of purchase, Warranty and Insurance of VOCAs

SALT's seek funding for dedicated communication technology for life long loan and additional equipment from local services to the pupils home. These can be; LEA's, Health, and Social Services departments, often jointly funded and some areas have a Tri-party committees e.g. Northumberland. Alternatively sometimes funding via charitable sources can be obtained. PHS does not generally purchase equipment for pupils dedicated use.

AAC STAFF

The S.a.L.T department staff are supported by the Lead S.a.L.T to provide assessment and therapy as required on their caseload. As necessary she also gives support and advice when making applications for funds for dedicated Voice Output Communication devices.

S.a.L.T's and S.a.L.T.A's take responsibility for the maintenance, preparation and programming of resources.

Classroom assistants and residential staff or carers are trained to provide support to students in managing and using their AAC systems.

Teachers are responsible for AAC across the curriculum with support from the AAC team.

Class teachers may prepare resources for particular curricular sessions.

[Signing Resources](#) see [Signing policy document](#)

SYMBOL RESOURCES

The school has purchased a site network license for Writing with symbols now called Communicate in Print. This enables all staff to produce high quality black and white or colour photo or symbol resources within therapy and the classroom, and are used for making topic cards etc. VOCAs use a range of symbol systems which are chosen individually for students depending on their requirements, increasingly where students need low technology symbol books as back up to high tech these are made by printing out the pages of their VOCA.

REFERENCES

SCOPE AAC Core Vocabulary

AAC Policy G.Worthington 02/10/2015

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists - Communicating Quality 3
Communication Matters Conference and Journals
ISAAC International Conference and Journals
City and Guilds Entry Level 2, 3 and Level 1 Award and Certificate in Augmentative and
Alternative Communication".
Tracy Kovach - Continuum of Learning. Pub 2009