



**APPLEBEE WOOD
COMMUNITY
SPECIALIST SCHOOL**
RESPECT | BELONGING | TRUST | RESILIENCE | ASPIRATION

Total Communication Policy

At Applebee Wood we aim to develop communication through our whole curriculum and embedded into all aspects of our school day. Our Communication lead alongside Speech and Language therapists aim to provide staff with relevant training, resources, knowledge and support to develop a total communication approach within classroom environments, around school and within each lesson suitable to the individual needs of our children and young people. A consistent whole-school approach will be developed to ensure progression for all.

Currently there are speech and language therapists (SALT) working 2 days a week at Applebee Wood. The school has also trained TAs to deliver speech and language programmes. The SALT has responsibility for delivering some speech and language therapy service as well as devising speech and language programmes to be delivered by the speech and language teaching assistants to children and young people in classes.

The school is fully committed to creating an ethos where development of pupils' communication skills, and related skills of social interaction and social imagination, are central to all other aspects of learning, and the role of the speech and language therapist within the school reflects this.

In order to nurture an environment where development of communication and related skills is an essential part of the daily learning process, the speech and language staff work in the classrooms whenever possible. It is the view of the school staff team that the curriculum forms the vehicle for the development of communication skills and so work on each individual's communication aims (see below) occurs during all routine and curriculum-based school activities.

Assessment

Pupils who are in the Early Years Foundation Stage are assessed using the Early Years Foundation Stage Development Matters. All pupils within school have a communication and interaction target on their IEP. These targets are monitored and assessed by our communication lead who is responsible for identifying and targeting communication gaps.

Children accessing progression steps are also assessed on the Spoken Language strand of English.

The speech and language therapists assess the communication skills of all pupils with ASD. Assessment is usually informal, in the classrooms, as this provides the most accurate picture of communication skills for most pupils. Assessment may involve work with the pupil on an individual basis and/or as part of the class group. In all cases, an essential part of the assessment process is discussion between the therapist and classroom staff, regarding each pupil's use of communication skills in varied settings.

An assessment document is then completed, which aims to give a comprehensive description of the communication skills that each individual pupil possesses, and how he/she uses these skills, as well as recording levels of comprehension and ability to use skills of social interaction.

Communication Aims

The communication aims at Applebee Wood School encompass work on aspects of flexible thinking / imagination and social interaction, integral to the development of communication skills. These aims focus on the 'triad of impairments' to reflect the interdependency of development of social communication, imagination and interaction skills.

- Staff to have clear and consistent strategies throughout school to meet the diverse needs of our pupils to enable purposeful and functional communication skills
- To provide and maintain a successful communication environment, which allows all children the opportunity to develop their language and communication abilities across the curriculum.
- To build positive relationships with parents/carers and other professionals to developed consistent communication experiences at different settings.
- To ensure that each pupil at Applebee Wood School has access to resources and communication aids tailored to their individual needs.
- To create an environment where all forms of communication are understood and equally valued.
- To enable each individual to experience success in use of communication, and to develop each individual's enjoyment of the communication process.
- To maximise each pupil's ability to communicate, through tailored methods, or combination of methods, which is most suited to each individual pupil's skills and preferences.

Working with pupils especially with ASD, of equal importance is the development of each individual's motivation to communicate, development of recognition of the need to communicate, and development of desire to communicate. Aims may therefore reflect nurturing of any of these skills rather than a developmental norm. Classroom staff are closely involved in the development of communication aims, as they bring to the discussion greater knowledge of a pupil's need or motivation to communicate. Involvement in development of communication aims also ensures that classroom staff experience ownership of the aims and are able to discuss with the therapist ways in which work on the aims may be implemented during daily classroom lessons and routines.

Approaches to the Development of Communication Skills

At Applebee Wood we adopt a total communication approach using a range of communication methods and strategies to support and encourage communication skills for all. We aim to use a method of communication relevant to individual pupils current communication skills and preferences.

We recognise communication using spoken language, Makaton, PECS, pointing and gesture, symbols and photographs, objects of reference, intensive interaction and AAC. As communication is a tool to convey information to others, we actively develop our pupils'

social and interaction skills to enable them to use their communication skills most effectively. We also acknowledge the need for each pupil to develop flexible thinking skills to maximise their communication skills.

At Applebee Wood School we adopt approaches widely used with young people with additional needs alongside general strategies to develop each individual's understanding and use of communication.

To communicate successfully with our pupils, it is essential that we consider each individual's level of understanding, and that we consistently adapt our own style so that it consistently falls within the level of understanding of each pupil that we communicate with.

When using spoken language, we are particularly aware of the number of key words that a pupil must process in order to understand what we have said. We consistently use visual cues to support each individual's understanding of spoken language. The cues used are dependent on each individual's skills and preferences. Cues used include symbols, the written word, real objects and photographs. We encourage pupils to seek and use visual cues independently, to support their understanding of spoken language, for example to look at objects set out for an activity. We always allow our pupils time to process language spoken to them. We are consistently aware of the difficulties that ambiguous or abstract language causes our pupils and we avoid language which may be misinterpreted.

The methods used are not used in isolation and a pupil may use a combination of the following methods:

PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

PECS is a communication approach designed to support individuals develop functional communication skills through visual exchange. The principle of PECS is that a symbol is exchanged by the child for a desired item. The symbol therefore acts as a spoken request when it is given to an adult. PECS is introduced to individuals at Applebee Wood when, following assessment, it is felt that it would be useful in facilitating success in and enjoyment of the communication process. PECS is a structured approach and has a defined hierarchy that must be followed for it to become a successful communication system.

There are 6 phases of PECS that must be followed:

1. **Phase 1 – Requesting:** The individual learns to exchange a picture/symbol for a desired item
2. **Phase 2 – Travelling:** The individual begins to initiate communication by seeking out and handing over a picture/symbol
3. **Phase 3 – Picture Discrimination:** The individual learns to choose between multiple pictures to request different items
4. **Phase 4 – Sentence Structure:** The individual uses sentence strips using 'I want' followed by a picture/symbol to form a simple sentence.
5. **Phase 5 – Responding to Questions:** The individual learns to answer 'What do you want' questions and responding with a picture/symbol.
6. **Phase 6 – Commenting:** The individual expands communication beyond requests using phrases such as 'I hear' or 'I see'.

TEACCH

TEACCH is a multifaceted approach. At Applebee Wood we use aspects of the TEACCH programme according to individual need and motivation. However, symbol timetables are widely used in school to aid comprehension of the day's events. In the short term, a symbol timetable will include the activities involved in that lesson, and in the longer term, symbols may be given for the mornings or day's events.

Signing

We use signs from Makaton as our preferred signing system. At Applebee Wood, staff use signs alongside spoken language to pupils to help them to understand the spoken language.

Signing allows pupils to see what is being said. Signing the key words in a sentence emphasises those key words, which in turn helps the pupil to focus his/her attention appropriately. Signing is particularly helpful as an aid to understanding abstract words, or language relating away from the 'here and now.' Signing is always used alongside the spoken word, never in place of the spoken word.

Some of our pupils may choose to use signs as their main method of communication. Some pupils may choose to use signs when learning words which to them have little meaning e.g. 'want' as in 'I want ...' or 'wait,' but then cease to use the sign when they have learned the spoken word and its communicative function.

Social Communication

At Applebee Wood, we teach communication skills and encourage our pupils to use their communication skills in functional, social settings. Teaching of communication skills is therefore an important part of all classroom activities, but we also maximise opportunities for teaching the enjoyment of social communication at snack time, lunch time and play times.

Linguistically able pupils are encouraged to join social skills groups, where we actively teach the social functions of language, and develop understanding of social situations and associated language.

Intensive Interaction

Intensive interaction is a pre-verbal approach that facilitates engagement with a supporting adult to develop communication skills. Intensive interaction follows the individuals' lead and support adults join in with the individuals' actions, sounds and movements. The support adult mirrors the behaviour of the individual to create a meaningful interaction. Through repetition the individual begins to learn key social skills such as joint attention.

Objects of Reference

Objects of reference are physical objects that can represent an activity, person, or place. These objects stand for something in the same way that words do and are supported by vocabulary. Eg. a coat for going outside.

Personalised objects of reference are respected and encouraged at Applebee Wood for some of our learners.

Colourful Semantics

Colourful semantics is a structured approach that helps children develop sentence building and understanding by using a colour coded prompt. Sentences are broken down into key categories:

Who?

What doing? (Verb)

What?

Where?

Some individuals at Applebee Wood use colourful semantics to aid understanding of language.

Photographs and Symbols

At Applebee Wood School, we use photographs and symbols to support learning. We use symbols and photographs wherever we can to support learners including visual timetables, communication books, ALI boards, places in school and lanyard visuals. We have an agreed set of commonly used symbols used consistently across school such as on visual timetables. All symbols use Widgit.

Flexible Thinking

We aim to develop the flexible thinking skills of all pupils during all daily activities by creating situations that will enable each individual to perceive himself as a successful thinker.

We acknowledge that the ability to think flexibly is pivotal to development of many higher order language skills, including understanding ambiguity and understanding implied meaning. Effective flexible thinking skills also support understanding of spoken language. For example, the ability to think and to piece together available information, such as objects set out for task, supports understanding about what is about to happen. Most importantly, thinking skills are necessary to make informed choices and to solve everyday problems.

Pupils' flexible thinking skills are therefore developed alongside communication and social interaction skills.

The Role of the Speech and Language Therapist in Pupils' Achievement of Communication Aims

The speech and language therapist usually carries out work to help individual pupils achieve their communication aims, while involved in class group curriculum-based activities. The speech and language therapist may work alongside the teacher, or may lead a group session, depending on individuals, preferences, topic etc.

Working in the classroom in this way reduces the need for pupils to generalise skills between environments (particularly difficult for our pupils) and allows modelling of strategies to staff to promote communication, essential for maximum pupil progress.

A further important ongoing responsibility of the speech and language therapist while working in the classroom is to maintain and develop a) the staff team's knowledge of and enthusiasm for development of communication skills, and b) the staff team's ability to maximise each individual pupil's opportunities for successful communication in the school environment.

This ensures that all staff share the ownership for the development of each pupil's communication skills with each other and with the pupils.

Monitoring and Evaluating

The Senior Leadership Team, supported by Denise Henderson (communication lead) will take responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of communication through:

- Planned observations
- Environment checks
- Informal feedback and discussions with staff including Speech and Language Therapists
- Monitoring of progress towards IEP communication and interaction targets.
- Speech and Language will monitor progress through specialised Speech and Language assessments and regular reviews
- Classroom targets through termly feedback
- Monitoring of Bsquared Spoken Language progress

Staff Training

We recognise the importance of effective communication throughout school so we aim to upskill staff to enable all pupils to become effective communicators.

Training is delivered to staff by Denise Henderson (Communication lead) and Speech and language therapists. The aim of the training is to maintain and develop staff awareness and knowledge of communication and related issues.

Summary

Communication is a vital part of school life at Applebee Wood and it underpins everything we do. Consistency and continuity is our priority to embed communication throughout the whole school day and the curriculum. By embedding a total communication approach we are able to create an inclusive, engaging and accessible learning environment for all pupils.

Reviewed by: Denise Henderson (March 25)

Person responsible: John Cockerill

Next review date: March 2026