Communications Policy

2021

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Signed and Adopted by the Governing Body:

Chair of Governors

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Introduction

This document is a policy statement for the development of communication at Villa Real School. It identifies our rationale and the approaches used to promote and support the development of communication with pupils/students.

The communication policy is an integral part of other policies and procedures used within school, such as
Behaviour Policy
Autism policy
EAL
Assessment

Villa Real School is an all aged special school that caters for pupils/students with complex learning needs. A high percentage of pupils/students have complex communication needs. The school is accredited as a Communication Friendly Setting. Communication underpins all learning in school and we are committed to providing a Total Communication environment. This encompasses:
1. How we support communication development in our pupils/students

Mission Statement

At Villa Real School we believe that becoming a competent communicator is key to our pupils/students achieving success within their school, personal and adult life. As such, communication is at the core of all our work at Villa Real and is embedded within the Curriculum and the wider school day. Developing communication skills is the responsibility of all staff and they should have the knowledge, skills, support and training to ensure that all pupils/students reach their communicative potential. We believe communication is a fundamental human right and that all forms of communication are recognised and valued equally.

Aims

- Provide the basis for a whole school 'Total Communication' approach
- Define each staff member's role in developing communication
- Outline some of the approaches to support communication used within the School
- To promote collaborative working between school staff, and outside agencies
- To maintain Communication Friendly Setting Status
- To support pupils to develop spontaneous and functional communication

Roles and Responsibilities
Management Team
- To ensure staff adhere to the Communication Policy
- To ensure that all staff have basic communication training in a range of communication strategies as part of their induction
- To support staff to develop their knowledge and skills of communication strategies
- To have an oversight and understanding of the range of communication strategies used within school
- To identify funds for purchasing resources and equipment and for accessing relevant training

School Communication Working Party
- To provide regular in house communication training via the ELKLAN platform
- To work collaboratively with the class team to devise and monitor SMART communication targets and review these regularly
- To work collaboratively with parents and carers to help them support and develop their child's communication within the home environment
- To facilitate good home/school links
- To provide a comprehensive assessment of each pupil's/student's speech, language and communication strengths and needs on admission to the School, when transitioning between key stages and in preparation for their transition to adulthood
- To monitor and support progression of pupils'/student's communication skills
- To provide individual, small group and whole class direct intervention as deemed appropriate by the School speech and language therapist
- To manage and prioritise the School caseload
- To contribute to the Annual Review process
- To work collaboratively with the NHS SALT team
- To extend PODD Training

Class Teacher
- To adhere to the School Communication Policy
- To integrate communication throughout the School day ensuring pupil/student access to the curriculum
- To work collaboratively with the School Communication Team and/or NHS/Independent SALT to devise and monitor communication skills
- To provide means, reasons and opportunities for communication, allowing pupils/students to maintain and progress their communication skills
- To attend relevant training
- To ensure necessary resources are available throughout the school day to promote and support pupils/students understanding and expression
- To keep communication aids in good working order and to report any losses or breakages promptly to the communication team or IT staff

- To ensure all pupils/students have a communication profile
- To ensure all relevant information and resources are passed over at transition
- To give the communication rep time to hand over relevant information from the communication meeting
- To inform the School communication working party and/or NHS /Independent SALT of other relevant agencies e.g. the sensory support service who may be working with that pupil/student

Support Staff
- To adhere to the School Communication Policy
- To provide means, reasons and opportunities for communication, allowing pupils/students to maintain and progress their communication skills
- To attend relevant training
- To work as part of the class team to maintain communication resources
- To work collaboratively with the School communication team and/or NHS/ Independent SALT to promote communication throughout the day

<u>How we support communication development in our pupils/students</u>

Communication underpins all learning in school and we are committed to providing a Total Communication environment. Through communication we build social relationships and knowledge, make our needs, opinions and feelings known and share ideas with others. Communication involves listening, understanding and responding and also links to literacy skills.

Communication is at the core of our work with pupils/students at Villa Real School. The importance of communication in empowering pupils/students and ensuring their access to the curriculum is recognised. All those involved in a child/student's education should possess the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to ensure effective communication is achievable for all. Acknowledging the importance of the setting where communication takes place, Villa Real School provides specialised support by creating a **<u>Total Communication</u>** environment in which pupils/students can learn, play and have fun alongside others while taking part in everyday social activities as well as educational ones.

Within a **Total Communication** environment all forms of communication are acknowledged and valued, including body language, facial expression, gesture, signing, objects of reference, photographs, visual symbols and high and low alternative and augmentative communication devices (AAC)
Within the Total Communication environment at Villa Real School our goals are:
1. To support pupils/students develop spontaneous and functional communication skills

2. To support pupils/students develop healthy relationships with others
3. To support pupils/students maintain a well-regulated emotional state for learning and interacting
4. To support pupils/students maximise their opportunities to take part in daily life in order to work towards independence and life after school.

Pupils/students at Villa Real School with their individual learning styles and sensory preferences, face many challenges in learning to communicate. We recognise that means or methods of communication will differ for individual pupils/students but, as their thinking skills develop, these methods may change from being informal and inconsistent to being more formal, systematic and structured. Initially pupils/students may convey and understand simple messages and as they progress the information carrying load may become increasingly complex and the reasons for their communication may become more varied.

We recognise that all behaviour is a form of communication and we work with our pupils/students to support them to use a more effective method of communication. See Behaviour Policy for more details.

What do we do to enable pupils/students to become effective communicators?

We know that not all pupils/students will follow the same route in learning but a child -centred developmental approach helps us to devise individual, effective teaching and learning programmes and interventions. Specialist approaches to teaching communication are an integral part of school practice.

We know that communication skills will develop when pupils/ students
- build trusting relationships with others while having fun
- learn to pay attention and share the focus of their interest
- understand the relationship between making a request and having their needs met
- enjoy and understand two-way communication
- understand what others do and say
- are given the means, reasons and opportunities to communicate
- have structure, routine and predictability

Staff at Villa Real School support a pupil/students communication development through
- Establishing warm trusting social relationships with the children
- Following a child's lead, their motivations and interests
- Providing frequent opportunities for communication through play, music, books, etc.
- Using familiar routines to build skills and support understanding
- Establishing joint attention and developing turn taking

- Matching adult language to the child's developmental level and being aware of language overload
- Use of Total Communication (gesture, sign, symbols, AAC, etc.) which uses a range of consistent supportive strategies so pupils/students can understand expectations, access the curriculum and express themselves
- Knowledge of Blank levels and use of appropriate questions
- Recognising that communication strategies are important in behaviour management

Below are some of the approaches that may be used within the School. Training and support on using these approaches will be offered to staff on a needs led basis.
- Visual schedules: Some pupils/students within school will have an individual timetable. The use of visual planning supports difficulties with receptive language, increases independence as well as lessening anxiety around transitions. Visual schedules may take the form of objects of reference, photos, widget (Communicate in Print) (CIP) symbols or written text only. Timetables can be differentiated and may be now/ then, half day or full day depending on the child's level of understanding. Visual schedules allow planning for regular activities so that if there is an unexpected change there is a format for explaining this change that is meaningful to the pupil/student. Pupils/students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own timetables
- Use of Symbols: We predominantly use Widgit Symbols (CIP). It is important that the use of symbols is as consistent as possible across all resources. As a general default all symbols for timetables and PECS are black and white with the text on top. The font for symbols should be Sassoon CR Infant
- Communication Aids: there are a number of different communication aids used by pupils/students within school. These include low tech options such as communication books and aided language displays and high tech aids which rely on mains power or rechargeable battery packs. We recognise that these are the voice of the pupil and as such pupils/students are encouraged to use them frequently in motivating and purposeful activities
- PODD – Pragmatic Organised Dynamic Display - A way of organising vocabulary for communication at any time. PODD uses Boardmaker PCS colour symbols, also available in high contrast to support the visual difficulties of individuals. The intervention used with PODD is aided language stimulation. This is a strategy by which adults or communication partners use the system to speak to the individual, (pointing and saying the symbol label) to teach them what they could say, when to say it and who to say it to. In PODD communication books and page sets for high tech systems (windows and iOs) vocabulary is organised according to communication function and conversational discourse requirements. Aided language development is supported

through the provision of multiple page sets (communication books). The range of page sets reflects a developmental process as reported in the literature on both typical and aided language development. Page sets are selected to enable the use of aided language stimulation that leads the individual's development. Individual requirements (skills and lifestyle) are taken into account in the design. This includes a range of access methodologies and visual presentations which allows potential access to the systems by **any** individual with or without physical and sensory difficulties. The routine placement and availability of vocabulary assists to develop automaticity, language learning and initiation. PODD is being used successfully with individuals with a range of disabilities including Autism, Cerebral Palsy, syndromes and degenerative conditions across a number of countries including Australia, America, Sweden, France, Norway, Denmark and the UK.

- PECS: The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is a unique augmentative/alternative communication intervention package for individuals with autism spectrum disorder and related developmental disabilities. It focuses on developing spontaneous functional communication. See the ASD policy for more detail.
- Makaton: Makaton is a form of sign language in which signs are used in spoken word order. It is used alongside speech and can support understanding of spoken language as well as being used by pupils/students as a form of expressive language
- SCERTS: SCERTS is a multi-disciplinary framework that focuses on building competence in social communication, emotional regulation and transactional support. It is not a specific approach, but rather a way of assessing, goal setting and monitoring progress in the areas of social communication and emotional regulation. It also supports collaborative working between professionals and families
- Colourful Semantics: Colourful semantics is an approach used to help pupils/students develop their understanding of sentence construction. By linking different elements of a sentence to different colours and question words this visual approach aims to teaching understanding of question words, develop vocabulary and sentence complexity, increase range and complexity of verbs and improve pupils/students written language skills
- Social Skills Teaching: The aim of social skills teaching is to enable pupils/students to interact successfully within the wider community. Effective social skills teaching will incorporate direct teaching of social skills with real life opportunities to practice these skills and reflect on performance. Social skills teaching that is not directly linked to practical application of these skills is unlikely to be effective
- Social stories: Social stories are used to describe a situation, skill or concept. They have a set formula as to what type of sentence they should include. They do not directly aim to change behaviour, but it is hoped that by increasing a pupil's/student's understanding they may be able to behave in a more socially acceptable way

A fundamental pre requisite of these approaches and their components is to involve parents, carers and other family members in the process of supporting communication development.

These are just some of the approaches that may be used and should not be viewed as an exhaustive list. These approaches may be suggested by the SALT following assessment. Wherever possible SALT intervention and strategies will be integrated into pupils'/students' timetables and should not be viewed as a standalone activity that only takes place during structured sessions. Spontaneous and naturally occurring opportunities for developing communication skills should be utilised wherever possible.

Impact of this communication policy for pupils/students
The impact of this policy will be monitored through:
Evaluation of pupil progress with communication skills
Classroom visits /Learning Walks carried out by SMT as part of performance management process
Pupil/student survey
Discussion and feedback from parents

Review
This policy will be reviewed annually by the Senior Management Team to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the School.