



Communication Policy

Reviewed and agreed at Governors' Student Development Committee –13/11/18

This policy will be reviewed on a calendar three-yearly model by the Student Development Committee.

Next review date: Autumn 2021 INTRODUCTION

This policy is intended for use by staff, support workers and Governors of Riverside School.

At Riverside we believe that communication is at the centre of successful education. Communication can be defined as a meaningful interaction between two or more individuals to request, resist, choose, comment and develop social relationships. Our ultimate vision for all students is that they will establish a system of, expressive and receptive communication in whatever form is appropriate to them. The method of communication can take many forms and can include one or a combination of the following:

- Body language
- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Gestures and pointing
- TaSSels
- Signing (Makaton)
- PODD
- Vocalisations
- Use of objects of reference and body cues
 - Use of photographs
 - Use of symbols/drawings
 - Use of High-Tech AAC
 - Speech
 - Writing

At Riverside we adopt a 'multimodal approach to communication. This means that all methods of communication are recognised and valued equally as forms of interaction. Communication underpins all areas of the curriculum and allows students to access learning and develop social relationships. Communication is central to the entire curriculum and an individual's autonomy. Students are therefore presented with opportunities to develop their communication skills throughout the school day using both planned and spontaneous situations At Riverside we recognise that it is everybody's responsibility to have an understanding of the different methods of communication and to encourage students. To be effective communicators staff must be effective listeners and observers.

AIMS

- To respect the individual's communication style and ability and their right to communicate.
- To draw up specific, measurable, attainable, realistic communication targets that are regularly reviewed.
- To meet the communication potential of every student with respect of their cultural, religious or family views.
- To ensure, where possible, that students are provided with an appropriate and consistent communication environment.
- To facilitate the development of successful social communication.

APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION

At Riverside we use a range of different communication methods to interact with the students, both low and high tech. We do not follow one approach as the needs of the students vary between classes and age groups. However, many of these approaches are specific to learners with autism. The important thing to remember is that whatever approaches are assessed as being appropriate for the individual students, they should be consistently followed by all staff and carers working with the student, to ensure that maximum communicative function is achieved. This means that if a student is more able to communicate and understand photographs they should always have access to them and all staff should know how to use them with the student. They should be moved on to the next stage after structured discussion and planning between SLT and school staff. We continue to support this through collaborative ongoing CPD.

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 person with learning difficulties and their communication partner to relate better to each other and enjoy each other's company more. It helps them develop their communication abilities. In Intensive Interaction the carer, support worker, teacher or SLT works on being a better communication partner and so supports the person with learning difficulties to develop 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 students. S/he applies this knowledge in a way that is sensitive and respectful to the person with learning disability whatever their age.'" (British Institute of Learning Disabilities).

TaSSeLs (Tactile Signing For Sensory Learners)

Touch is a vital channel of communication for learners at the earliest developmental levels. It has been said that it is "humankind's earliest form of communication" (Gallace and Spence, 2010) and "our most fundamental means of contact with the outside world" (Hart, 2010). TaSSeLs is a system of touch-speech cues to promote effective communication with people with profound and complex learning disabilities, some of whom may have a visual impairment. Staff who work in classes with students who have a profound and multiple learning disabilities are given training to enable them to use TaSSeLs to support the students in their class. For more information on TaSSeLs see www.communicationmatter.org.uk.

Object Cues and Objects of Reference

The terms Object cues and Objects of Reference (OOR) 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.

Photographs

Photographs can 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.

Symbols

As symbolic understanding develops students are more able to understand the abstract qualities of symbols in relation to objects and events. At Riverside we use a combination of Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) and Widget 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 reading and pattern matching skills. 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.

PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

The Picture Exchange Communication System is a form of augmentative and alternative communication. It is a structured approach to developing communication with a student by 'exchanging' a photograph or picture symbol for a desired item. It is used with a wide variety of learners who have variety communicative disorders. At Riverside some of the students use PECS to express themselves. These students are identified by the SLT team in collaboration with the class teacher as certain pre requisite 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. We use many PECS strategies to support the student behaviour for example individual timetables, reward cards, take a break and wait. For more information on PECS see www.pecs.org.uk.

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children)

All Riverside's 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 daily timetable and/or individual timetables 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. 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.

Makaton

Makaton is a language programme that uses signs and symbols to help people to communicate. Signs and symbols are used along with speech and gesture, facial expression, eye contact and body language. Makaton is designed to support spoken language and the signs and symbols are used with speech in spoken word order. Makaton helps to simplify language as only the keywords in a sentence are signed.

At Riverside we use Makaton signs 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. For more information about Makaton see www.makaton.org.

PODD (Pragmatic Organisations Dynamic Display)

PODD is a communication system which can support people who are non-verbal or are difficult to understand by offering a large vocabulary of aided language (symbols, photos and words). At Riverside School a number of our students use PODD communication books. Each book is individually made for the students to ensure they have a vocabulary which is interesting and motivating to them. We assess each student to ensure they can access the books to ensure ease of communication. For students who are not yet using books teachers will create ALDs or core boards to accompany their lessons and sessions to offer further opportunities for non-verbal students to access language. For more details on PODD contact the school's SLTs.

Colourful semantics

Colourful semantics is an approach created by Alison Bryan. It is aimed at helping children to develop their grammar but it is routed in the meaning of words (semantics). Some students use colourful semantics to support their understanding of language.

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 students in Riverside

use the spoken word to communicate. They may have difficulties with the organisation, clarity and fluency of speech sounds and words.

At Riverside we focus on functional communication ie the student 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 students focused work on speech sounds may not be successful due to their developmental level, difficulties with awareness, motivation and generalisation skills. .

smiLE Therapy

smiLE Therapy is a therapeutic student centred approach that develops functional social communication using role play and real life contexts. Complex communication skills are broken down into manageable components and skills are taught explicitly. Students become actively responsible for their own communication and learning as they learn ways to prevent or repair communication breakdown in face-to-face situations. This approach encourages students to develop a range of strategies to ensure they communicate their message successfully (hierarchy of communication strategies). smiLE Therapy is taught in six week blocks to small groups of students by trained SLTs.

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 participation in society. Staff use good models of social communication in their interactions with each other and students within the school.

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

ROLE OF THE SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPISTS

To ensure the successful communication development of all students at the school it is essential that the Speech and Language Therapist, (SLT), department and school staff work collaboratively. Riverside School staff work with SLTs in accordance with the PROTOCOL FOR JOINT WORKING BETWEEN WHITTINGTON HEALTH PROFESSIONALS & SPECIAL SCHOOLS/SPECIALIST PROVISIONS IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF HARINGEY.

At Riverside School there is a well-established relationship between SLTs and school staff. To work effectively with students and staff SLTs delivery therapy and training using their Universal, Targeted and Specialist model SLT aims within the school are:

- To maximise students communication skills within the scope of their ability.

- To work closely with school staff to promote the optimum environment for developing speech, language and communication.
- Discuss and set individual/group targets with teachers.
- Develop and make resources in liaison with class teams.
- To introduce, develop and maintain augmentative and alternative communication systems for individuals as appropriate.
- To provide advice, information and training as appropriate for staff, parents/carers
- To provide a monitoring system to ensure the quality of the work and provide appropriate and effective support.
- To provide students with assessment where necessary.
- To plan and deliver appropriate therapy (group/individual).
- • To develop policies for particular areas of therapy.
- To liaise with and make referrals to other professionals.
- To input to Annual Reviews/Transition Plans.

THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM (MDT)

Students at Riverside have a range of needs and a team of school staff take a holistic approach to provide greater access to the curriculum. The team includes; SLTs, Occupational Therapy, (OT), Physio Therapy (PT), School Nurse, Paediatrician, Paediatric Dietician, Music Therapists, Art Therapists, Teacher of the Deaf and Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Educational Psychologists, (EPs), and Child and Adolescent Mental Health – Learning Disabilities (CAMHS-LD) team including Psychiatrist and Clinical Psychology.

ROLE OF THE COMMUNICATION ASSISTANT

This Role was established in September of 2017 with the intention of strengthening the implementation and embedding of communication approaches. The communication assistant works in alignment with the SLTs and works directly with students, Teachers and Teaching Assistants to support communication. As well as implementing and embedding communication approaches the Communication Assistant supports the development and production of specific communication resources and low tech aids. The Communication Assistant also delivers class and team trainings and CPD regularly.

ROLE OF SCHOOL STAFF

- To write cameos on each student to include information about communication skills
- To write Communication Profiles for students with support from SLTs

- To create an environment conducive to the communication styles of individual students and groups
- To carry over good practice and programmes/activities observed and developed in group SLT sessions to all areas of the curriculum

RESOURCES

Making communication resources, such as objects, photographs, symbols, ALDs and timetables etc. is a shared responsibility. We recognise that making resources is very time consuming. SLTs are available for advice on appropriate communication resources for school and parents.

POLICY INTO PRACTICE

To ensure that the communication policy is put into practice we carry out the following:

- Regular staff training
- Regular meetings between SLT and school
- Regular monitoring of the use of the policy
- Regular liaison with parents at termly Parents' Evenings
- Yearly annual review reports on the student's communication skills to share progress with other professionals and parents
- Home visits
- Parents groups
- Video good practise
- Update service delivery on a 2 yearly basis / or where necessary
- Keep up to date of developments on communication (CPD)
- Regular MDT / SLT meetings
- Good levels of supervision

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 changes ahead.

We ensure that information on their communication skills is transferred between classes and educational settings in the Summer Term at transition meetings. This is done through sharing Communication Profiles and Annual Review reports and previous targets.

Communication Profiles are individual profiles for each student, written yearly and updated when needed by the class teacher outlining the communication style with their strengths and needs.

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

WORKING WITH PARENTS

We work with parents to develop a shared understanding of the quality and range of communication taking place both at home and school, by:

- Sharing information at annual reviews
- Regular parent/carer groups
- Running parents' forums
- Training for parents (e.g. Makaton, PECS, PODD, SMILE)
- Liaising with parents at termly Parents' Evening
- SLTs providing advice on communication development and ideas for activities at home
- Home-school book

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