

Oak Field School Policy for Communication

Intent

This policy describes the principles and best practice to maximise every pupil's ability to communicate at Oak Field School. By using best practice and consistency learners will become effective in communication with a range of audiences, therefore maximising life experiences and opportunities beyond school.

Implementation - Five communication standards

Communication at Oak Field is based on the 5 Communication Standards, which was developed by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. This addresses best practice for all adults and children with communication difficulties

1. There is a detailed description of how best to communicate with individuals.

All students who have some difficulties in communicating have a Communication Profile. Oak Field School aims to develop equal interaction between a pupils **Means, Reasons and Opportunities** for communicating and this is recorded on their communication profile. Interests and motivators are also listed in order to foster and promote communication. Identifying barriers to effective communication is also useful. **Expectations** are also recorded. Staff have high expectations that each pupil can communicate and uses the pupils skills to develop next steps in order for the pupil to progress in their communication.

Each pupils Communication Profile is stored centrally on the school network and is updated at least annually by class staff alongside Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT), the pupil and parents. Other agencies such as Respite Care may also be involved.

2. Staff demonstrate how they support individuals with communication needs to be involved with decisions about their care.

Pupils are taught the core vocabulary of words, signs, symbols and concepts first through modelling. The core vocabulary is taught alongside fringe vocabulary, linked to activities, foods, places etc. in order to communicate choices.

Staff work to understand and recognise the pupils' communication no matter how discrete. Such as if the pupil cries out it may be that they want something to 'stop', or if they reach out they may want 'more'.

Pupils may start with a total approach to communication, that is, exposure to words, signs and symbols before their route to effective communication is established.

'Modelling' is a research-based strategy to help pupils understand and learn what the object, symbol, sign and word represents and helps the pupil understand how they can use the language (object, symbol, sign, word) themselves.

Modelling involves the communication partner (e.g. staff, parent, and therapist), using the word, sign, symbol or object in context. For example, if a pupil likes bubbles and they reach out for the bubble wand, the communication partner could say you want "MORE" whilst showing the pupil the sign and the symbol.

This Language may need to be modelled a number of times before it can be effectively used by the pupil.

Teaching the use of language such as 'more' and 'stop' helps pupils make decisions about likes/dislikes and may aid in decision making about their care or their future.

3. Staff value and use competently the best approaches to communication with each individual

The following training is available to staff as part of Continuing Professional Development

- The Principles of Communication at Oak Field School
- Using Signing to aid understanding
- Creating symbol based resources

Other training is available as required, through the school, SaLT or by other agencies such as

- Early communication skills
- Intensive Interaction
- Communication Partner Training

Each class has support from a Speech & Language Therapist and from the Communication Team at Oak Field. Staff share good practice and celebrate pupil achievements within school and with parents and carers.

4. Services create opportunities, relationships and environments that make individuals want to communicate.

In order to become an effective communicator, a pupil needs **Means, Reasons and Opportunities** to Communicate. A motivating activity combined with appropriate strategies and resources often promotes communication, it is often the case that the motivator (activity, resource, person or environment) is the key to unlocking communication potential, their **REASON** to communicate.

There may be occasions that specific communication sessions are created to explore motivators, and potential **MEANS** to communicate. Means of communication could involve the following:

- Body language and movements
- Gestures and signs
- Symbol exchange or pointing
- Vocalisations and speech
- Eye tracking

Essentially though, **OPPORTUNITIES** to communicate must be given throughout all areas of the pupil's life. At Oak Field we look for pupils strengths in communication and work to develop this into more meaningful and intentional communication. Communication strategies are shared with parents/carers in order for the pupils' communication to be developed in all areas of their life. These strategies then develop within the whole team around the pupil.

Staff create environments which are communication rich and that reflect the wider community and prepare them for their future needs. Symbols are clear and accessible.

5. Individuals are supported to understand and express their needs in relation to their health and wellbeing

Learning to use language such as 'More' and 'Stop' using methods such as vocalisations, facial expression, gesture, sign or use of a symbol, will enable pupils to express what they want 'more' of and what they want to 'stop'. Signs and symbols are used by staff to aid understanding.

Implementation - Resources

Oak Field School use black widget symbols on a white background with no border as this is the most accessible for the majority of students. Colour symbols are used if agreed with SaLT (Speech and Language Therapists) and the communication subject leader if, for example, a pupil will be using an electronic device with colour symbols in the future. There are a few exceptions to this rule and staff will use their professional judgement when creating resources.

Oak Field School uses Makaton signs. Signs and symbols can be accessed using software such as 'Communicate In Print'. Sets of generic symbols are available on the network to print and use ensuring consistency.

Electronic devices are available such as button switches and big macs. These can enable a pupil to have control of a voice. Displays around school are accessible using a multi-sensory approach and symbols which are clear and meaningful, A5 in size where possible.

Some pupils may have access to Assistive Technology. Tablet devices are used for pupils who can use a grid of symbols for example to communicate. These are often available through an assessment by the Speech and Language Therapy team. Some pupils may use eye gaze resources and software.

Implementation - Assessment

Assessments are made by the class teams alongside parents/carers and other specialists such as SaLT or the Teacher of the Deaf for example. Assessment is through the input of levels with evidence into Classroom Monitor (speaking and listening), other assessments may be used such as Q skills. Progress in communication will also be evident in progress made across the whole curriculum.

Implementation - Monitoring and Evaluation

A regular review of the 5 good communication standards is undertaken, these are usually completed within the first term of the new academic year. The subject leader collates these and develops an action plan. The subject leader holds regular meetings with Speech and Language Therapists to discuss progress, resources, new research, new resources and next steps. This is then shared with staff.

Pupil progress is monitored annually and an action plan created highlighting priorities for development. This may involve further targeted work by SaLT for example.

Communication Profiles are monitored on an annual basis by the communication subject leader.

Teachers must ensure Communication Profiles are up-to-date and ready to pass onto new class teams at the end of the summer term. Updates to the profiles show progress has been made in communication.

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For Review: March 2022