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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Communication, including AAC, forms a central part of the environment of Hillingdon Manor School.

Communication is supported, encouraged and celebrated throughout the curriculum and unstructured times such as lunch time and break times.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to any way in which spoken communication is supported or replaced. The policy sets out reasons why AAC forms part of the curriculum at Hillingdon Manor School.

It is proposed that the policy will underpin the practice of AAC throughout the school and prove an informative document for the purpose of monitoring practice. It will be implemented by the whole staff at Hillingdon Manor School and monitored under the guidance of the Speech and Language Therapy team.

Implementation: It is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that staff members are aware of and understand this policy and any subsequent revisions.

Compliance: This policy complies with all relevant regulations and other legislation as detailed in the *Compliance with Regulations & Legislation Statement*.

2.0 RATIONALE

Communication happens when one person sends a message to another person either verbally or non-verbally.

Interaction happens when two people respond to one another – a two-way communication.

Most people on the autism spectrum have difficulty interacting with others. This may be a difficulty with responding to others when they are approached by them, with initiating interactions, or with using interaction to show people things or to be sociable.

Many children with autism are delayed in their use of language or have disordered language and don't use speech. It is therefore essential that other methods of communication are established. This means communication at Hillingdon Manor School is not limited to the use of formal systems such as speech, sign or the written word and a total communication approach is adopted with the overall aim of the provision of AAC to provide each student with an effective mode of interaction with as large an audience as possible.

3.0 TOTAL COMMUNICATION – HILLINGDON MANOR SCHOOL APPROACH

Hillingdon Manor operates a 'total communication approach' this means that staff work using the students preference for communication e.g. sign, PECS, speech but also expose them to different modes of communication to offer students the opportunity to find the most enjoyable and effective mode of interaction. Students with communication difficulties often struggle to understand and use spoken language, and need support to communicate basic needs, wants and desires. Total communication makes use of the skills a student has, such as non-verbal communication and may include the use of Augmentative and Alternative communication.

Our Mission Statement

"Hillingdon Manor School strives to provide effective specialist education and support to students with autistic spectrum

disorder and their families, which will allow students to achieve their full potential in education and life."

In order to achieve this:

- We will provide all students with opportunities to learn and achieve, by supporting them with a connective curriculum which makes explicit connections between areas of learning and concepts so that they can progress to their full potential.
- We will teach appropriately to the abilities of the students, using specialised strategies which are communication focussed.
- We will work with the students in an inclusive, equality based manner.
- We will concentrate on the positive.
- Our school will try to raise the self-esteem of all who attend.
- We will provide a safe environment and will make sure that all students know who to go to if they feel anxious or unsafe.
- We will work with our students towards improvements in their behaviour.
- We will provide opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- We promote positive and healthy relationships between all members of our community.
- We will keep you informed of your children's progress and the school activities.
- We will set homework in accordance with our school policy and in discussion with you about individual requirements.
- We will monitor and liaise with you about lateness and attendance.
- We will treat you with courtesy and work toward meeting your ambitions for your child.

Communication and Equality

Hillingdon Manor School aims to provide equality of communication opportunity for all. This involves appropriate staff organisation, class groupings and the development of individual programmes based on students need. Effective communication requires an easy and quick way of transmitting thought. For some students this will be through traditional sentence word structure, for others it may require other methods such as buttons, Makaton, VOCA or text/symbol to speech applications that support or replace speech. Communication is inextricably linked to the school philosophy, which states that "Hillingdon Manor School strives to provide effective specialist education and support to students with autistic spectrum disorder and their families, which will allow students to achieve their full potential in education and life". In particular, AAC links with Hillingdon Manor School Aims as follows:

- To provide all students with opportunities to learn and achieve, by supporting them with a connective curriculum which makes explicit connections between areas of learning and concepts so that they can progress to their full potential.
- To teach appropriately to the abilities of the students, using specialised strategies which are communication focussed.

- To work with the students in an inclusive, equality based manner.
- To value each student as an individual and support their intellectual, social and emotional development within a caring, purposeful and flexible framework.
- To provide effective education, therapies and support for children with a range of physical, sensory, medical and learning difficulties
- To recognise and value the qualities, abilities, self-esteem and dignity of each individual
- To provide a high quality and appropriate environment in which all students are encouraged to develop to their full potential.
- To ensure our curriculum is enjoyable, stimulating and suitably challenging for all students
- To concentrate on the positive.
- To try to raise the self-esteem of all who attend.
- To provide a safe environment and the tools to ensure that all students know who to go to if they feel anxious or unsafe and the means to communicate this
- To listen to our students and work with them towards improvements in their behaviour.
- To provide opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- To promote positive and healthy relationships between all members of our school.
- To respond effectively to each student's changing needs
- To encourage our children to achieve the greatest possible independence of thought and action.
- To maintain a high standard of performance in leadership, teaching, and communication.
- To work effectively with parents and other professionals in the best interests of the children and the school.
- To ensure appropriate opportunities for all within the school.
- To provide effective education, therapies and support for children with a range of physical, sensory, medical and learning difficulties.
- To ensure our curriculum is enjoyable, stimulating and suitably challenging for all students.
- To ensure every child has access to a relevant, broad and balanced curriculum, based on National Curriculum requirements.

Communication Entitlement

The aims of Hillingdon Manor School are to ensure that equality of opportunity is provided for all. To achieve this, all children will have access to the school communication curriculum at the level appropriate to their development, and taking into account their individual needs and preferences. Where appropriate they will have access to AAC resources and teaching approaches. We aim to provide a 'total communication' environment where all modes of communication are equally valued and students are given opportunities to make choices, initiate conversation and express their own ideas and opinions. AAC class resources and low tech individual resources are provided by the school for all students who require them. Students who are recognised through their EHCP/statement or by the Speech and Language Therapy Team following assessment as needing a High tech AAC device will be provided with one for use in the school. This will be following consultation with parents and dependant on the student's motivation and preference for using the device.

4.0 IMPLEMENTATION

Hillingdon Manor School recognise that students may need different modes of communication for expressive and receptive language and that different AAC methods may be needed in different situations e.g. it may be easier to sign when in a swimming pool than to use a communication book. An electronic aid may break down and the AAC user needs to have a 'low tech' alternative available.

Examples and training packages are being developed to show how AAC can be fitted into school topic work in each subject for students to access the curriculum being supported with AAC.
Vocabulary for AAC is chosen carefully. A mixture of topic words and Core vocabulary is chosen to encourage communication in the least effortful, restrictive way. Core vocabulary is a small set of simple words, that are

used frequently and across contexts, Core vocabulary contains all parts of speech - nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections (Cross, Baker, Klotz & Badman, 1997). Research suggests that students with language acquisition difficulties build early language three-word phrases with core vocabulary (Baker, Hill & Devylder, 2000). Core vocabulary makes up 80 percent or more of everyday communication and is at the heart of language development allowing students to request comment and direct freely.

As students' progress, alongside parents/caregivers and teachers they are encouraged to take an active part in choosing vocabulary to encourage freedom of speech and equal communication opportunities.

Hillingdon Manor School ensures that communication is implicit throughout the school day. The daily routines and interactions will develop many of the fundamental skills of communication. Time spent on structured communication/ AAC teaching will vary according to the needs of the individual child.

Teaching may take place:

- Informally throughout the day. Interaction in natural contexts is essential if students are to generalise AAC skills and use them functionally.
- At snack time, breakfast club, lunchtime and at 'hello' and 'good-bye' sessions.
- In small specific language groups.
- In whole group sessions
- In individual sessions led by school or speech therapy staff.
- This will be especially important for students using VOCAs as they will need time to learn how to use the machine before being able to use it to communicate:
- In communication through play sessions.
- Outside of the school environment.

We work in partnership with parents and others involved with the student and try to extend opportunities for communication and ensure that students' communication is supported beyond the school.

We offer support to parents with workshops and training opportunities.

The student and adult communication partner may use one, or more than one, of the following Augmentative and Alternative Communication methods:

- Makaton
- Movement, gesture, body language and facial expression
- Graphic symbols (primarily symbolstix and boardmaker symbols although other symbol systems may be used if they are more appropriate for a particular student) and photographs.
- Communication charts, mats and books.
- Objects of reference
- Sensory cues (e.g. daily aroma, physical touch, personal identifiers)
- PECs books
- Technology including computer assisted learning.
- Switch activated toys and equipment to develop cause and effect and as a precursor to communication aids: Voice Output Communication Aids.

In order to promote the use of AAC the following communication strategies may be employed:

- Giving the AAC user TIME to initiate and respond.
- Encouraging the use of AAC everywhere and at all times.
- Looking at the total communication that the student is using e.g. body language and facial expression as well as the use of their aid.

- Finding time to just 'chat' informally without the adult controlling the subject matter.
- Leaving class AAC resources 'lying around' so that they may be used casually by any student.
- Encouraging school staff and others to use the class/individual AAC resources themselves to find out how it feels to use it and to encourage students and others to regard it as a 'normal' means of communication.
- To use Makaton all the time and everywhere not just when speaking to a signing student. Makaton gives students longer to process information.

Under the guidance of the Speech and Language Therapy Team we aim to achieve continuity and progression by working together with all those concerned with the child e.g. Music therapist, Occupational Therapist, parents, all specialist teachers, escorts, lunchtime supervisors.

Assessments are carried out by the Speech and Language Therapy Team in consultation with Hillingdon Manor School staff, Occupational Therapist, Teachers, parents etc.

Planning is student centred and decisions on approaches to be used are made by the Multidisciplinary team e.g. Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist and any other relevant professional.

Individual students have targets on EHCPS and Annual Reviews and may also have communication plans if appropriate with progress reported in Annual reviews to parents.

5.0 SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY TEAM

Continual assessment for each student forms the basis for future planning. Students using high tech AAC may require implementation plans outlining how they will be taught the skills that they require to firstly operate the devices and how to encourage generalisation of skills. When, where, and who will teach them, details of how charging, updating programming and access to the aid will be managed and how staff and family will be trained in the use of the aid are included in the plan.

The role of the Speech and Language Therapy Team is considered to encompass the following tasks:
- To lead policy development
- To attend relevant courses and feedback information to staff
- To manage and co-ordinate resources
- To provide information to staff
- To keep abreast of developments in the subject
- To monitor the teaching and learning of AAC throughout the school
- To liaise with outside agencies (e.g. speech therapy, visual impairment Service) on matters relating to AAC policy within the school.
- To assist in assessment for appropriate AAC.