

Inclusive Communication Policy

Purpose:

The Ambitious Approach underpins all our thinking and practice. It is an approach to education created by Ambitious about Autism to support children and young people with autism. It has been developed to provide high-quality education whilst affording dignity, respect, and compassion, in all aspects of our provision, including the consideration of mental health and wellbeing. The Ambitious Approach is based upon a person's indisputable rights to be:

- treated with dignity and compassion
- valued
- listened to
- supported to have the best quality of life possible
- empowered to make choices and decide on how they want to live their life.

This policy has been written because good communication is important to all aspects of quality of life including:

- Relationships and being part of the community
- Achieving academically, building skills and fulfilling potential
- Physical and mental well-being
- Being able to self-advocate and have choice and control over one's life
- Confidence, resilience and managing life's challenges.

Other policies to be referred to include:

- Behaviour Policy
- Learner Mental Health and Well Being Policy

Research shows that people without effective communication are at increased risk of:

- A lack of choices and involvement in everyday decisions
- Limited relationships
- Increased vulnerability to abuse and hate crime
- Low mood, anxiety and depression, and withdrawal from community life.
- Reduced employment and housing opportunities; increased placement breakdowns.
- Lower standard of healthcare, diagnostic overshadowing, and more inpatient admissions.
- Over reliance by staff on restrictive approaches and interventions.
- Overuse of specialist services.
- Increased use of behaviour which challenges, mental health distress or offending.
- Poor access to verbally-mediated therapeutic input focused on criminal offences.
- Staff teams consistently overestimating an individual's abilities, impacting negatively on staff perceptions and affecting the individual's overall care.
- Poor compliance with the legal requirements of the Mental Capacity Act, Human Rights Act, Disability Discrimination Act and Equality Act.

Scope:

We adopt a person-centred, equalities-based approach to promoting communication whereby all forms of communication are equally valued. We support pupils/students to trial and adopt the forms of communication that work best for them within their profile of strengths and needs.

Communication is a two-way process and can only exist in the context of:

- Positive everyday relationships and interactions
- People valuing individual personality, strengths, interests and communication style
- Meaningful joint activities and experiences
- People who can understand communication needs and adjust their communication accordingly.

Policy Owner	Head of Integrated Services	Review Date:	March 2024
Policy No.	114	Version No.	1.0

The Ambitious Approach helps to provide a useful foundation for this. In addition, our speech and language therapists provide support to staff to help them implement the actions outlined in this policy.

The aims of our inclusive communication policy align with the Royal College of Speech & Language Therapist's Five Good Communication Standards, which are:

- There is a detailed description of how best to communicate with individuals.
- Settings demonstrate how they support individuals with communication needs to be involved with decisions about their care and their services.
- Staff value and use competently the best approaches to communication with each individual they support.
- Settings create opportunities, relationships and environments that make individuals want to communicate.
- Individuals are supported to understand and express their needs in relation to their health and wellbeing.

Inclusive communication:

In our settings, all forms of communication are respected and responded to. Students are enabled to make use of a wide range of strategies to communicate their wants, needs, ideas, feelings and thoughts, including:

- facial expression, gesture or eye-gaze
- tactile communication or objects of reference
- signing systems such as Makaton
- low tech alternative and augmentative (AAC) systems such as PECS and communication books (using photos, pictures or symbols)
- hi tech AAC systems such as communication systems using specialist software installed on tablets
- vocalisations, single words or spoken sentences
- technology, such as texting, what's app, facetime

The decision about which modes of communication to teach and use is based on an individual assessment of strengths and needs, communication and cognitive abilities alongside previous responses to different communication systems. All progress is valued and celebrated, not just progress with speech.

How an inclusive communication environment is achieved:

The most effective way to support the development of communication skills of children and young people with autism is through ongoing and natural interactions within the social environment as part of meaningful activities and warm relationships. Through our universal offer (the provision available to all pupils/learners in our settings), all staff at Ambitious support and promote communication and its development throughout every part of every day, through formal and informal learning opportunities in lessons, play, social interaction and by having fun together.

Good communication is present in:

- The physical environment – communication aids; visual timetables; clear, accessible labels; clear activity instructions and learning materials at the right language and communication level for individuals
- The social environment – staff interacting with pupils/students (not just to deliver instruction) at the right language and communication level and responding to student's communication attempts.

Each classroom may look slightly different, due to the communication needs of the individuals in the room.

Speech & Language therapists support this through universal level work including activities such as staff training, observations, modelling and coaching staff.

Individual support:

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Curriculum staff and the Speech & Language Therapists work together to ensure:

- Everyone is clear about the best methods to support the student's understanding and expressive communication
- There are jointly set targets and plans for how to develop communication skills in a way that is meaningful and functional for the student
- Where specialist interventions or onward referrals are needed, that these are completed in a timely way.
- Specific resources or equipment to support communication are provided

Monitoring:

Monitoring the presence of appropriately differentiated communication environments is a joint responsibility between curriculum leaders and Speech & Language Therapists. This is achieved through:

- Physical and social environmental audits and observations
- Jointly set targets in school / college development plans
- Monitoring the impact of communication training in terms of changes in staff behaviour in the classroom and not just enjoyment / knowledge training outcomes
- Ensuring that sufficient S< time is allocated to indirect activity, focusing on the communication environment, not just direct intervention with a pupil/ student.

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