



Communication Policy

St Nicholas School is a UNICEF Rights Respecting School with Gold Status and promotes rights respecting values in all its policies



The Governing Body of St Nicholas School formally adopted

this Policy on March 23rd 2023

It will be reviewed March 2024 unless otherwise advised

Signed _____

Head Teacher

Signed _____

Chair of Governors

St Nicholas School Communication policy

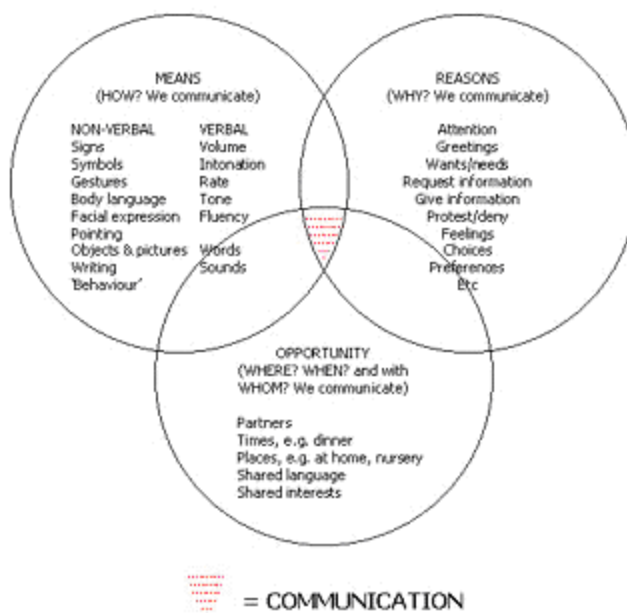
Aims

We are very aware that a child's inability to communicate effectively can be a significant barrier to learning. Therefore, staff work collaboratively with Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) to ensure that we focus on communication friendly strategies and environment that remove these barriers.

1. To provide our children with the means to develop functional communication using strategies that are appropriate to their ability.
2. To provide an active stimulating educational environment that encourages individual opportunity and achievement.
3. To ensure that where necessary children have access to the most appropriate augmentative systems available.
4. To provide opportunities for our children to develop their communication skills at home, at school and in the wider community.
5. To ensure communication is functional, effective and generalised to all environments the child spends time in.
6. To ensure St Nicholas School is a Total Communication environment where signing, symbols, photos, objects and routine are all used to support communication.
7. To ensure that everyone knows how to best support the communication needs of each individual child. This includes school development planning and a strategic systemic approach to the early identification and monitoring of children with SLCN.
8. By ensuring that communication is part of the school improvement plan incorporating support from the relevant members of the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) – for example, Occupational Therapy (OT)/ Physiotherapy (PT), Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), Paediatrics and dietetics.

Means, Reasons and Opportunities

It is important that communication is an everyday experience for children. Our focus at St Nicholas School is on developing the Means, Reasons and Opportunities to communicate (Money and Thurman, 1994).



We are aware that:

- Without the Means of communication, you cannot express yourself.
- Without Reasons for communication, there is no point in or need to communicate.
- Without the Opportunities, there cannot be any communication

Thus, while Communications is timetabled, every lesson, the bits between lessons and every aspect of being in the school is regarded as a communications development opportunity

The Balanced System Model

The Speech and Language Therapy team work to the Balanced System Model. The Balanced System builds on the clear expectations from Bercow, Ofsted and the National Curriculum that communication is a shared responsibility and all staff have a duty to support the development of the communication skills of the children within St Nicholas School.

Key to the model is collaborative working - it is about working with staff to enhance communication, which will benefit every child at St Nicholas School. The way in which we support each child is different and will vary depending on their needs.

Universal Support

- Whole School Total Communication approach
- Communication friendly classrooms
- Symbols accessible in all areas
- Staff and Parent Training
- Children on this provision have their needs met through specialist teacher input within a needs led learning approach.
- Advice clinics
- Integrated learning
- Croydon's Local offer

Targeted Support

These children are not on caseload. Their needs can be met by the specialist teachers and their EHCP/targets are reviewed by the class team. These children will also have access to:

- Communication groups
- Other targeted interventions run by school staff e.g. language groups, social skills, life skills
- Advice clinics
- Specific training on targeted interventions for staff and parents.

Specialist Support

Indirect- This is a specific piece of work with a child working on targets. A member of the SALT team will identify the strategies and support a child needs jointly with the class team/parents and targets will be set.

Targets are worked on by the class team with support from the SALT team as needed.

Targets are reviewed by the therapist at the end of the set period of time and next steps are laid out.

Direct- Targets are set jointly with the class team/parents. The child receives direct intervention from the therapy team. This could be through 1:1/group sessions for an identified period of time or where stated in their EHCP. Targets are reviewed by the SALT team at the end of a set period of time and next steps are laid out.

Moving from specialist to targeted and/or universal is not about discharging a child; it is about looking at how their needs are best met, always keeping in mind that the levels of intervention build on, rather than replace, one another. A caseload child is one who needs SALT to assess, set targets and review them. However, their intervention (between target setting and review) may be at a specialist level (i.e. delivered by a member of the SALT Team) or at a targeted level (delivered by school / settings staff).

If universal isn't enough, then a child needs universal AND targeted; if universal and targeted are not enough, then a child needs universal AND targeted AND specialist - it is not a case of either / or.

Specialist level interventions cannot and should not happen in isolation - it is not in the best interests of the child.

Speech and Language Therapy at St Nicholas School

St Nicholas School has two onsite full time Speech and Language Therapists. Zara Rafique (Speech and Language Therapist) and Beth Gentry Hobson (Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist/SALT lead). Croydon Health Services NHS Trust also provide Speech and Language Therapy to the school. They are currently attending 1.5 days per week and consist of a Specialist Speech and Language Therapist and a Speech and Language Therapy Assistant.

St Nicholas School SALT team provide Universal and Targeted support to the whole school, and specialist support to children in Reception, Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3. NHS SALT team provide support to those children in Years 4, 5 and 6.

Some of the duties of the SALT team are:

- Working in the classroom settings - liaising with staff and working with children as part of their classroom experiences to share good practice, regularly review progress and plan next steps for communication skills. This achieved through education and health care plan reviews (EHCPs) known to SALT annually and through one-page profiles to identify a child's communication skills

- Jointly plan classroom activities/ ideas in order to incorporate communication across the day
- Support each other and class teams on how to generalise new communication skills across the various environments accessed
- Provide a baseline level of training for all staff on communication across the setting
- Ensure that communication targets are embedded across all areas of the Curriculum.
- Keep other professionals updated on our children and their means of communication e.g. OT, Paediatrician, to support Multi-Disciplinary working between professionals.
- Refer onto additional services in a timely and appropriate way (as required)
- Identify and prioritise children based on their needs in relation to the school environment and their clinical need.
- Engage with parents/carers in a purposeful and timely way ensuring that communication skills can be integrated into the family home and supporting parents/carers with training and liaison when needed.

Advice Clinics

Advice Clinics are:

- The referral process into SALT/specialist level support. This is so the therapist can meet with the parent/carer to discuss their concerns as well as speaking to school staff, to then decide what level of support is best needed for the child and to give strategies on how to support them in school and at home. This does not mean that a child will move to specialist level support automatically if targeted support has not been offered first.
- The referral back to SALT/specialist level support.
- An opportunity for all parents to meet with the therapist to discuss any concerns or seek strategies to work on communication strategies at home/EHCP queries.

Advice clinic slots will be offered on a termly basis for all parents and are given on a first come first serve basis.

When to refer to Speech and Language Therapy

Both the NHS and School SALT team accept referrals if targeted level support has not been successful when:

- A child does not have a communication system
- A child has made really good progress with a communication system and you want to know the next steps are
- You're not sure how to use the communication system
- A change in behaviour which is trying to communicate something
- A communication system is not working and the child does not seem to be making progress.
- You need help with setting targets

- Any concerns about communication or social skills

Termly link meetings

The SALT team will meet with their allocated classes on a termly basis. The teacher and the therapist will discuss the children's targets, the classroom environment, queries/concerns and how it is impacting the classroom as well as any interventions that are taking place. This should be following a review of those on specialist support within the classroom. Targets can then be jointly set for that term.

The link between behaviour and communication

Behaviour is communication. Many children and young people, who have behavioural difficulties, including many of those with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH), also have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). These needs often go unrecognised because behaviour can mask a child or young person's difficulties with communication. SALT and St Nicholas School work collaboratively on supporting children and young people with behavioural needs and SEMH by identifying their SLCN, advising their families and professionals working with them on how to respond appropriately, and providing advice and guidance for ongoing support. When we see a child who is in crisis, displaying changes in behaviour or who appears unhappy, our first question will always be: 'what are they trying to tell us'? Giving a child a communication channel will help the child and those around them to support with their behavioural needs. Speech and Language Therapy should contribute towards an individual child's behaviour plan.

Staff training and outreach

This is an essential component of supporting child with SLCN. This is achieved through a clear training development plan focussed on developing communication skills for staff at St Nicholas School as well as parents. SALT will provide a core training package that is accessible for school staff and parents in key areas of communication needs, related to children with ASD,MLD and SLD.

We are committed to ensuring that all staff have the knowledge and skills to support our aim of a whole school Total Communication approach. Communication is a regular item on new staff induction, training days and during twilight sessions for all staff across school. The SALT team deliver specific 'coaching' sessions for individual class teams, to help them to effectively support the communication of the children in their class. Elklan training is also offered and provided as required for some staff within school. These members of staff have received this training to equip them with the tools they need to encourage and support communication for the children within their class and across school.

All staff at St Nicholas School aim to:

- Facilitate the social inclusion and well-being of all of our children.

- Support communication skills in order to prevent and deal with subsequent behavioural issues, as we support the concept that: 'All behaviour is a form of communication' (Michigan Alliance for Families, 2016).
- Support and help our children to find a way to express themselves using good levels of functional communication.
- Ensure that every child's individual communication system(s) are used consistently by all staff across school.
- Continually raise the status of communication systems used within school, in order to ensure all of our children can successfully access the curriculum.
- Contribute fully to the maintenance of an individual's communication systems; specifically, the SALT team, and class team.
- Adopt a Total Communication Approach throughout school, where children have access to their personalised communication tools throughout the day.
- Identify and develop a Means of Communication tailored to each child's individual needs: communications style; cognitive ability; physical ability.
- Create Opportunities for Communication throughout the curriculum to enable each child to communicate functionally and spontaneously, to the best of their ability.
- Understand the importance of helping to understand our children's Reasons to communicate

Staff have completed a variety of training courses on different communication strategies. This will be set out as a rolling in house training programme for all staff to attend in areas such as PECS, Intensive Interaction, smile therapy, Blanks levels. Makaton training is offered in house and schools can request Makaton training as an INSET package. In addition to this we have 'signs of the week' which are cascaded through school.

St Nicholas school offers outreach to local school and this may involve advice about communication needs, including sign and symbol use.

External training courses can be offered for staff if appropriate. Staff are expected to work for St Nicholas School at least 6 months post course accreditation otherwise the cost of the course will need to be repaid back to the school.

Communication groups

Every child in school takes part in a communication group. These are set up throughout the school across year groups. Children are placed in groups according to ability and communication needs and work on activities that are directly linked to their communication targets from the speech and language therapists. Teachers and teaching assistants lead these groups which run once or twice a week depending on the needs of the children.

Working with parents

As a school we are committed to supporting parents in developing their understanding of their child's communication needs and in their communication with their child. We do this in the following ways:

- The language and communication needs and targets are shared with parents/carers during parents evening and Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) reviews.
- For pupils on the SALT caseload, their specific SALT programmes/targets are also continually shared with parents and carers.
- Resources and keywords from individual SALT sessions may also be sent home, where appropriate.
- Support through the school website for parents to access and use communication resources e.g. links to the Makaton sign of the week on the school Twitter feed.
- Termly advice clinics with the SALT Team
- Coffee mornings
- Chill and Chat
- Training on communication as a whole
- Specific training on targeted interventions

Transition

Transition is an important part of a child's life and we believe in empowering the child. We recognise that it can be a challenging time for a child 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 Passports and Annual Review reports and previous targets. Communication Passports are individual profiles for each child, written yearly and updated when needed by the class teacher outlining the communication style with their strengths and needs. The children are prepared for transitions through a variety of means, e.g. visits, social stories, discussions, photos, specific groups.

Symbols across school

Symbols are used widely across school particularly to support the curriculum and the understanding of the daily routine. Two software packages are used in school. Board maker and communicate in print. Visual timetables, room symbols and lanyards should be printed using Communicate in Print. Signs and symbols for routines should not be bought in from external websites or resources unless agreed with the extended management team.

To provide consistency throughout school certain symbols have been agreed and they are the only symbols to be used.

These currently are:

- Timetable symbols including subjects and days of the week,
- Behaviour management cards
- Signs and symbols in the classroom as signage around school
- Symbols for clubs
- Symbols for lunchtime
- Symbols for sensory boxes
- Lanyards for key symbols- all staff to wear at all times.
- Each classroom door also has a sign containing the names and pictures of all of the children and staff based within that classroom.

All classes to have a visual timetable, now and next board and zones of regulation board displayed at all times.

Forms of communication used in school

At St Nicholas School, we encourage a total communication approach where children can develop and are entitled to a range of methods to convey their wants, opinions, fears, feelings and needs. We want all our children to access a system that is within their skill set and functional to their cognitive ability. (This may not always be through spoken words.) This is known as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and can be approached in a variety of ways, dependent on each child's needs. The range of expressive communication systems that we support include:

Verbal communication

Many children at St Nicholas school are able to speak and will use speech as their primary form of communication. However, many children have need the support of Augmentative and Alternative means of communication (AAC) in order to communicate successfully. Some children need help to understand the social skills of communication.

We initially focus on labelling single words through play and modelling from a supporting adult. When children can label single words spontaneously, we model adding information such as child says "ball", adult says "red ball". Early Communication skills are an everyday activity that must be part of a child's everyday experiences and cannot be taught in isolation.

Makaton Signs

Makaton is a sign vocabulary developed for people with learning difficulties. It supports both expressive and receptive language and is particularly appropriate for children who use natural gesture to communicate their needs and wants. Key words are signed and children are encouraged to use signs to make requests, to comment

and to answer questions. Signs are taught as part of the curriculum and as part of the daily routine. Some children will work specifically on signing in small group sessions. There are many Makaton resources available in school. One member of staff is a trained Makaton Regional tutor.

The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

PECS is a specific interactive communication system, where children exchange a symbol to indicate their wants or needs. It is particularly appropriate for children who are either non-verbal or have little speech, and those who are unaware of the need to direct their requests and comments towards another. It encourages the development of spontaneous communication and has six progressive phases or levels which develop the child's ability to communicate. Phase 1). The six phases focus on acquiring a hierarchy of skills including, travelling with a token to a communication partner (phase 2) picture discrimination (to choose between a selection of photos/ symbols – Phase 3) and sentence construction (Phase 4) i.e. "I want" plus object.

Communication books and boards

Communication books are collections of vocabulary organised by category. Children select their vocabulary to express their needs and desires.

Communication boards are single sheets with vocabulary for a specific activity, for example sand play or cooking.

Physical Objects

Objects can be used in a number of different ways to help children develop their choice making and requesting skills. Using objects to request - an object can be used to request an activity i.e. cup given to ask for a drink

Choice Making

motivating objects can be used as part of a choice making approach where objects are presented and indicators such as a reach or eye pointing can be used to indicate a selection

Intensive Interaction

This is a pre-verbal approach that serves to help support children to engage with a supporting adult or peer in order to develop their communication skills. By copying the actions or vocalisations of a child, we can help support them to develop the ideas that communication can influence interaction with our environment.

Voice Output Communication Aid (VOCA)

VOCA is a communication system (usually computer based) where children can select a variety of symbols and photos to create functional requests to communicate

within their environment. Access to this system requires some level of sentence construction and an awareness of categorisation.

Receptive Language

Alongside the development of communication systems, we work on supporting receptive (understanding) language as part of everyday experiences for our children. Children with cognitive difficulties often need additional cues within their environment to ensure that they can follow instructions and access the curriculum.

We also consider where a child is in regards to their symbolic understanding. This will help us to create accessible information and to decide if the visual information should be;

1. Object Level – in this case we are likely to use objects of reference systems or visual timetables using objects e.g. a plate to represent dinner time. It is important that objects are accessible and available at each point of transition across the day and familiar to the child.
2. Photographic Level – information on a range of visual aids will be presented using photographs only. Photographs are harder to understand than objects but are potentially, easier to transition within a working environment. Once a child can access photographs to help support their understanding, you should be able to transition over to photographs easily by just swapping out their Objects of Reference for photographs.
3. Symbolic Level – Symbol systems such as Boardmaker, Widget or Makaton Symbols can be used. Symbols are a symbolic representation of the item or activity that the child is accessing or transitioning to. In the visual hierarchy, symbols are harder to understand than photographs but help prepare a child, especially those accessing Augmentative and Alternative Communication – AAC, access more expansive communication systems (i.e. Voice Output Communication Aid – VOCA). At this stage, it is important to discuss and agree with the team working with the child on a symbol system to use to support the child. Once a child can access symbols to help support their understanding you should be able to transition over to symbols easily by just swapping out photographs for symbols.

Visual support systems

We use several visual support systems at St Nicholas School to help children to understand what is happening and transition across their day.

- Now and Next boards are used at St Nicholas School to visually communicate instructions or expectations to a child, supporting their understanding of what is happening/going to happen. Now/ Next boards can help reduce anxiety about transitions or changes in routines. They can also reduce the need to regularly repeat verbal instructions.
- Visual Timetables are used in all classes to let the children know what is happening across the day. Some children also have their own personalised visual timetables. A visual timetable means placing objects/ photos/symbols of activities

in the order in which they are going to happen. The visual supports are moveable so they can be taken off when finished or put into a different order, when needed or at points of change.