Alternative and Augmentative Communication Policy

Last update October 2017

<u>Review of this Policy</u>
This policy will be reviewed bi-annually or sooner if legislative changes or good practice guidance dictate.

At Hazelbeck School, we recognise that:
- Communication is a fundamental right
- Communication is key to all interaction and learning.
- Communication is a key life skill

At Hazelbeck School we recognise that communication is central to all teaching and learning and will ensure that high priority is given to:
- Learning to communicate
- Developing functional communication
- Identification of difficulties in communication
- Plan intervention in a timely manner
- Work in partnership with other agencies
- Contribute to a continuum of service

Introduction
The policy details the way alternative augmentative communication enables students to access the whole curriculum at Hazelbeck School

Learning to use any form of alternative and augmentative communication is difficult. At Hazelbeck School we support students to develop their communication skills through every aspect of school life through a Total Communication approach.

Alternative, Augmentative Communication (AAC)
Alternative refers to a means of communication other than speech. Augmentative means the quality of increasing the power of communication. Communication is described as success in conveying one's meaning to others. Alternative, Augmentative Communication can be defined as any means which replaces speech and/or enhances an individual's ability to successfully convey meaning to others.

The term AAC refers to a number of supports for communication both high and low tech. Low tech aids include: signing and symbols, objects of reference and PECs. High tech aids are electronic devices ranging from one switch devices like Big Macs through to a range of more complex aids that can provide the users with a very sophisticated mode of communication. High tech aids are used to support the students' access to the curriculum by giving them the vocabulary and language forms needed for learning.
Children and young people progress through a number of stages, including being assessed for the aid, developing familiarity with the aid, learning the available vocabulary and accepting the aid as an essential

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form of communication. Once this point is reached the aid enables the child to take part fully in educational and social life.

The use of any AAC does not replace other ways of communicating such as gesture, facial expression and voice.

Our policy at Hazelbeck School is **total communication** and students are engaged in meaningful interactions throughout the school day, regardless of levels of formal language acquisition, and they are enabled and encouraged to use whichever form of communication they feel is most effective for each given situation.

The Aims of Alternative, Augmentative Communication (AAC)
- To enable students play a full part in their lives
- To enable students to access the whole school curriculum.
- To give access to appropriate forms of communication other than natural speech for those students with this need.
- To assess each pupil and offer tuition in the most appropriate forms of alternative, augmentative communication.
- To give students a means of active participation in motivating social situations.
- To teach core vocabulary within a carefully structured programme.
- To enable students to create their own Total Communication system. This means using the most effective means of communication for each given situation.
- To work in close partnership with the speech and language therapy team/s and where appropriate, the occupational therapy department and the physiotherapy department.
- To work in partnership with the student's family / carers.

The role of Alternative, Augmentative Communication (AAC) in the school day
Students who use AACs should have access to their AAC at all times throughout the school day including break and lunchtimes.

School Environment
- All students experience a communication rich environment.
- All staff use key word signing to help pupil's understanding of the speech.
- All staff model effective communication for all students.
- Objects of reference are used as an aid to help some pupil's communication
- Symbols are available as an aid to communication and learning.
- Simple voice output communication aids are available to assist communication and learning

Individual Pupil Experiences
Students are given the opportunity to further develop their use of AAC according to their assessed needs.
- Some students will have a personal resource of objects of reference to aid their understanding
- Students will be offered the opportunities to further develop their signing skills
- Some students will have a personal symbol resource to support their communication
- Some students have a dedicated speech output device to augment their communication

School Activities
- Object, sign, symbol and visual support are an integral part of curricular activities.
- Students are encouraged to use AAC in interactions to augment their communication.
- Personal resources are available for students to use following guidance from the AAC team who review suitability of these at regular intervals.

Individual Student Activities
Teaching students to learn and use AAC resources effectively is jointly planned by Speech and language Therapists (SLT) and the AAC team. This ensures a common approach across the school and that students have access to the same developmental vocabulary as their peers

Cross Curricular Issues
All AAC is cross curricular and integrated into students' individual programmes at the appropriate level.

Roles, Responsibilities and Resources

At Hazelbeck School the AAC team consists of the members of the school staff supported by a qualified Speech and Language Therapist provided by Bradford and Airedale Community Health Service (BACHS):
- Assistant headteacher with responsibility for communication across the school
- HLTA with responsibility for ICT (ipads)
- HLTA and SNTA with responsibility for programming and co-ordinating AAC devices

Key features include:
- All staff in school are responsible for AAC across the curriculum with support from the AAC team.
- The AAC team take responsibility for co-ordinating the maintenance and preparation of resources.
- Class teachers and all HLTAs will prepare resources for particular curricular sessions.
- A number of speech output devices of varying complexity will be available within school and become dedicated to individual children. This enables students to discover if there is a role for electronically aided speech in their total communication system.
- Maintenance of devices is the joint responsibility of the AAC team
- Use and implementation of AAC is the responsibility of the class teacher/s assisted by support staff
- Monitoring, evaluation and moderation within, and between, Bradford schools is the responsibility of the AAC teams.
- A number of devices will be retained for assessment purposes.
- Makaton is the agreed signing system
- PCS is the agreed basic symbol system
- The AAC team will assess for need
- The AAC team will assess for progress and development

Training will be provided in the use of sign, symbols and objects of reference as part of on-going CPD. Training will be delivered to staff in the use of VOCAs as appropriate.

Classroom Management
Teachers take responsibility for ensuring that AAC is available at the appropriate level for the pupil in all curricular and pastoral areas, following the guidance of the AAC team.

Recording Progress
Progress is recorded using an agreed format linked to the students Annual Smart Targets (AST).
Records will contain information about:
■ Spontaneous functional language uses of AAC, including the situation in which the child communicated
■ Developing skills in the use of AAC
■ The use of AAC to support other communication methods, e.g. a sign to explain an unclear vocalisation.

The information recorded will be used to inform:
■ Teachers about the level of skills achieved by the child in different social situations
■ Parents and carers of their child's progress, and show activities that have been covered

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■ All staff who may be involved in programmes of work.

Review of progress and need
This allows progress in the use of AAC to be reviewed in context of the pupil's functional communication skills. The assessment leads to the formulation of future plans for AAC together with general communication skill work.

Evaluation
The policy and practice within and between schools will be presented to the Trust as part of the Communication Vision update or as new information and research becomes available. Monitoring, evaluation and review will identify impact of provision, describe outcomes and inform target setting.

Guidance for talking with people who use voice output communication aids (VOCAs) and other supported communication aids

- Do accept that the device is my voice
- Do ask my permission before turning off the device, moving it or asking me to demonstrate
- Do look at me, not my Talker.
- Do give me a VERY LONG time to respond
- Do ask me how I indicate 'yes' and 'no' if I don't have my Talker.
- Do 'read' my facial expression and body language.
- Do ask me to expand/explain, rather than always asking questions to which I can only answer yes or no.
- Do check that I mean to say what I said, (check it wasn't a miss-hit) and also that you have not misunderstood. Just ask "Did you mean …"
- Do make sure that I can access my Talker.
- Do talk to me at my eye-level.
- Do tell me things as well as ask me questions
- Do tell me when you want to move my chair
- Do ask my permission if you need to talk about me in my presence
- Do try to include me.