**Green Lane School**

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**Autism: Augmentative and Alternative Communications (AAC) Policy**

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Reviewed in: September 2023

**Intent**

The school employs AAC for pupils who have little or no clear speech and / or exhibit difficulties in their communication. The general practice of the school is to use AAC to add to or complement pupils’ existing communication – that is to *augment* it. The key objective is to use AAC to advance a pupil’s means of expression, promote their understanding and to improve their overall communication. There are also occasions where it is appropriate for a pupil to have a high technology electronic aid which provides *alternative* communications systems in addition to the range of *augmentative* strategies & systems that are in place in school.

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Thus the school uses two types of AAC

* Unaided that does not require additional equipment:
* Aided that requires additional equipment – some simple and ‘low tech’ – and some of a more sophisticated ‘high tech’ nature.

**Implementation**

**Unaided Communication**

This policy deals with communication that does not require the use of any additional materials/equipment – Green Lane School is committed to a ‘Total Communication’ approach which covers all aspects of communication and includes unaided communication such as:-

* Body language/posture
* Pointing
* Gestures
* Eye pointing
* Facial expressions
* Vocalisations

Gestures and signing are quick, immediate, and practical in all settings – they are used intuitively by most pupils/adults especially facial expressions and hand movements and are easily understood by a lot of pupils. However, we recognise that our ASD pupils may find the use of gesture, body language and facial expressions difficult to understand, and so these skills are taught through the use of the SCERTS programme, PHSE targets, SALT programmes and our ASD friends’ group.

More formal signing is required, however, to support more abstract meanings and more sophisticated concepts, and signs based on the Makaton system may be used to cover more complex communication needs. Staff are trained in signing skills to ensure children have access to a range of signs for functional communication.

Makaton signing training is available for all staff through the Speech and Language Therapy Service at sessions arranged during the school year.

**Aided Communication Systems**

This policy deals with aided communications systems that specifically address the needs of individual pupils, as well as those that are common to designated groups of pupils, such as those on the Autistic Spectrum. The school presently administers the following strategies in numerous settings to develop and extend pupils’ communication skills.

* **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECs)**

This augmentative communications system has proved to be highly effective with ASD pupils with communication disorders. PECs is also used with other pupils who do not have speech or who speak with limited effectiveness; those with articulation or motor difficulties; those who are in regular contact with peers who have limited communication abilities; and those pupils who lack initiative in communication and function in a reactive rather than a proactive mode.

PECs is based on visual symbols that are easy to prepare and are highly portable. A specific range of symbols will be personalised for each pupil and used to develop communication skills. PECs has a sophisticated structure that can be applied to suit a wide range of communication abilities; it can be used in a wide range of environments and by anyone who comes into contact with the pupil.

* **Objects of reference**

This is based on the use of objects as a means of communication. Objects are used to represent things – activities, events, wishes etc and help a child to understand what is about to happen. Objects of reference may act as a ‘bridge’ to more complex forms of communication such as words, symbols, signs etc. Objects of reference may be real life objects used in activities, objects with a shared feature, miniature objects etc – they may be smells, sounds etc linked to particular activities/events.

* **Signing**

The school uses signs to support functional communication. Key words are used when signing in order to promote pupils’ grasp of verbal exchange – both for comprehension and expression. Signing acts as a bridge between speech and its intended function. For some pupils, the use of signing may be faded as their understanding increases. The use of signing is flexible – it can be personalised to individual pupils’ needs and can be used alongside other systems such as TEACCH and PECs.

* **Symbols: Boardmaker**

This programme is used as resources for producing visual symbols to support understanding and communications. It is used for daily timetables, individual work schedules, individual communication books, resources to support all curriculum work where appropriate, and to label items in the school environment etc.

Consistent use of the same symbols ensures the maximum potential for understanding at the early stages of communication – this is then extended to include different symbols/representations as pupils’ understanding and proficiency develops to encourage generalisations to occur.

**Impact**

A key priority is for pupils to use AAC in a range of situations at a consistent level. This requires that everyone involved in communication should be aware of what is expected, and how best to support the pupils’ exchanges.

The use of ‘communication profiles’ displayed in each ASD discrete classroom and in many other rooms as appropriate, will ensure that staff and visitors are aware of specific information relating to the communication needs/abilities of each pupil, which should ensure consistency of approach.

Reviewed by: J. Barnes (Head of Autism)

Person responsible: J. Barnes (Head of Autism)

Date: September 2023

To be reviewed: September 2023