**Green Lane School**

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**Total Communication Policy for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

Headteacher: Mrs Joanne Mullineux

Green Lane School

Woolston Learning Village

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Currently there are speech and language therapists (SLT) working 2 days a week at GLS. The school has also trained 3 TAs to deliver speech and language programmes. The SLT has responsibility for delivering some speech and language therapy service as well as devising speech and language programmes to be delivered by the speech and language TAs.

The school is fully committed to creating an ethos where development of pupils’ communication skills, and related skills of social interaction and social imagination, are central to all other aspects of learning, and the role of the speech and language therapist within the school reflects this.

In order to nurture an environment where development of communication and related skills is an essential part of the daily learning process, the speech and language staff work in the classrooms whenever possible. It is the view of the school staff team that the curriculum forms the vehicle for the development of communication skills, and so work on each individual’s communication aims (see below) occurs during all routine and curriculum based school activities.

# Assessment

The speech and language therapists assess the communication skills of all pupils with ASD. Assessment is usually informal, in the classrooms, as this provides the most accurate picture of communication skills for most pupils. Assessment may involve work with the pupil on an individual basis and/or as part of the class group. In all cases, an essential part of the assessment process is discussion between the therapist and classroom staff, regarding each pupil’s use of communication skills in varied settings.

An assessment document is then completed, which aims to give a comprehensive description of the communication skills that each individual pupil possesses, and how he/she uses these skills, as well as recording levels of comprehension and ability to use skills of social interaction.

# Communication Aims

The communication aims at Green Lane School encompass work on aspects of flexible thinking / imagination and social interaction, integral to the development of communication skills. These aims focus on the ‘triad of impairments’ in order to reflect the interdependency of development of social communication, imagination and interaction skills.

The selection of aims is determined in part by the speech and language therapist’s knowledge and experience of the development of communication skills, but aims are not always selected according to current developmental levels and normal developmental progression. Working with pupils with ASD, of equal importance is the development of each individual’s motivation to communicate, development of recognition of the need to communicate, and development of desire to communicate. Aims may therefore reflect nurturing of any of these skills rather than a developmental norm. Classroom staff are closely involved in the development of communication aims, as they bring to the discussion greater knowledge of a pupil’s need or motivation to communicate. Involvement in development of communication aims also ensures that classroom staff experience ownership of the aims and are able to discuss with the therapist ways in which work on the aims may be implemented during daily classroom lessons and routines. The communication aims forms part of the IEP.

# Approaches to the Development of Communication Skills

We aim to use a method of communication relevant to each individual’s current communication skills and preferences. We recognise communication using spoken language, symbols, signs, pointing and gesture, photographs, drawings and real objects. As communication is a tool to convey information to others, we actively develop our pupils’ social and interaction skills to enable them to use their communication skills most effectively. We also acknowledge the need for each pupil to develop flexible thinking skills in order to maximise their communication skills. Thinking skills underpin success in development of effective communication and interaction skills.

Our aims therefore are:-

* To enable each individual to experience success in use of communication, and to develop each individual’s enjoyment of the communication process.
* To maximise each pupil’s ability to communicate, through whatever method, or combination of methods, is most suited to each individual pupil’s skills and preferences.

At Green Lane School we adopt approaches widely used with people with autism (see below) alongside general strategies to develop each individual’s understanding and use of communication.

In order to communicate successfully with our pupils, it is essential that we consider each individual’s level of understanding, and that we consistently adapt our own style and level of communication, so that it consistently falls within the level of understanding of each pupil that we communicate with.

When using spoken language, we are particularly aware of the number of key words that a pupil must process in order to understand what we have said. We consistently use visual cues to support each individual’s understanding of spoken language. The cues used are dependent on each individual’s skills and preferences. Cues used include symbols, the written word, real objects and photographs. We encourage pupils to seek and use visual cues independently, to support their understanding of spoken language, for example to look at objects set out for an activity or look at what other people are doing. We always allow our pupils time to process language spoken to them. We are consistently aware of the difficulties that ambiguous or abstract language causes our pupils and we avoid language which may be misinterpreted.

We are aware that we, the staff, must adapt our own patterns of communication in order to maximise successful communication with our pupils

**PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)**

PECS is now widely used in many schools for children with autism. The principle of PECS is that a symbol is exchanged by the child for a desired item. The symbol therefore acts as a spoken request when it is given to an adult. PECS is introduced to individuals at Green Lane when, following assessment, it is felt that it would be useful in facilitating success in and enjoyment of the communication process.

## **TEACCH**

TEACCH is a multifaceted approach. At Green Lane we use aspects of the TEACCH programme according to individual need and motivation. However, symbol timetables are widely used in school in order to aid comprehension of the day’s events. In the short term, a symbol timetable will include the activities involved in that lesson, and in the longer term, symbols may be given for the morning’s or day’s events.

## **Signing**

We use signs from Makaton as our preferred signing system. All staff have regular refresher training.

At Green Lane, staff use signs alongside spoken language to pupils to help them to understand the spoken language. Signing allows pupils to see what we are saying. Signing the key words in a sentence emphasises those key words, which in turn helps the pupil to focus his/her attention appropriately. Signing is particularly helpful as an aid to understanding abstract words, or language relating away from the ‘here and now.’

Signing is always used alongside the spoken word, never in place of the spoken word.

Some of our pupils may choose to use signs as their main method of communication. Some pupils may choose to use signs when learning words which to them have little meaning e.g. ‘want’ as in ‘I want …’ or ‘wait,’ but then cease to use the sign when they have learned the spoken word and its communicative function.

## **Social Communication**

At Green Lane, we teach communication skills and encourage our pupils to use their communication skills in functional, social settings. Teaching of communication skills is therefore an important part of all classroom activities, but we also maximise opportunities for teaching the enjoyment of social communication at snack time, lunch time and play times.

Linguistically able pupils are encouraged to join social skills groups, where we actively teach the social functions of language, and develop understanding of social situations and associated language.

## **Intensive Interaction**

This approach is adopted with some individual pupils in an informal way, in the classroom, in light and sound, in the playground and in other everyday situations. It is often used to reinforce play routines established during music assisted communication sessions.

# Flexible Thinking

We aim to develop the flexible thinking skills of all pupils during all daily activities by creating situations that will enable each individual to perceive himself as a successful thinker.

We acknowledge that the ability to think flexibly is pivotal to development of many higher order language skills, including understanding ambiguity and understanding implied meaning. Effective flexible thinking skills also support understanding of spoken language. For example, the ability to think and to piece together available information, such as objects set out for task, supports understanding about what is about to happen. Most importantly, thinking skills are necessary to make informed choices and to solve everyday problems.

Pupils’ flexible thinking skills are therefore developed alongside communication and social interaction skills.

The Role of the Speech and Language Therapist in Pupils’ Achievement of Communication Aims

The speech and language therapist usually carries out work to help individual pupils achieve their communication aims, while involved in class group curriculum based activities. The speech and language therapist may work alongside the teacher, or may lead a group session, depending on individuals, preferences, topic etc.

Working in the classroom in this way reduces the need for pupils to generalise skills between environments (particularly difficult for our pupils), and allows modelling of strategies to staff to promote communication, essential for maximum pupil progress.

A further important ongoing responsibility of the speech and language therapist while working in the classroom is to maintain and develop a) the staff team’s knowledge of and enthusiasm for development of communication skills, and b) the staff team’s ability to maximise each individual pupil’s opportunities for successful communication in the school environment.

This ensures that all staff share the ownership for the development of each pupil’s communication skills with each other and with the pupils.

# Ongoing Assessment

The speech and language therapist continually informally assesses progress in development of communication skills and achievement of communication aims. Pupils’ progress is discussed informally with classroom staff. Staff evaluate communication aims as part of the evaluation of the IEP. Aims are therefore continually reviewed. The speech and language therapist writes new communication aims two or more times per academic year. Aims are updated and modified as often as is necessary, but will be reviewed termly by classroom staff. For some pupils, some aims are maintained beyond a term, when moving to a phase of consolidation and generalisation of new skills. For some pupils, new aims may be written more often than once a term.

The speech and language therapist carries out an assessment of each pupil’s communication skills prior to their annual review, and contributes a report to the review detailing recent progress, current levels of communication, use of communication, comprehension and social interaction and current areas of work.

# Staff Training

The speech and language therapist provides training to both all staff. The aim of the training is to maintain and develop staff awareness and knowledge of communication and related issues.

# Summary

The speech and language therapist provides a speech and language therapy service to all ASD pupils at Green Lane School. The communication skills of all these pupils are assessed, and the levels and nature of direct work with the therapist will vary between pupils and over time, depending on individual needs and preferences. There is much emphasis on liaison with staff and on staff training, enabling the staff to have a good understanding of communication and to share ownership of development of each pupil’s communication skills.

All staff at Green Lane share with the therapist the aim of enabling each pupil to experience fun and success in communication and for each individual to use their communication skills to the best of their ability. Our pupils learn in an environment where development of communication skills is considered pivotal to all other areas of learning.

Reviewed by: M. Gaskell (Assistant Head of Autism)

Person responsible: J. Barnes (Head of Autism)

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