



**Policy Document
Augmentative and
Alternative Communication**

October 2011

FAIRFIELDS SCHOOL

AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Communication, including AAC, forms a central part of the Foundation Curriculum of Fairfield's School. It both supports and is taught through all other areas of the curriculum. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to any way in which spoken communication is supported or replaced.

The policy sets out reasons why AAC forms part of the curriculum at Fairfield's School and specifies how it is to be taught. It is proposed that the policy will underpin the practice of AAC throughout the school and prove an informative document for parents and governors and also for the LEA for the purpose of monitoring practice.

It will be implemented by the whole staff and peripatetic teaching staff and speech and language therapists and evaluated under the guidance of the AAC co-ordinator.

RATIONALE

Communication is the successful transmission of a message from one person to another and is not limited to the use of formal systems such as speech, sign or the written word. Some pupils within the school have complex needs including severe physical and sensory impairment but even those with a minimal behavioural repertoire can communicate.

Knowledge and skills to be acquired will relate to the areas outlined in the school schemes of work on Language, Literacy and Communication and English. The overall aim of the provision of AAC is to provide each pupil with an effective mode of interaction with as large an audience as possible. Effective communication requires an easy and quick way of transmitting thought. For some pupils this will be through traditional sentence word structure, for others it may require other methods such as buttons on an electronic aid programmed to say whole phrases or sentences, Makaton signing of key words, or British Sign Language which uses a different word order, syntax and grammar. Graphic symbols may be used in a sentence structure or to convey key ideas sometimes in a different word order.

Communication is inextricably linked to the school philosophy, which states that "Each child will be valued as an individual and enabled to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally within a caring, purposeful and flexible framework".

In particular, AAC links with Fairfield's School Aims as follows:

Each child will be valued as an individual and enabled to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally within a caring, purposeful and flexible framework.

The school's aims guide the development of each child and provide a direction for future school and curriculum development.

The school's aims are as follows:

- To provide effective education, therapies and support for children with a range of physical, sensory, medical and learning difficulties.
- To recognise and value the qualities, abilities, self esteem and dignity of each individual.
- To provide a high quality and appropriate environment in which all pupils are encouraged to develop to their full potential.
- To ensure our curriculum is enjoyable, stimulating and suitably challenging for all pupils.
- To ensure every child has access to a relevant, broad and balanced curriculum, based on National Curriculum requirements.
- To respond effectively to each pupil's changing needs, providing opportunities for inclusion into mainstream settings as appropriate.
- To encourage our children to achieve the greatest possible independence of thought and action.
- To recruit high quality staff and enable them to develop their skills and expertise through a programme of continuing professional development.
- To maintain a high standard of performance in leadership, teaching, and communication.
- To work effectively with parents and other professionals in the best interests of the children and the school.
- To promote the spiritual, moral, physical and personal development of each child within a caring environment
- To ensure appropriate opportunities for all within the school.
- To share our skills and expertise by offering support within the community and other educational settings.

ENTITLEMENT

The aims of Fairfields School are to ensure that equality of opportunity is provided for all. To achieve this, all children will have access to the school communication curriculum at the level appropriate to their development, and taking into account their individual needs and preferences. Where appropriate they will have access to AAC resources and teaching approaches. We aim to provide a 'total communication' environment where all modes of communication are equally valued and pupils are given opportunities to make choices, initiate conversation and express their own ideas and opinions. All AAC teaching will conform to Fairfields Health and Safety Policy.

AAC class resources and low tech individual resources are provided by the school for all pupils who require them. Where pupils require individual high tech AAC resources their needs are prioritised in accordance with the County AAC Policy.

IMPLEMENTATION

- ❖ The school has a Scheme of Work for ICT and for Language, Literacy and Communication that is a very detailed document, particularly at the pre-verbal level. Staff made the decision to approach this area in such depth to support teaching and learning in a 'subject' which is infinitely complex and where progress is sometimes difficult to achieve. A high percentage of the school population is developing skills in this area.
- ❖ Opportunities for the development of communication are outlined on subject activity plans.
- ❖ We recognise that pupils may need different modes of communication for expressive and receptive language and that different AAC methods may be needed in different situations e.g. it may be easier to sign when in a swimming pool than to use a communication book. An electronic aid may break down and the AAC user needs to have a 'low tech' alternative available.
- ❖ Examples are being developed to show how AAC can be fitted into school topic work in each subject for pupils working at or below level 1 of the National Curriculum.
- ❖ Vocabulary for VOCAs and communication books and charts is chosen carefully. Early vocabulary comes from the school core vocabulary chosen to match the normal development of speech and the pupil's cognitive level. As pupils progress they are encouraged to take an active part in choosing vocabulary and opinions of parents and others are obtained. We are aware that the vocabulary we choose restricts the pupil's freedom of expression and that we must not always keep to polite utterances and 'safe' topics of conversation. Pupils also have access to vocabulary relevant to the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and School Topic Cycle.

Communication is implicit throughout the school day. The daily routines and interactions will develop many of the fundamental skills of communication. Time spent on structured communication/ AAC teaching will vary according to the needs of the individual child. Teaching may take place:

- ❖ Informally throughout the day. Interaction in natural contexts is essential if pupils are to generalise AAC skills and use them functionally.
- ❖ At snack time, lunchtime and at ‘hello’ and ‘good-bye’ sessions.
- ❖ Throughout the whole curriculum but especially in Literacy and English lessons.
- ❖ In small specific language groups (class based or booster groups).
- ❖ In whole group sessions
- ❖ In individual sessions led by school or speech therapy staff. This will be especially important for pupils using VOCAs as they will need time to learn how to use the machine before being able to use it to communicate.
- ❖ In communication through play sessions.
- ❖ Outside of the school environment.
- ❖ We work in partnership with parents and others involved with the child and try to extend opportunities for communication and ensure that pupils’ communication is supported beyond the school. For example, this year we offered AAC week in the summer holidays.
- ❖ We offer support to parents with half termly work shops.
- ❖ We offer outreach and training to mainstream school, special schools and DSPs as part of the Northamptonshire Policy on AAC and outreach.

The pupil and adult communication partner may use one, or more than one, of the following Augmentative and Alternative Communication methods:

- ❖ Makaton and other signing systems appropriate to individual pupils e.g. BSL, on the body signing (for MSI pupils).
- ❖ Finger spelling
- ❖ Movement, gesture, body language and facial expression
- ❖ Graphic symbols (primarily PCS symbols although other symbol systems may be used if they are more appropriate for a particular pupil) and photographs.
- ❖ Communication charts, mats and books.
- ❖ Objects of reference
- ❖ Sensory cues (e.g. daily aroma, physical touch, personal identifiers)

- ❖ PECs books
- ❖ Technology including computer assisted learning.
- ❖ Switch activated toys and equipment to develop cause and effect and as a precursor to communication aids.
- ❖ Voice Output Communication Aids

In order to promote the use of AAC the following communication strategies may be employed:

- ◆ Giving the AAC user TIME to initiate and respond.
- ◆ Encouraging the use of AAC **everywhere and at all times.**
- ◆ Looking at the **total communication** that the pupil is using e.g. body language and facial expression as well as the use of their aid.
- ◆ Finding time to just ‘chat’ informally without the adult controlling the subject matter.
- ◆ Leaving class AAC resources ‘lying around’ so that they may be used casually by any pupil.
- ◆ Encouraging school staff and others to use the class/individual AAC resources themselves to find out how it feels to use it and to encourage pupils and others to regard it as a ‘normal’ means of communication.
- ◆ To sign all the time and everywhere not just when speaking to a signing pupil. Hearing/speaking pupils hear spoken language everywhere. We should give signing pupils the same opportunity.

Under the guidance of the AAC co-ordinator we aim to achieve continuity and progression by working together with all those concerned with the child e.g. speech therapist, physiotherapist, music therapist, parents, all specialist teachers, nursery nurses, escorts, lunchtime supervisors, students, volunteers, intervenors, Visual Impairment Service and Hearing Impairment Service. The AAC Co-ordinator meets with the Speech Therapists to discuss new referrals and ongoing cases.

Assessments are carried out by the AAC co-ordinator in consultation with Fairfield's School staff, Physiotherapist, Speech Therapist and any other relevant agencies such as the Occupational Therapist, Visually Impaired Service, Hearing Impaired Service, and Educational Psychologist. Where appropriate, pupils are assessed annually by using the Scope assessment for pupils with SLD/PMLD that has been extended by us to include P6 to P8 and by observation over a period of time using a variety of equipment. Pupils requiring high tech dynamic aids may be referred directly to the county AAC team.

Planning is child centred and decisions on approaches to be used are made by the Class Teacher, AAC co-ordinator, speech therapist and any other relevant professional. Individual pupils have targets on I.E.P s and may have individual communication plans if appropriate. Teacher assessment is used in consultation with other staff to evaluate AAC skills. These are

recorded on individual assessment schedules in the pupil files and reported to parents in the annual report to parents. Continual assessment forms the basis for future planning. We are aware that thorough ongoing assessment of vision and hearing are vital for a child's communication needs and that aids to vision and hearing need to be checked daily and cleaned and maintained in good working order.

Pupils using more complex VOCAs may require implementation plans outlining how they will be taught the skills that they require to operate the aid such as moving between levels or understanding the principles involved in scanning. When, where, and who will teach them, details of how charging, updating programming and access to the aid will be managed and how staff and family will be trained in the use of the aid are included in the plan.

The school now has a number of low tech VOCAs and a small number of higher tech aids. We are building a resource bank of photos and symbols for communication books, mats and charts and for VOCA overlays. Augmentative communication aids are provided for all pupils who require them, either through school funding or by borrowing from the AAC loan library. This will be supervised by the co-ordinator and funding procedures will be outlined by the Financial Management Policy. A register of all VOCAs and AAC resources is kept and regularly reviewed to ensure that they are receiving full use.

Within the school there are a number of teachers with specialist qualifications or training relating to communication including: Music Therapy, Multi-Sensory Impairment, Severe Learning Difficulty, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties Derbyshire Language and Makaton and AAC. We currently have a teacher designated as AAC co-ordinator and an LSA who is an AAC technician.

The role of the co-ordinator is considered to encompass the following tasks:

- To lead policy development
- To attend relevant courses and feed back information to staff
- To manage and co-ordinate resources
- To provide information to staff
- To keep abreast of developments in the subject
- To monitor the teaching and learning of AAC throughout the school
- To monitor the maintenance of equipment
- To liaise with outside agencies (e.g. speech therapy, visual impairment Service) on matters relating to AAC policy within the school.
- To assist in assessment for appropriate AAC
- To act as line manager for the AAC technician

Staff attending relevant courses are invited to report back appropriate information through handouts or departmental/whole school meetings.

CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

AAC is essential for all other areas of the curriculum and in particular English. Opportunities for assessment of Language, Literacy and Communication skill are identified throughout the curriculum, particularly in activities based on play, music, drama, movement education, PE and PSHE.

The policy will be reviewed in line with our agreed school cycle.