

# AAC Policy

<b>Name of Unit/Premises/Centre/School</b>	Federation of Heathfield and St Francis School
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## Introduction

### What is AAC?

**AAC = Alternative and Augmentative Communication.**

AAC is used by us all to enhance our spoken language but for some individuals AAC is their only means of communication. AAC is separated into two areas; Unaided AAC and Aided AAC.

**Unaided AAC** = Uses only the individuals body to communicate e.g. eye-pointing, facial expressions, gesture, body language, pointing, intonation and sign languages.

**Aided AAC** = Uses addition equipment to communicate e.g. objects, photographs, pictures, symbols and electronic aids that produce speech or text (VOCAs = Voice Output Communication Aids)

### AAC at The Federation of Heathfield and St Francis School

- Staff and Speech & Language Therapists (SaLT) at both schools are dedicated to assessing, implementing and reviewing the communication needs of every child in the school.
- We believe the ability for our pupils to communicate is one of our most important priorities.
- We aim through multi-agency involvement to determine an AAC method for every child as early in their schooling as possible.
- We believe a child cannot reveal their true potential until they are able to communicate.
- Through learning to communicate our children will enhance their access to the curriculum and their social skills. This will broaden all areas of their lives.

## Roles & Responsibilities

### Teacher & class staff

- To work with the SaLT and relevant professionals to enhance AAC provision.
- To promote and encourage communication through the use of AAC strategies.
- To make sure personal AAC resources are available at **all** times.
- To provide opportunities for a pupil to communicate in all school and curriculum activities.
- To create, review and update AAC resources.
- To liaise with parents regarding AAC provision at home.

### Speech & Language Therapists and Assistants

- To advise class teachers, staff and parents on targets and resources for individual children.
- To set targets related to communication, understanding and expression.
- To assess all pupils when they enter Heathfield School and St Francis School with the support of the SaLT and AAC Co-ordinator.
- To review pupil progress as appropriate to their level of need.
- To provide reports and targets as part of their Annual Review meeting as appropriate to their level of need.
- To deploy their assistants to work with children or in classes. .
- To meet with new class teams in preparation for each school year to discuss individual AAC needs and AAC priorities for the class group. This will take place in July at Heathfield School and September at St Francis School.

### Parents

- To value and support the school's work towards establishing an AAC system for their child and to ensure its success.
- To liaise with the pupil's teacher to ensure continuity and consistency from home to school.
- To attend meetings to discuss their child's progress at school.

### A Multi-Disciplinary Team

(N.B. A Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meeting may be necessary for a pupil with multiple learning, sensory and physical disabilities. This is due to the pupil's AAC method being more complicated and requiring many professionals to contribute to establish an appropriate AAC method)

- A MDT would consist of members appropriate to the needs of the child. An example of an MDT would be the: teacher, speech and language therapist, Makaton advisor, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, a member of the senior leadership team and parents.
  - The MDT will discuss the following areas in an assessment; '(i) motor skills, (ii) hearing, (iii) vision and visual perception, (iv) cognitive abilities, (v) language comprehension, (vi) literacy, (vii) natural speech, (viii) general health.'
- Cockerill & Carroll-Few (2001, p.76) Cockerill, H. & Carroll-Few, L. (2001) *Communicating without Speech: Practical Augmentative & Alternative Communication*. London, Mac Keith Press.
- If an MDT meeting is deemed appropriate by the teacher or the Speech and Language Therapist then the Area of Learning leader for Communication can be asked to coordinate the meeting and invite professionals.

## AAC Strategies used by the pupils at The Federation of Heathfield and St Francis School

**Makaton Signing** – is a signing system used with speech in spoken word order. Using Makaton signs can help people who have no speech or whose speech is unclear. Makaton uses speech **and** gesture, facial expression, eye contact and body language.

- The SaLT in consultation with school staff will decide if a pupil would benefit from communicating using Makaton signing.
- Makaton should be used by **all** staff in the school to aid the language comprehension of all the pupils. It will also demonstrate how Makaton is used to express language to the pupils and school visitors.
- Makaton signing should become part of the communication culture of the school. It does not need resources so it is the most easily accessible method for enhancing communication in the school.
- Remember Makaton signing will always be used by staff **with** speech. Makaton signing often encourages the development of speech. N.B. Is it not British Sign Language (BSL) which does not use speech.
- All new staff will receive training in the core Makaton signs. The training is refreshed annually, or as deemed appropriate, for all staff.
- There are Makaton resources available in both schools to support the acquisition of Makaton within the classroom
- Each classroom has a pocket sized book of Makaton signs for the Core Vocabulary. These should be readily accessible in each classroom.
- Some pupils will develop their own unique signs or an approximation of a sign, this is acceptable but staff must always sign the accurate signs.

**British Sign Language** – is a form of sign language that is used in Britain and involves the use of hand movements, gestures, body language and facial expressions to communicate. It is predominantly used by people who are either deaf or have a hearing impairment.

- BSL is used in consultation with the SaLT and in agreement with parents' choice for specific pupils who are either deaf or have a hearing impairment.
- Two pupils at Heathfield School currently use sign supported English in BSL, in conjunction with visual aids. These pupils have a designated 1:1 LSA to support them in their daily interactions, engagement and learning in classroom activities.
- Each 1:1 LSA is employed by the school with a specific role in supporting the acquisition of BSL with the pupils. They are trained in BSL Level 2
- Whilst these pupils have a 1:1 independence is encouraged at all times

**Body Signing** – (N.B. it can be referred to as Tactile signing) This is a signing system for pupils with a severe visual impairment. It is to be used instead of Makaton signing for pupils who cannot see.

- Body signing is to aid the child's understanding of what is happening to them.
- It can and should be used in conjunction with Objects of reference.
- Consistency of use is extremely important to aid effectiveness.

**PECS – ‘Picture Exchange Communication System’ – ‘Picture Exchange Communication System’** – is a system designed to teach pupils how to communicate through them expressing their desires, wants and needs, and then receiving the object. It can be used with all pupils with communication difficulties but they have to have the physical ability to choose, give and receive preferred objects.

- The Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) in consultation with school staff will decide if a pupil would benefit from communicating using PECS. A St. Francis PECS Core Group will then meet half-termly to review current provision and offer support where necessary. Two teachers at HEathfield School are responsible for supporting the provision for PECS in the school and offer support where necessary.
- PECS needs to be implemented by staff that have been trained to an adequate level to implement PECS in the classroom. This will be supported by relevant staff and the PECS Core Group (St Francis)
- The six progressive stages of PECS need to be followed exactly. (See The Picture Exchange Communication System Training manual for detail in delivery).
- PECS opportunities should be available through the day
- PECS books should be in the same place in the classroom and available at all times.
- A pupil using some vocalisation is not an indication that PECS is no longer required by the pupil in order to aid communication. PECS often encourages the development of speech.
- All staff to be made aware of how to complete a simple PECS exchange. This is in the event of a pupil interacting with a staff member outside the classroom i.e. a visit to the office to collect a register, as it is important that this is performed correctly.
- PECS typically uses symbols but photographs and objects can be used instead if appropriate for the pupil.
- PECS resources are available for use in a central store together with personal class based made resources.
- The PECS book should only contain information for the child to communicate their choices.
- The front cover should only be used as a teaching space for introducing new symbols. During a teaching session the new symbols should be kept separate until they become part of the pupil's vocabulary.

*See PECS policy attachment for further detailed information – January 2015.*

**Communication Books** – to be used with pupils who are sociable and understand interactions. These pupils will often have poor speech clarity and need an AAC method that is more universal and accessible than Makaton signing or PECS. They will need to have good comprehension and motivation. This includes the use of PODD.

- The SaLT in consultation with school staff will decide if a pupil would benefit from a Communication Book or PODD book (Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display)
- Communication books need to be available at all times through the day.
- Books will be personalised and unique to each pupil using one
- The contents of the book will be for both social interaction and work related materials
- They will need to be updated regularly to progress a pupil's social language acquisition by the class staff
- The appropriate software to create a Communication book is Communicate In Print 3, by Widgit – classroom staff are responsible for updating communication books regularly in the school year
- PODD books are made using Boardmaker Online and the PODD software
- Classroom staff are responsible for modelling language to pupils using their communication book, for a variety of purposes throughout the school day. This is to include commenting, greetings, discussion and requesting

**Eye-Pointing** – to be used with pupils who have limited physical movement but are observant and communicative with their eyes.

- The SaLT in consultation with school staff will decide if a pupil would benefit from using an eye-pointing method
- Eye-pointing can be accessed with an Etran frame (clear frame), a flip-over book or with staff holding objects in front of the child.
- There are many variables which will be decided between the SaLT and class staff. These include use of symbols / photographs / objects, their size, the distance, the number of choices, the arrangement and the language used.
- An adult should always sit facing the pupil so as they can see what the pupil is choosing with their eyes.
- A confirmation gaze method will be taught where in the pupil confirms their choice by looking back to the adult. When taught consistency amongst staff is important.
- Preferred and non-preferred items can be used to assess reliability in choice making.
- A programme detailing the variables, language used, materials used, confirmation gaze and assessment will be devised by SaLT.
- The pupil should have access to their eye-pointing resources frequently for it to become 'their voice'.
- Resources need to be updated frequently by the class staff.

**Objects of Reference (O of R)** – using objects to communicate. Used with pupils who do not respond to signing, symbols or spoken words. Objects are used to signal the forthcoming activity. They can be used by a pupil to make choices.

- The SaLT in consultation with school staff will decide if a pupil would benefit from using objects of reference.
- Objects of reference should be clearly available in the classroom.
- Objects should be labelled with the 'word' / 'phrase' used when presenting the object. This is to ensure consistency of spoken language and the pupil may in time understand the spoken word.
- The school has a set of standardized objects of reference but some may be personal to the pupil. (See Appendix A)
- The object should be presented *immediately* before the activity to ensure the pupil understands the message. Once the pupil shows understanding of the object - through demonstrating anticipation - the time period between object and activity can be increased.
- Objects of reference can be used to create a daily timetable.
- Objects of reference can be used alongside Makaton signing or body signing.
- Objects of reference can be used to communicate choices in the same way as a PECS exchange. However, this would be considered a PECS strategy and should be taught using the same stages of progression as PECS.

**Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs)** – these are battery operated resources that can record speech or have pre-recorded speech that can be activated by the pupil. There are many different types of VOCAs from light tech VOCAs such as Big Macks to high tech VOCAs such as computers or Dynavox communication aids. All children can access VOCAs regardless of physical abilities or sensory impairments.

- The SaLT in consultation with school staff will decide if a pupil would benefit from communicating using a VOCA.
- VOCAs should ideally be programmed with a voice of the same age and gender as the pupil activating it.

- VOCAs should be used to teach a pupil to communicate so motivational requests need to be recorded. These requests should be enjoyable for the pupils.
- VOCAs should be used consistently and frequently.
- Many VOCAs are accessed by the child through direct touch but alternative methods of access may be appropriate for pupils with physical difficulties. Alternative methods or assistive technology may include using a switch, an alternative computer mouse, a touchscreen or an alternative keyboard. A child may need a multi-disciplinary assessment to ascertain what assistive technology may be appropriate. This should involve class staff, the speech and language therapist, the occupational therapist and the physiotherapist, but also outside agencies such as Specialist Teacher Advisors may be consulted.
- For programming VOCAs see SaLT, Hayley Sae Kang or Verity Hawkins who will aid this process. However, the responsibility must be with the pupil's class teacher.
- VOCAs, switches and positioning equipment is stored in the storage room in the infant department at St Francis, or in the staff workroom at Heathfield. Please sign out all equipment borrowed in the lever-arch file – St Francis

### **Strategies to aid communication used at The Federation of Heathfield and St Francis Schools**

#### **Environmental strategies - to aid communication**

- Clear and concise language.
- Establishing eye-contact.
- Face to face level with the child.
- Allow time for a child to respond – where is it necessary to repeat message, adult to ensure to replicate the exact message and not alter it.
- Communication Passports displayed, reviewed and accessible
- Makaton signing used everywhere in the school across the school day.
- Visual timetable in every class.
- Every pupil to have a Placemat for eating and drinking – St Francis School`
- During transition to a new class communication strategies are shared between staff and all resources transferred.
- July (Heathfield) or September (St Francis) meetings with Speech & Language therapists to decide main concentrations for AAC in that particular class of pupils.
- Plan communication opportunities in all school and curriculum activities.
- Ensure the child's seating position - when accessing their AAC - adheres to the Physiotherapists or Occupational Therapists recommendations.
- Switches and switch position(s) are consistent for the pupil.

#### **Communication Passports – to ensure staff and visitors know how to communicate with every pupil. To communicate important information about the pupil.**

- Accessible in the classroom so they are accessible to all staff and visitors.
- Contain information that is important for others to know about the pupil – to enhance an interaction.
- Pupils must know where they are.
- Updated at least twice yearly.
- Written in the 1<sup>st</sup> person.
- Unique to every pupil.
- There must be information about how to communicate with the pupil, how the pupil communicates to others and their likes and dislikes.

- Saved into the children's files in the Teacher's pool.

**Placemats** – to be used whenever a pupil is eating or drinking. This will provide consistency of language and approach, ensure the pupil feels secure and enable progression in skills

- Contain information that is important for others to know about the pupil – to ensure their nutritional needs are met.
- Pupils must know where they are.
- Updated at least yearly or when changes are made.
- Written in the 1<sup>st</sup> person.
- Unique to every pupil.
- If a child has a medical passport they do not necessarily need a placemat as information will be duplicated.

**Visual timetable** – to provide pupils with an outline of their day in school to ensure security and structure

- Displayed and used in every class.
- Created using an appropriate AAC method for the class e.g. symbols / photographs / objects of reference.
- Shows the timetable for the whole day.
- Individual pupils may have their own visual timetable or schedule to support in their transition
- 'Oops' cards used when a timetabled activity changes.

**Pre-Intentional communication** – pupils working within P-Levels 1i and 1ii will be deemed to be pre-intentional communicators. To support and develop these pupils the following strategies can be adopted.

- Strategies pitched at the correct developmental level, this is assessed by the SaLT.
- Sign language used to enhance speech – Makaton signing or Body signing (as appropriate).
- Objects of reference used immediately prior to an activity commencing.
- Positive, friendly and open voices.
- Singing songs to aid understanding.
- Establishing a predictable routine.
- Following the 'Early Communication Skills Resource' (in SaLT room or Hayley has a copy at Heathfield) to teach and assess early skills.
- Completing 'ECA' form to establish how the pupil reacts and what that reaction communicates.
- Using intensive interaction to facilitate communication.
- Developing hierarchy of preferences and motivators with SaLT.
- Showing preferences and making choices between objects.

## Symbol System

The symbol system used in school is Widgit symbols. These are created in the computer programmes Communicate: In Print 3 and Communicate: Symwriter. The symbols will be in black and white at St Francis and colour at Heathfield. The exception for this is pupils who use PODD as these books are created through Boardmaker.

The pupil's teacher may use their professional judgement to decide if they feel a child would benefit from using coloured symbols. Reason for this may be; the child has a visual impairment, a

child is progressing onto a communication aid that uses colour or that a child appears to understand coloured symbols better than black and white.

Donna Irving (Specialist Teacher for the Visually Impaired) has been consulted about the best images for children with VI and coloured Widgit symbols on a yellow background give high contrast for a child. These symbols can be created using Communicate: In Print 3.

A standardised noun symbol vocabulary has been created to ensure the symbol is consistent across the whole school.

A standardised core language and topic list will also be created alongside our rolling topic planning for each key stage.

### **Symbols/ Photographs or Objects?**

Initial assessments should take place by the class teacher to determine what aids a pupil's receptive understanding whether it be using symbols, photographs or objects. Pupils understand in a range of ways and it should be remembered that there is not a continuum to say a child will understand a photograph before a symbol and visa a versa.

### **Recording Progress & Assessment**

Progress is recorded daily by the class teacher as part of their Individual Education Plans (IEPs), curriculum assessment, particularly in English and recording of Speech and Language targets set by the SaLT or AAC Co-Ordinator

After a session with other professionals involved with the child (i.e. Speech & Language Therapist, Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist) the professional will record progress. The class teacher will always discuss progress with other professionals after these sessions.

The child's Annual Review meeting will be used to discuss achievement against all of the pupil's targets including the AAC target. Professionals and parents are invited to these meetings.

In a Multi-disciplinary Team meeting the teacher will take notes and later distribute to the attending professionals. This will contain actions for the professionals and detail a time period for a review meeting.

### **Finance**

The Federation of Heathfield and St Francis Schools will endeavour to meet the AAC needs of any child. The school has a wealth of AAC resources and in the majority of cases resources can be created or allocated from existing equipment.

If the Multi-disciplinary Team recommends additional assessments or resources beyond the school's budget then the school will seek alternative funding or contributions from parents, the Local Authority, Health, Children's Service or Charity organisations. There can be no guarantee that this funding will be secured.

### **Borrowing Equipment**

Equipment can be borrowed from school by the parents but in the event of damage the parent would be liable to pay for a replacement. The school has a Borrowing Agreement for school staff and parents to complete and sign when borrowing resources.

## **Insurance**

The school has insurance for equipment purchased by the school and used within school. The school does not have insurance for equipment brought into school from home. The home insurance would need to cover the item being used in school.

If equipment is brought for a pupil through an educational establishment (e.g. Hampshire County Council) and the parents wish the resource to go home too then the home insurance would need to cover it as a specific named item.

## **Breakages**

Report all breakages or equipment needing repair to Hayley Sae Kang

## APPENDIX A

### St Francis School – Objects of Reference or Body Signs

ACTION / EVENT	OBJECT OF REFERENCE	WHAT TO SAY	
<i>Objects in classroom</i>			
DRINK	CUP	‘time to drink’	Child to use a cup that is familiar to them
TUBE FEED	PIECE OF TUBE	‘time for water’ ‘time for milk’	
CIRCLE TIME	QUOIT	‘circle time’	
PHYSIO	PHYSIO MAT SAMPLE	‘time for physio’	
ART	PAINTBRUSH	‘painting’	
MUSIC	BELLS	‘Music time’	
OUTSIDE	FIR CONE	‘we’re going outside’	
MATHS	2D TRIANGLE	‘time for maths’	
HAND FUNCTION	GLOVE	‘Time for hand function’	
WRITING	PENCIL	‘its writing/drawing’	
DRAMA	RED VELVET	‘its drama time’	
OPTIONS	BLACK ARROW	‘its options afternoon’	
TAC PAC	SCARF	‘TAC PAC’	
COOKING	WOODEN SPOON	“Its cooking”	Use wooden spoon when beginning cooking in the classroom or use one if you are in the kitchen.
OPTI-MUSIC	OPTI-MUSIC MITTEN	‘optimusic’	Give child silver glove as they are starting to use the opti-music
COMPUTER	MOUSE / SWITCH	‘computer work’	Give child switch/mouse as they start using the computer

<i>Locations around school</i>			
MSR	FIBRE OPTIC LIGHT	‘MSR’	
SWIMMING/POOL	COSTUME	‘swimming time’	
COOKING/KITCHEN	WOODEN SPOON	‘time for cooking’	
STORY/ LIBRARY	BOOK	‘story time’	Sandwich child’s hands in yours then open hands to sign for book and move slightly side to side
SOFTPLAY	OBJECT MADE FROM SOFTPLAY MATERIAL	‘softplay’	
PE	AIRFLOW BALL	‘time for PE’	
DANCE	RIBBON	‘time for dancing’	
ASSEMBLY	CD	‘it’s assembly time’	
FOOD/DINNER	CUTLERY	‘time to eat’	
TOILET /NAPPY	CLEAN NAPPY	‘change your nappy’ ‘time for toilet’	
OUTSIDE	FIR CONE	“we’re going Outside”	
CHILLOUT ROOM	BEANBAG	“Chill out room”	
BUS	SEATBELT	‘we’re going on the bus’	
<i>Body signs</i>			
HAPPY BIRTHDAY		‘happy birthday’	Blow across back of hand and then say ‘Happy Birthday’.

MEDICATION		'medicine'	Use one finger and tap a circle out on the child's palm and touch corner of mouth.
MORE		'you want more'	Cup child's hand in yours then tap firmly with your flat palm.
HELLO		'hello'	Shake hand of child with one or both of your hands.
GOODBYE		'bye'	Touch fingertips of child and wave.
FINISHED		'... has finished'	Stroke hands down arms to fingertips.
NO / STOP		'stop'	Place hands on child's hands & forearms and press down whilst saying stop.