BEAUCROFT COMMUNICATION BOOKLET

Enabling our students to THRIVE

To be:

Thoughtful and Caring

Happy and Safe

Resilient

Independent

Valued

Empowered

Communication at Beaucroft School

Contents

1. Communication Statement

What is Communication?

Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place, person or group to another.

Communication is essential for everyone. At Beaucroft School it is interpersonal interaction which provides the students with the ability to demonstrate achievements and to become as independent as possible.

The communication process, which occurs naturally as part of most student's development, can be especially difficult for the students who attend Beaucroft School. For some students, in addition to their learning difficulty, they may have Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) that can provide additional barriers to effective communication.

Implementation

It is essential that communication systems and strategies are consistently planned and implemented within a whole school framework.

This handbook has been compiled in order to share good practice to ensure that all adults working at Beaucroft School have the information and skills to communicate consistently and effectively with all of the students.

Assessment and Monitoring

All students are assessed via teacher and / or our Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT).

Communication is a 'continuous process that runs through the school day' and therefore is not necessarily recorded in the same way as other cognitive skills.

The Communication Lead, with the support of the Leadership Team, will have the responsibility of ensuring that good practice with regards to communication (particularly for those who are pre or non- verbal) is maintained throughout the school day.

This is in addition to the collaborative work with the speech and language therapist and school-based assessment systems.

2. Reviewing handbook

This handbook needs to be continuously reviewed and actively used if it is to fulfil our aims of ensuring continuity and consistency for all students. It is inevitable that, as class practice improves and evolves, that it will need to be updated and reviewed.

Proposed additions or amendments will be discussed with the Communication Lead, SaLT, teaching staff and SLT.

If there is agreement to the proposed change, or addition, the Communication Lead will ensure that this handbook is edited, and the new version is shared with all staff.

3. Individual Communication plans / systems

When devising these the following points need to be considered:
1. Is the student actively involved in learning communication skills?
2. Is the student able to self-initiate communication?
3. Has the student got real, motivating opportunities to communicate with mature language users?

Communication systems must be regularly reviewed and revised to meet the student's changing needs as they progress towards becoming an active communicator.

4. **The role of the adult**

Communication occurs between two or more people. Whatever communication system is chosen it will only be as good as the student's communication partner in the communication process. For the student's means of communication to be effective it is crucial that it is consistently followed by **all** adults involved with the student.

A sensitive responsible adult who uses the systems that are common across the school and the strategies that are specific to the individual student will have the greatest chance of promoting successful interactions and helping the student develop their communication skills.

Adults must:
• be familiar with the whole school systems of communication
• be familiar with the specific communication systems for the students they work with
• always use speech that is simple, direct and in clear short phrases (when required)
• allow students time to respond
• use natural gestures where appropriate
• accompany gestures or signs with an animated facial expression
• encourage students to indicate need and make choices
• stay 'on task' when working with students and not get drawn into adult social chat with other staff

5. **Strategies/Tools we use at Beaucroft School**

At Beaucroft School we promote a Total Communication approach in both comprehension and expression which means we use many different methods in combination to support our student's understanding of spoken language and their ability to communicate by whichever method is the most successful in different situations.

As well as spoken language, we use a range of Alternative and Augmentative Communication systems (AAC). These systems have been researched and used effectively with students and adults who have learning difficulties, ASC and/or sensory difficulties. Most of these are listed below:

- **Objects of Reference**
- **TOBI – True Object Based Icons**
- **Photographs**
- **Picture Communication Symbols (Widgit Communicate in Print)**
- **PECS**
- **Aided Language boards**
- **iPad – Proloquo2go**
- **Communication books**
- **Press buttons/talking postcards**
- **Signs and gestures – Signalong**
- **Time for …**
- **First and Then**
- **First, Next, Then…**
- **Individual and class green/red visual timetables**

The introduction of a new AAC system can be introduced with guidance from the Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) where necessary.

Students may use only one system or a combination of two or more systems at any one time to ensure a total communication approach. One or more of them may be supported by information and communication technology.

6. **The Use of Cues at Beaucroft School**

At Beaucroft School cues are used to support student's understanding of what is going to happen next as part of a structured daily routine (receptive skills). As students progress in their use of cues they may be able to use them to make choices about what they would like to do (expressive skills). Cues may include e.g. objects, TOBIs, photos, symbols, now and next, visual timetables and signing. The spoken word should always be used alongside all cues and consideration should be given when labelling activities and places to ensure consistency. Photos and symbols should be labelled to help with consistency of spoken language.

Individualised cues may be used with students, but all non-standardised cues should be recorded and shared with anyone who works with the student (e.g. supply staff).

At Beaucroft School we promote Total Communication which means we use many different methods in combination to support our students to understand spoken language and communicate by whichever method is the most successful in different situations. For example, a student may understand the spoken word for 'mum' but may need a sign to understand that an activity is finished and may need a photo of the outdoor area to understand that it is playtime. Similarly, a student may have a spoken word that they use for 'dad' but use a sign for "more" (as this is a relatively easy sign to learn) and make choices of preferred activities using photographs of the real activities. Staff should have an awareness of the hierarchy and the level of symbolic understanding for individual students (e.g. Does the student understand objects, photos, pictures, symbols, spoken word?)

Why do we use cues?
• To support student's understanding of spoken language and the routine of the day and expectations
• To connect meaning between objects, actions and their referents
• To ease transitions.

7. **Objects of Reference Cues** (Receptive)

Real objects which are related to or have symbolic meaning to or used within an activity for example, a toilet roll shown to them when it is toileting time. These are not all standardised objects but are specific to the activity/event which is about to take place and are represented to students prior to the activity as a cue to what is about to happen

Objects (Expressive)

Objects used within an activity may also be used to help students make choices to express themselves or to answer questions. The adult may ask 'what do you want?' or "Where's the...."and holds up two items for the student to reach to, point to or take. Presentation of the object is always accompanied by the spoken word. Staff should endeavour to ensure that everyone uses the same object to represent an activity consistently.
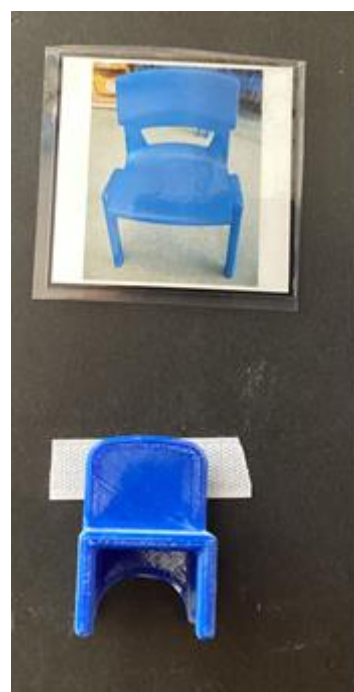
8. **Photographs /TOBIs**

Photographs or TOBIs provide an important conceptual step between objects and symbols and should be used with spoken language.

TOBIs are either photos which are made clearer by cutting around the shape of the object -removing the background and where possible making them a similar size as the real object. Obviously this is not always appropriate/possible. Empty packets eg. a crisp packet can be laminated to give the same effect. This is a step before using general photos if required.

Photos should be taken of:

• motivating objects, for example favourite toys

• objects, for example a photo of a student's cup to indicate time for a drink

• activities, for example a photo of the swimming pool

• places around school, for example a photo of the dining hall

• events, for example a photo of the school bus to indicate it's time to go home.

When students are familiar with a large range of photographs and as their symbolic understanding develops a symbol-based system can be introduced to support student's access to a wider range of vocabulary.

9. **Communication Symbols**

At Beaucroft School we use the Widgit Communicate in Print symbols. They consist of coloured line drawings that are more abstract than photographs, though photos can also be incorporated for specific objects or people eg. type specific book /item of clothing.

Symbols can be used to help students understand what is happening around them and to develop both their receptive and expressive communication skills building up their vocabulary.

As with all communication systems, symbols should be introduced in situations where the student is highly motivated to communicate and where they have something they want to say: for example, 'I want a drink.' Staff should ensure that everyone uses the agreed symbol, either whole school or individual, to represent an activity or object consistently.

Cue cards should be worn by all members of staff including non-teaching and learning staff.

10. **Picture Exchange Communication System** (PECS)

PECS is an approach used to develop a student's expressive communication skills. At Beaucroft School PECS is used with some students to teach them how to initiate communication, and at a later stage to teach sentence structure, extend vocabulary and possibly other concepts. In the later stages students are able to use PECS to make requests and make comments. PECS enables students to communicate with anyone in any

environment. Students are taught the stages of PECS progressively using any curriculum area. The teaching is dynamic and develops at an appropriate rate for each individual.

When beginning PECS the initial aim will be to find a number of motivating items for the student. These may be consumable (e.g. raisins, apples etc.) or favourite toys or activities such as bubbles, balloons, water spray, spinning tops etc. Once a range of items has been established pictures will be used to represent them. Depending on the needs of the student these pictures may be large/small, colour/black or white, or even representative of the real object e.g. crisp packet. Where a symbol is used it should be a widget symbol where possible. When first teaching this system two members of staff, work together to teach the physical exchange of a picture for a desired object. Each student will have their own communication book with a selection of pictures for exchange which should be available for their use at all times.

11. Aided Language Boards.

The purpose of Aided language boards is to encourage students to communicate by pointing to pictures/photos/symbols (and where possible verbalising as they do so) to communicate single words, phrases or to build sentences . The approach is based on aided language stimulation techniques and is initially modelled by an adult and then can be used together with a student/student. The boards are a way of extending vocabulary and can also be used for developing sentence structure using a colourful semantics approach. We create these boards across the curriculum for different activities so that students have a means of communication in all activities. They can be used in group sessions/individually. We have also started to use them throughout the day eg for choosing, expressing emotions, commenting on the environment, communication about the weather and so-on.

These may be used alongside a picture exchange communication system (PECS) and both approaches may be seen combined in some of the students' communication books.

12. Communication books

Communication books are very much individually designed for each individual student. They are continually revised and added to as students' vocabulary grows and their interests develop and change. They may be a mixture of symbols/pictures/ photos and could be a combination of a picture exchange system and aided language boards/pages. The additional use of colourful semantics within the communication books may assist the students to build sentences and further develop both their language and literacy skills.

13. VOCA's and Apps

When students have developed a foundation of skills using low tech symbols and picture communication systems, it may be appropriate to introduce a higher tech VOCA (Voice Output Communication Aid) or an electronic app. There are a huge range of aids and devices available to assist in the development of the students communication skills especially if the student is non-verbal, allowing them to have a voice. There are many different simple devices such as buttons and talking postcards where a message can be recorded and played to enable students to participate in activities with a voice. Some students use a communication app on an iPad or iPhone called Proloquo2Go whereby they can build sentences / phrases using symbols and then activate the sound to produce the spoken word. The use of natural sounding voices, including real students' voices can be used on a variety of devices. The scaffolding of prior skills as outlined above is important in order for students to be successful in using these and other similar aids.

14. Signing and Signalong

Signalong is a sign supporting system which has been developed to help students with learning difficulties to acquire language skills and to aid where there are communication difficulties.

There are six core points which underpin Signalong theory, which should be understood and followed by all those using this signing system within school.

A dictionary of all the basic vocabulary is held by those who are the Signalong tutors at school (ie. Sue Windeat, Karen Evans, and Rebecca Williams).

1. Signalong uses one sign per concept. Signs are based on British Sign Language but have been specifically adapted for the needs and abilities of students and adults with learning and communication difficulties.

2. Signalong is a sign supporting system Signalong is used to support speech and reinforce the link between sign and word. The word should always be spoken alongside the sign.

3. Signalong is part of a total communication approach. Signalong recognises this and makes use of speech, facial expression, body language and voice tone alongside the use of sign. The use of all of these alongside formal signs ensures students are receiving auditory, visual and physical prompts to aid understanding. Signing is understood as the formalisation of a natural instinct and natural gestures and idiosyncratic signs used by students should be encouraged.

4. Signalong is a key word signing system. Only the most important or essential words in any sentence are signed. Signs should be used at the learner's level, for example if students are operating at one word level, only one key word in any sentence should be signed (e.g. Do you want a **drink**?). Clear, simple language should be used with all students, and signs should be used to reinforce essential vocabulary.

5. Signalong is based within an understanding of typical language development. Signalong should be introduced to students following typical language development stages. Basic signs should first be introduced alongside real objects and experiences, before moving on to more abstract representations and concepts.

6. Signalong is a 'needs led' communication approach. The vocabulary chosen to introduce to students should be determined by individual student's needs and motivations i.e. the signs that are most important to student's understanding of the world around them, and those which will be most beneficial to supporting student's communication.

15. Creating a Communicative Environment

All students need to be part of a communicative environment. This is an environment which:

• enables each student to access information about what is happening next

• allows students to make decisions

• enables each student to ask for an activity or object.
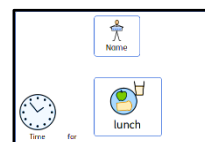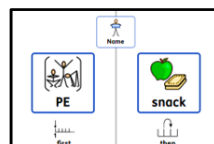
This environment is created when:

• daily life is structured to enable routines to be established

• cues are easily accessible to students

• adults, sensitive to communication from the students, are able to respond to any expressive signal from the student.

Meaningful choices should be offered throughout the day. This encourages students to:

• Make requests

• Use of gesture, pointing, signing, PECS, or words

• Make decisions

• Express their feelings, needs and interests

Choices might be about many different things eg. be about:

• What they want to play with

• What they would like to eat

• Who they would like to play with

• What they would like to use in art etc.

16. PEIC-D Promoting Early Interactive Conversation – Dorset.

What is PEIC-D?

The PEIC-D approach revisits early interaction skills such as imitation, turn-taking and interaction.

Through PEIC-D students may begin to learn and rehearse communicative skills such as:

• Attending

• Exploring and interpreting facial expression

• Vocalising

• Anticipating
• Joint attention
• Turn taking

Adults make themselves available on the student's terms and they start by responding to actions of the student. Responding to the student's signals as if they are intentional, even when they are at a pre-intentional level of communication, enables students to become active learners and begin to realise the message carrying possibilities of their movements, gestures, and vocalisations. PEIC-D is carried out by teachers and teaching assistants and therapists. It can take place during 1:1 sessions both in and out of the classroom; within a group (eg. group music therapy sessions), in the playground or incidentally throughout the day.

Sessions vary in length from a minute up to thirty minutes depending on the student and students may indicate when they want to stop. Sessions may be recorded on PEIC-D sheets which clearly lay out the different stages. Staff should reflect on sessions in order to think about how students are responding and how interactions may be extended

17. **Minimal Speech Approach**

All staff need to be aware that understanding spoken language is difficult for many of the students at Beaucroft School and that it is generally best practice to use short, clear, jargon free language when communicating with most of our students. There are classes and individuals where this is not the case, but the majority of our students respond better when spoken language is clear, succinct, and supported visually. This enhances their ability to focus on the key words in a sentence.

18. Conclusion

It is the responsibility of all teaching staff to endeavour to give the students a meaningful way of communicating throughout the whole day in all activities. Advice is available from Rebecca, our speech and language therapist as well as experienced staff across the school. We acknowledge that all behaviour is communication and need to strive to ensure that students can communicate in an appropriate way which enables them to make their feelings, needs, desires and wishes known as well as to contribute their thoughts and observations of the world around them.

Our aim is that our students will THRIVE and in order to do this we strive for them to have a functional, meaningful and social means of communication.