**St Andrew’s School**

**Policy to Promote Communications and Social Interaction**

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**Rationale**

Helping pupils to develop their communication and interaction skills as fully as possible assists their independence at school, at home and in the wider community and in preparation for adult life.

Communication happens when one person sends a message to another either verbally or non-verbally. Interaction happens when two people respond to one another, hence a two-way communication.

The aim of this Communication Policy is to develop the following abilities in our pupils:

* to respond, to listen and to understand
* to interact and communicate effectively with others in a range of social situations
* To make choices, obtain information, question and be actively involved in decision making
* To develop creativity and imagination
* To become more independent

We believe that:

It is important to encourage pupils to express their likes, dislikes, feelings, emotions and preferences for different audiences, in whatever modality is meaningful for them.

It is important for our pupils to develop verbal skills and vocalisation, whether spontaneous or imitative, and/or the use of a range of communicative movements and gestures.

For some pupils the development of expressive language skills will be assisted by signing, symbols and through the use of Information and Communication Technology.

**What do we do to develop communication and social interaction?**

***Step 1:***

***Assessment***

Assessment is the key to developing a meaningful programme. We must first understand how children communicate and why. The child within St Andrew’s and/or with autism is likely to have many of the following issues:

* may only be showing early signs of wanting to communicate and would prefer to live in his/her own world
* may appear not to hear what is said, fail to respond to their name and/or be indifferent to any attempts to communicate with them
* may repeat what is said to them (echolalia)
* may have little or no recognisable speech but may use other means e.g. crying, taking an adults hand to a desired object, pointing, gesture, reaching etc.
* may talk fluently but mainly on topics of personal interest
* may use adult language but without understanding
* may talk but not share conversations
* may not understand non-verbal communication e.g. gesture, facial expressions, tone of voice

Social interaction is also likely to be impaired in the following ways:

* unable to pay attention to others – show interest in what is being said
* unable to follow social rules of conversation
* focus on one aspect of a person rather than the whole person
* unable to respond when addressed as a member of a group
* unable to appreciate unwritten social rules e.g. personal space, dominating the conversation, taking turns, sharing
* behaving inappropriately in a social context e.g. blurting out an observation that might be hurtful and best left unsaid.
* lacking awareness of others’ feelings i.e. lack of empathy
* unable to link how they feel to how they express it
* impaired development of all types of play particularly imaginative and involving another

There are two stages in the development of communication:

Pre-intentional communication:

This is when the child says or does things without intending them to affect those around them. Children often use this to calm themselves down, focus or react to an experience e.g. count to ten; talk to yourself

Intentional communication:

This is when the child says or does things with the purpose of sending a message to another person. It is easier for a child once they have learnt that their actions affect other people. For children with autism, the step from pre-intentional to intentional communication can be very difficult.

Assessment of communication and social interaction is done through observation, interaction and in partnership with SLT and parents/carers who know their children best. At St Andrew’s School, work on pupils’ communication and on social interaction is developed with close links to the speech and language therapy department and the educational psychology service. It is useful to distinguish between what a pupil understands (receptive language) and their ability to use communication (expressive language). Children can often understand more than they can communicate.

**What do we do to develop communication and social interaction?**

***Step 2:***

***Programmes, Strategies and Interventions***

When assessment is complete, we devise a programme in collaboration with parents/carers and colleagues in partner agencies. For the child with little verbal communication we decide on the most appropriate tool(s) to aid communication. We have staff trained in PECS (Picture exchange communication system) and Makaton and communicate in print symbols. We also use a range of visual aids appropriate to individual children e.g. digital photographs; drawings; signing; pointing; gesture etc.

We encourage communication in the following ways:

* pupils are encouraged to express their likes, dislikes, feelings, emotions and preferences by experiencing a range of situations designed to elicit response e.g. soft play; snack time; craft work; out of school visits etc.
* by participating in a range of social routines and by being encouraged to communicate in a widening range of situations e.g. dinner hall 🡪 café; school library 🡪 bookshop
* by expanding use of vocabulary through new experiences
* by encouraging language in a range of situations e.g. to request; choose; instruct; question; share information; organise actions and thoughts
* to vary the tone and volume of their voices in different situations e.g. drama, role play and monitor the use of volume, tone and pitch
* to match facial expression to what they are saying and feeling e.g. use mirror; camera; photographs; video
* To adapt and transfer social skills and interactions to a range of situations eg trips out of school, after school clubs etc

We encourage children to link home and school by completing a home/school diary. Children who can’t tell their parents what they have done in school can refer to their daily board and also their ’2 build a profile’ report which is emailed every term, this can be used to develop conversation and vice versa.

We encourage listening and responding in the following ways:

* We develop “good looking” and “good listening” skills by constantly reinforcing positively when a child offers attention, this is reinforced with symbol cards and is a building block for shared attention
* we always use the child’s name rather than “you” to remove distractions
* We address the child first to gain attention before giving instructions which are short and clear and given slowly
* time is given for processing. If we have to repeat the question or instruction we use the same language
* instructions will be given with visual support
* visual supports are used constantly
* social stories are used to help pupils understand instructions and cope with situations they are uncomfortable with
* use of visual interactive timetables which are age appropriate and individualised to be meaningful

We encourage social interaction in the following ways:

* we support our pupils to participate in all school activities e.g. concerts, assemblies, sports days etc.
* we create opportunities to learn and develop social skills such as turn taking and participation in conversation e.g. snack time; weekend diary etc. We value parental support to provide information
* we create social activities where we support pupils to initiate communication e.g. through smiling; making eye contact; showing interest; reaching out or drawing attention to an object of interest

**How will we know our policy on communication and social interaction is effective?**

* Pupils can communicate in a way that is appropriate for them and staff understand them
* Pupils are relaxed, less stressed and more independent
* There is evidence of increased communication as appropriate to individual children
* Home/school links are positive and open
* Pupils are developing an awareness of how other people feel
* Pupils are developing everyday social skills of conversation
* Pupils use IT technology confidently to communicate

**Monitoring of this policy**

The impact of this policy will be monitored through:

* Monitoring of IEP’s
* Contact with parents/carers
* The annual review process
* Home/school planners

Reviewed August 2018 – Ruth Cranston