



## **RADLETT LODGE SCHOOL:**

### **COMMUNICATION POLICY**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The underlying cognitive and social impairments of children with autism make it difficult for these children to develop appropriate functional communication, social interaction and language skills. The ability to communicate forms the basis of learning, how to interact and learning new things both within the school and home setting. Therefore it is essential children with a communication difficulty have continuous access to support their communication development.

This policy has been written to provide guidance about how pupils at Radlett Lodge School are supported in terms of their communication development.

#### **THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION:**

Communication is more than being able to speak or being able to combine words in a grammatical order.

There are two main different types of communication:

**Pre-intentional Communication:** this is when a child says or does things without intending them to affect those around them. E.g. a particular behaviour (e.g. crying, rocking, fiddling with something) may be used by a child to calm themselves, focus themselves, as reaction to an experience (either upsetting or fun)

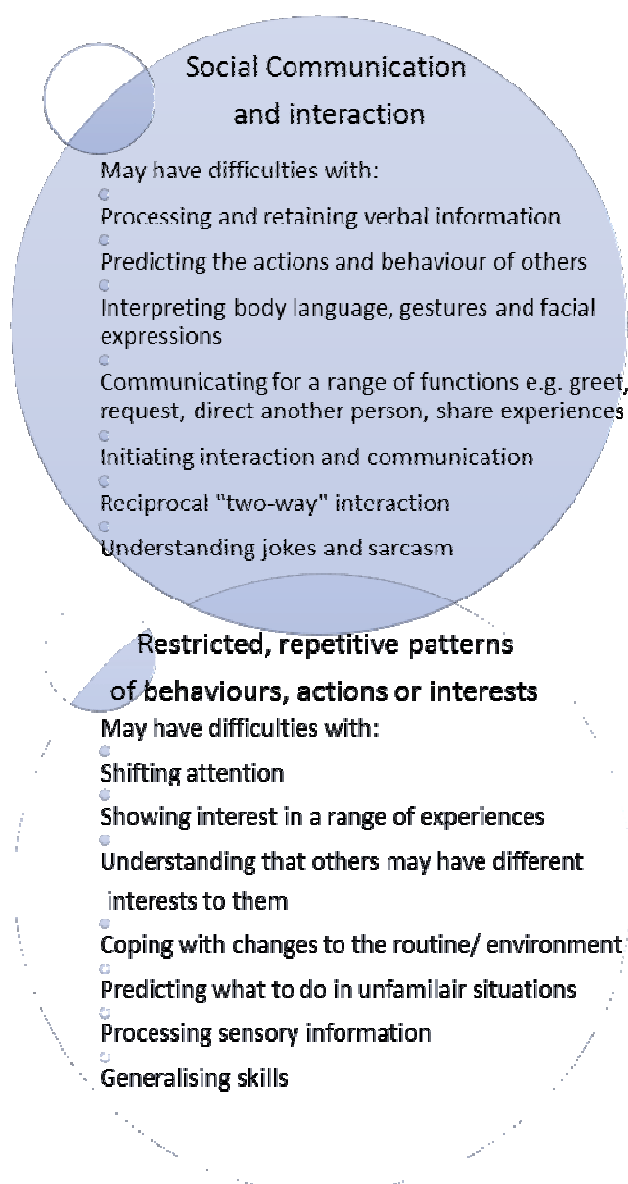
**Intentional Communication:** this is when the child says or does things with the purpose of sending a message to another person. Intentional communication is easier for the child once they have learnt that their actions have an effect on other people - the move from pre-intentional communication to intentional communication is a big step for the child on the Autistic Spectrum.

Sussman (1999) believes that it is helpful to view children with an ASD as being on a continuum in terms of their intentional communication, at one end of the continuum are children who communicate mainly to get the things they want, "at the other end are children who communicate for many reasons, such as to ask questions, comment on something or to be sociable".

Communication can be achieved through the use of gestures, signs, symbols, words or, more commonly, through a combination of all of these. Crucially, communication is a *two-way process*. Communication partners need to be able to take on the roles of both speaker and listener, to have an awareness of each other's knowledge, mental state and associated needs, to show empathy and to interpret each other's communicative intentions.

## COMMUNICATION AND AUTISM.

The autism spectrum is defined by primary difficulties in the areas of social communication, social interaction, and flexibility of thought or behaviour.



Whilst each child will present with their own, unique communication strength and needs, all people who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder are likely to experience difficulties with social interaction and communication as well as with the appropriate use of language during social communication.

Children with autism often have difficulties in discovering the power and pleasure of reciprocal social communication and interaction. They tend to engage less in day-to-day interactions with their caregivers and thus may have decreased opportunities and needs for developing communication and language skills. They may also have other learning difficulties, which impact on their ability to develop language.

When communication difficulties are left unaddressed, these difficulties can result in or contribute to significant behaviour problems often reflecting frustrations resulting from an inability to communicate; behaviours become a means of communication in their own right - used when a more acceptable and effective means of communication is not (yet) available to the child.

Children with autistic spectrum disorder often have specific difficulties accessing, generating meaning from and subsequently acquiring a spoken language system. Research indicates that more than half of all children with autism do not develop functional speech. (Schuler AL, 1995).

Some children with autism have the memory capacity to learn language forms, with only limited understanding of the use or meaning of those forms. For example, they may fail to generalise a word they have learned from one situation to another, so a word learned and understood in one situation may be meaningless in or not thought of in another. Others may continuously repeat words, phrases or sentences that they have heard without any apparent communicative intent (echolalia). In addition, all children with autism tend to have more difficulties with symbolic or abstract language concepts than with straightforward facts and descriptions.

#### AIMS:

- to enable each child with autistic spectrum disorder at Radlett Lodge School to achieve their communication potential;
- to provide children with autistic spectrum disorder with acceptable and effective functional communication skills;
- to enable children with autistic spectrum disorder to understand and to respond to communication addressed at them;
- to teach children with autistic spectrum disorder to initiate communication so they become more able to effect change and less reliant on other people to have their wants and needs met;
- to develop children's listening, looking, attention and turn taking skills;

- to identify and create opportunities for children to engage in social communication and interaction across the curriculum and throughout the school day;
- to teach children with autism an awareness of self and others in order to enable them to become more competent social partners in a world where interaction is of prime importance.

### ENTITLEMENT:

The majority of children at Radlett Lodge School have an identified need to receive speech and language therapy input, which is defined as part of their Education Health and Care Plan/EHCP (replacing the Statement of Special Educational Needs).

### IMPLEMENTATION:

Speech and Language Therapy at Radlett Lodge School is provided in line with the NAS SPELL values of *Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low Arousal* and *Links*. Radlett Lodge is committed to develop its pupils' social communication and interaction skills throughout the school day. Speech and language therapy input takes a whole school approach aiming to develop collaborative working practices thus ensuring that the communication skills of our pupils are developed throughout the school day and capitalising on real life situations whenever possible.

Intervention programmes tend to be classroom based to reflect the communication demands of the classroom and to ensure maximum opportunities for children to apply and generalise their communication skills throughout the school day. The classroom and class group are recognised as the most viable and important communicative context as it is here that intervention approaches have immediate applicability, as pupils learn them and apply them simultaneously in a functional setting. This way, opportunities for practice are available on a daily basis within the clear focus of classroom learning tasks. The speech and language therapist may work both directly alongside pupils during classroom tasks or during educational visits or indirectly through observing classroom practice and providing recommendations for developing best practice in the classroom.

In addition, teachers have the opportunity to refer individual children for further assessment and/or advice. Where appropriate, a child's specific speech and language therapy needs may be addressed through short programmes of one-to-one or small group intervention by the speech and language therapist.

The speech and language therapist contributes to staff development and training by providing induction training for new staff as well as whole school communication training.

The speech and language therapist is also responsible for leading the development and monitoring the use of visual communication strategies within the school and residential environment. The actual implementation

of agreed strategies is carried out collaboratively by the whole school and residential team.

### RESOURCES:

- A variety of standardised assessments including the British Picture Vocabulary Scale, The Reynell Developmental Language Scales and the Pre-Verbal Communication Schedule.
- A variety of social skills programmes including The Social Use of Language Programme, Socially Speaking and Talkabout.
- A variety of home-grown observation checklists and forms (including MyProgress™ MDT Tracker) to support continuous monitoring of a pupils communication development.
- Visual Communication Programmes including Communicate in Print and Clicker 7.
- A range of Alternative and Augmentative Communication aids including: Low-Tech Electronic Communication Aids (such as switches and recordable buttons), High-Tech Electronic Communication Aids (such as i-pads and i-pods).
- Communication Books.
- A range of materials to promote self advocacy skills, for example, Talking Mats and Listen Up Programmes.
- A range of materials to promote storytelling, for example, puppets.
- A range of materials used in musical interaction activities, for example, instruments, lycra, ribbon sticks.

### ASSESSMENT:

The Speech and Language Therapist is responsible for assessing each child's communication strengths and needs and, together with other professionals, the child's teacher and, where appropriate, residential care worker, they plan and implement collaborative intervention programmes with specific communication objectives and targets being included in each child's MyProgress™ EHCP Outcomes (6 monthly targets).

The Speech and Language Therapist, in conjunctions with the Occupational Therapists and Psychology team, is responsible for yearly updates of the MyProgress™ MDT Trackers for each child.

A baseline assessment is carried out for each child as they enter Radlett Lodge School (within the first term of a child joining). The SCERTS<sup>1</sup> assessment framework is used to structure observations of the

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<sup>1</sup> *The SCERTS Model: A Comprehensive Educational Approach for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders – Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Support*  
Curriculum/Communication Policy

pupil in class, at play, and during community based education trips and residential activities if appropriate. This provides a profile of the pupil's communication, interaction and emotional regulation strengths, and highlights the next steps for development. Transactional supports are identified to help the pupil achieve these next steps. SCERTS assessments are supplemented by the use of standardised speech and language therapy assessments when appropriate.

Baseline assessments are carried out in collaboration with the school's clinical psychologist. Information is drawn from the above assessment methods, liaising with parents and teachers in order to inform recommendations and suggestions to best enhance the pupil's communication development.

SCERTS assessments are repeated annually (progressing to 6 monthly over the academic year 2016 - 2017). A Speech and Language Therapy progress report is provided at each child's EHCP Annual Review.

#### LINKS WITH OTHER SUBJECTS – COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:

Communication plays a large part in all curriculum areas especially in their delivery. Delivery of each curriculum subject is differentiated in accordance with each pupil's ability. Language levels are adapted as necessary and visual materials are made using communication programmes.

There is a particular emphasis on teaching communication and social interaction in literacy, Citizenship/PSHE and music where the nature of the curriculum specifically lends itself to learning and practising communication skills. For example, musical interaction work is used to work on skills such as turn taking, anticipation and awareness of self and others, literacy work addresses skills such as language development, spontaneous communication and imagination, and Citizenship lessons often focus on the development of play and learning to understand emotions.

#### EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES:

Radlett Lodge School ensures that all pupils are provided with an effective means of communication and are given opportunities to practise and generalise their communication, social interaction and language skills.

See also Early Years and Post 16 Policies.