



Total Communication Policy

STATEMENT OF INTENT

“Acorns School aims to develop communication as an all-day long approach. We will provide staff with the training, resources and support needed to develop and implement aids to support a communication approach suitable to individual’s needs.

Vocabulary will be modelled with the aim to expand individuals understanding and use of language at a level appropriate to them.

Appropriate, engaging, and purposeful activities will be provided to support the development of children’s functional communication skills. Skills will be practiced in the school environment, wider community and within the home environment to provide children with the opportunities to continually make their want and needs known in a way that can be understood by all.

A consistent whole-school approach will be developed supporting consistency and continual progression for all”.

AIMS AND PURPOSE

This policy sets out the vision, principles, and strategies for developing communication at Acorns Primary School. It serves as a foundational statement for fostering a communication-rich environment that supports every pupil’ learning, independence and self-expression.

All new staff and parents / carers are encouraged to read this policy to understand and embrace the communication ethos at Acorns Primary School.

Acorns Primary School caters for pupils from the ages 2-11 with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities including autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Many of our pupils experience challenges with communication and interaction, making it essential that communication is embedded across all aspects of school life.

- At Acorns Primary School we are committed to creating an enriched total communication environment that celebrates the diverse ways our pupils communicate and encourages them to develop new skills.

Our aim is to:

- Establish a communication-enabling environment where every child has access to their preferred methods of communication throughout the day.
- Develop personalised communication approaches tailored to each pupil’s unique needs.

- Embed meaningful opportunities for communication across the curriculum, enabling every child to express themselves to the best of their ability.
- Ensure every pupil is given a 'voice' and the means to be heard.
- Support families in using communication strategies at home with the aim to keep things consistent for the young person between school and home.

COMMUNICATION AND OUR CURRICULUM

At Acorns primary school, communication is at the heart of our curriculum and central to our mission of promoting independence and opening up opportunities for our wonderful pupils.

We believe in valuing each individual and celebrating their successes through every stage of their learning journey.

Across all four of our curriculum pathways, we prioritise the consistent integration of communication strategies in every learning opportunity. We recognise that for our pupils, the ability to express themselves, understand others, and engage with the world is fundamental to their development and success.

Therefore, our curriculum is designed to:

- Embed communication as a core focus, ensuring all pupils can access learning in ways that suit their individual needs.
- Incorporate tailored strategies such as visual aids, symbols, communication / assisted language input (ALI) boards, communication books and alternative augmentative communication (AAC) to support understanding and expression.
- Provide structured opportunities for pupils to communicate their wants, thoughts, and observations through the school day.
- Introduce and reinforce new vocabulary through supported, modelled activities that promote both receptive and expressive language skills.

By placing communication at the core of our curriculum, we empower pupils to become confident, active participants in their learning journey and beyond.

Monitoring and evaluation:

At Acorns Primary School, we recognise that monitoring and evaluating a young person's communication progress is central to their overall development and wellbeing. Communication is not only a fundamental right but also a vital tool for learning, social interaction, and independence.

We are committed to ensuring that all pupils have regular, meaningful opportunities to use and develop their preferred methods of communication. To support this, a range of communication tools—including signs, symbols, photographs, objects of reference, and personalised communication aids—must be consistently available and appropriately supported by staff in the following environments:

- Within the classroom
- Across the school and home settings
- In the wider community

Where a therapy programme is deemed appropriate, the Speech and Language Therapist will oversee the young person's progress, reporting against the specific targets outlined in their programme. These outcomes are also reviewed in relation to the communication objectives detailed in the pupil's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) during the annual review process.

Class teachers are responsible for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of each pupil's communication development, ensuring that progress is tracked effectively. This is evidenced through observations, recording against individual pupil targets on schools recording system (evidence for learning – EFL) and through the communication matrix and b-squared.

Class teachers can liaise with Speech and language therapists, the schools communication lead and communication support teaching assistant to support developing effective and robust communication environments that enable individuals to continue to make outstanding progress. They can support with identifying needs and developing interventions to support as necessary.

Communication and interaction needs—including achievements, challenges, and concerns—are formally reviewed and discussed at every EHCP annual review meeting, ensuring a collaborative and holistic approach to supporting each pupil's growth.

Communication methods used at Acorns Primary School:

At Acorns, we are committed to creating a total communication environment that supports the diverse speech, language, and communication needs of all our pupils. We understand that no single approach suits every learner, so we adopt a flexible and inclusive strategy that draws on a wide range of interventions.

Central to our practice is the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). AAC refers to any method that supplements or replaces spoken language, enabling individuals to express themselves in meaningful ways.

This can range from natural gestures and facial expressions to more structured systems such as symbols, signs, and communication aids.

We recognise that communication is not limited to speech. At Acorns, pupils may use:

- Gestures and signs (e.g., Makaton) to convey meaning
- Graphic symbols and photographs to support understanding and expression. At Acorns we use a programme called Boardmaker as known as PCS to generate and make all of our symbols.
- Objects of reference to represent activities, places, or people
- High-tech and low-tech communication aids, including voice output devices and communication boards

These tools are embedded across all learning environments—within the classroom, throughout the school and home settings, and in the wider community—to ensure pupils can access the curriculum and engage socially and emotionally.

AAC is not only a bridge to learning but a language in its own right. For pupils with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities, it provides a vital pathway to achieving emotional, social, educational, and vocational goals.

By embracing a total communication approach, Acorns empowers every pupil to find their voice, connect with others, and thrive in all aspects of life.

Acorns Primary School implement the below strategies:

Aided Language Input (ALI)

At Acorns ALI is used in all classes and around the school environment to promote and extend all pupils language and range of vocabulary.

ALI involves modelling Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) in everyday settings. It helps to promote and develop pupil's understanding of language and symbols.

At Acorns we use ALI in a range of settings including our outdoor facilities. We have incorporated ALI boards into our setting to enhance input modelling throughout the school day.

Mid-tech AAC devices

Mid-tech devices include tools such as:

- Single switches
- Big Mac switches
- Single-touch communication boards with voice output

These devices enable pupils to express themselves in a variety of ways, including:

- Greeting others
- Making choices and decisions
- Commenting and expressing opinions
- Sharing information

Mid-tech AAC supports the development of independence and social interaction and is embedded across all learning environments.

High-tech AAC devices

Some pupils may be assessed for the suitability of high-tech AAC devices whilst at Acorns Primary School.

These devices offer more advanced communication options, including dynamic displays. However, high-tech AAC is not appropriate for all pupils, and suitability is determined through a detailed assessment led by the Speech and Language Therapist. High-tech devices are usually funded through an application made to the ACE centre.

This assessment process includes:

- Collaboration with the pupil's family
- Input from education staff
- Liaison with other professionals involved in the pupil's care

Once a high-tech AAC device is introduced, it is essential that staff model the device's functions consistently throughout the day. This modelling enables the pupil to learn how to use the device effectively and confidently.

To ensure successful implementation:

- Training will be provided by AAC consultants or the Speech and Language Therapist to all relevant staff and parents/carers.
- A low-tech AAC backup (e.g. communication book) must always be available to ensure continuity of communication in case of device failure.

Objects of reference

Objects of Reference are tangible items used to represent a person, activity, or event—for example, a spoon to signify lunchtime.

These objects play a vital role in helping pupils understand and anticipate what is happening in their environment.

These objects are used to help a child to understand what is happening in their environment. The object is introduced at the beginning of the activity, remains with the pupil during the activity and is put away at the end of the activity.

At Acorns Primary School we have a flexible approach to objects of reference – objects of reference should be personalised to each pupil and developed over time to increase their understanding of activities and the environment.

Touch cues

Touch cues are physical prompts made on a person's body. They are often used for pupils who may need more than just a visual symbol to make sense of the world around them.

At Acorns we use four main physical prompts to support our pupils as a cue when moving them around school.

- Going down – One tap on the pupil's shoulder. As you tap say "going down"
- Going up – One tap on the pupil's elbow. As you tap say "going up"
- Moving – One tap on pupil's knee. As you tap say "going to move"
- Finished – One hand on either shoulder. Slowly move your hands down the child's arms towards hands. As you tap saying "finished"

Alternative access methods

Eye-gaze

At Acorns Primary School, we are committed to providing inclusive and accessible communication strategies for all pupils, particularly those with physical challenges that impact their ability to use spoken language or motor-based communication methods.

Eye-gaze technology is a vital component of our total communication approach, enabling pupils with restricted movement to engage meaningfully with their environment and learning.

Eye-gaze systems allow pupils to communicate by using their eyes to select, indicate, or interact with visual content. This method removes the need for physical reach or movement, making it especially effective for pupils with limited limb mobility.

Eye-gaze enables pupils to:

- Make requests and express preferences
- Participate in classroom activities
- Engage in social interaction and play-based learning
- Develop vocabulary and sentence structure through interactive games and communication apps

Eye-gaze systems are also used to support curriculum access, enabling pupils to respond to questions, explore topics, and demonstrate understanding in a way that is tailored to their individual needs. Interactive games and activities

are integrated into learning plans to build pupils' confidence, reinforce communication skills, and promote enjoyment and engagement.

Auditory scanning

Auditory scanning involves presenting choices or messages verbally in a systematic sequence, allowing pupils to respond—typically through a consistent signal such as a vocalization, gesture, or switch activation—when their desired option is heard.

At Acorns primary school we support the use of auditory scanning by ensuring staff are trained in its implementation, maintaining a quiet and structured environment to enhance auditory processing, and tailoring scanning systems to each pupil.

Makaton

At Acorns Primary School, we recognise Makaton as a vital component of our total communication approach, supporting pupils with a wide range of speech, language, and communication needs. Makaton combines signs, symbols, and speech to enhance understanding and expression, and is embedded across all learning environments.

Makaton signs are always used in conjunction with spoken language, reinforcing meaning and supporting the development of both receptive and expressive communication.

While not all pupils will use Makaton expressively, its consistent use by staff provides valuable visual and auditory cues that aid comprehension and reduce barriers to learning.

Intensive Interaction

At Acorns Primary School, we recognise Intensive Interaction as a key approach to supporting pupils who are at the earliest stages of developing communication and social engagement.

This method is embedded within our total communication framework and is used consistently across all environments—classroom, communal areas, and beyond—to promote meaningful two-way exchanges between pupils and adults.

This approach focuses on the development of early communication milestones, including:

- Encounter – being present and available for interaction
- Awareness – fleeting moments of focus or recognition
- Attention and Response – noticing and reacting to others
- Engagement – maintaining consistent attention during interaction
- Participation – anticipating, taking turns, and sharing moments
- Involvement – actively and consistently joining in interactions
- Pupil-Initiated Response – independently initiating communication

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

Picture exchange communication system is an approach used to teach functional communication.

We follow a 6 phase approach which focuses on teaching pupils how to initiate communication, sentence structure and how to extend vocabulary beyond single words.

It is extremely important when beginning to find a number of motivating and reinforcing items for the individual (a mean to communicate).

These could include but are not limited to consumables (e.g. crisps, orange etc.), toys (e.g. bubbles, balloons etc.) or actions (e.g. tickle, hug etc.)

Once a range of items have been established symbol or pictures will be used to represent them.

Pupils will then be introduced with support from class staff.

Communication Books

Communication books are personalised resources—often containing symbols, pictures, words, or phrases—enable pupils to express themselves, make choices, and participate fully in daily interactions

Communication books are a highly personalised communication system. A pupil will communicate by pointing to symbols in sequence to make requests or comments.

It is a highly effective communication system based on core and fringe vocabulary.

Core words are progressive throughout the stages of a communication book. Fringe vocabulary can be adapted to suit the learners needs and requirements. Communication books are staged 1-5. At each stage new core words are introduced.

When new language is introduced, it will need to be modelled by an adult before the pupil can use the language within their everyday language.

Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD)

PODD is a way of organising whole word and symbol vocabulary in a communication book or speech generating device to provide immersion and modelling for learning.

The aim of PODD is to provide vocabulary:

For continuous communication all the time, for a range of messages, across a range of topics, in multiple environments.

PODD can have different formats depending on the individuals physical, sensory and communication needs of the person using it.

Colourful Semantics –

Colourful semantics is a structured visual approach aimed at helping children to develop their sentence structure and language comprehension. It can also be used to support understanding of specific question words.

It uses colour coded prompts to represent different parts of a sentence to help our pupils to understand and build grammatically correct sentences. At Acorns primary school we use colourful semantics as an aid to promote expressive language, enhance understanding of instructions and foster independence in communication.

Spoken word –

Spoken communication is made up of speech sounds, word meanings, putting words into sentences and grammar.

The use of speech is always encouraged, and we provide models of clear speech and language for the students.

Some of those who do use spoken communication may have difficulties with the organization, clarity and fluency of speech sounds and words. We follow advice from speech and language therapists and will complete therapy activities to support and improve clarity of children with speech sound difficulties.

Attention Autism

Attention Autism is a highly engaging, structured intervention designed to develop attention, communication, and social interaction skills in children with Autism and other communication needs.

The approach uses visually stimulating and motivating activities delivered in stages to capture and sustain pupils attention.

Visual aids

Visual supports offer accessible and inclusive ways for pupils to understand, express, and engage with their environment.

These supports range from objects of reference, visual timetables to symbol based lanyards and Now / Next boards – they help to reduce anxiety, clarify expectations and promote independence.

At Acorns Primary School we offer a range of visual supports to ensure all our pupils have access to the best possible support available at an individual basis.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Now / Next boards
- Portable / vertical timetables
- Keyring lanyards
- Core word boards
- Objects of reference
- Whole class visual timetables

Assessment

Assessment of communication skills is in line with the assessment, recording and reporting policy for the school.

In relation to communication the following considerations apply:

- All pupils should be assessed using the Communication Matrix twice yearly. This assesses a child's functional communication skills and any developments made towards their communication skills.
 - Pupils who are in the Early Years Foundation Stage are assessed using the Early Years Foundation Stage Development Matters.
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- Most pupils have communication targets on their IEP's. Assessment against learning outcomes is made on an individual basis to demonstrate progress and inform future targets relating to EHCP and Annual Review outcomes.
 - For pupils who are involved with Speech and Language Therapy, a formal report is submitted with the pupil's annual review.

Monitoring and Evaluating

The Senior Leadership Team, supported by Hannah Serventi and Emily Oulton, will take responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of communication through:

- Learning walks
- Coaching and mentoring opportunities
- Peer to peer observations
- Informal feedback and discussions with staff including speech and language
- Monitoring of progress towards targets in EFL (evidence for learning); including written comment, pictorial or video evidence.
- Tracking pupil data using communication matrix devised by Acorns School.
- Speech and language will monitor progress through specialised speech and language assessments.

Inset and Training

At Acorns Primary School we recognise the importance of up skilling staff to enable all pupils to reach their potential.

All new staff undergo staff induction which includes Communication at Acorns.

The teaching team and support staff have an ongoing programme of CPD support based on individual needs.

Communication champions –

Each class designates a Communication Champion, supported by a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), the school's Communication Lead, and a dedicated support assistant.

This team meets termly to review progress, share best practice, and ensure consistent implementation of the Total Communication Policy across the school.

Champions are provided with targeted Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to deepen their expertise and confidently model effective communication strategies with all pupils, in every context throughout the school day.

This collaborative approach ensures that communication remains a whole-school priority, embedded in both learning and social environments.

Parental / Carers

The school recognises that home-school partnership is pivotal to the success of pupils' achievements in communication.

Close liaison is encouraged through:

- Parent / carer meeting with class teachers and / or Speech and Language Therapists
- Parent / carer communication workshops
- IEPs shared with parents and outcomes reported to parents termly.
- EFL (Evidence for Learning) parent view to share progress with parents / carers.
- Annual reports
- Annual reviews

Communication Lead and Specialist teaching assistant

The communication lead at Acorns Primary School is Hannah Serventi and the role is supported by Emily Oulton a specialist teaching assistant.

Both are responsible for developing and overseeing strategies that enhance communication across the school community, ensuring that pupils with speech, language, and communication needs receive tailored support.

Working closely with the Communication Lead, the specialist teaching assistants implements these strategies within the classroom, using targeted interventions and adaptive techniques to promote student engagement and progress.

Together, they collaborate with teachers, therapists, and families to ensure consistent, clear, and responsive communication practices that empower every learner.

Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)

The named speech and language therapists that work at Acorns Primary School are Ellie Keenan and Laura Randell.

To ensure the successful communication development of all students at the school it is essential that the Speech and Language Therapist, Speech and Language therapy service and school staff work collaboratively.

Speech and Language Therapists adopt a Consultative Approach, they work in conjunction with school staff, and parents to assess the communication needs of the child.

The type and quantity of support from the SLT service is subject to change and will be outlined on each involvement plan and report. The services works episodically with children and families.

Assessment may involve observation in the classroom, teacher discussion and individual assessments. Speech & Language Therapy services work to skill up parents and settings to support and manage a child's communication needs. Once the adults around the child do not need further specialist support the child will then be discharged. They can be re-referred at a later date for further input if the child's needs change.

The Speech and Language Team can be contacted on 01772 777318

TOTAL COMMUNICATION

Signed by:

Headteacher: L
Hall

Date:

Chair of Governors:

Date:

Next Review Date: October 2026



