TOTAL COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

Chair of Governors: Paula Halsall
Date: February 2023
Review date: February 2026

Policy review
This policy will be reviewed within a 3-year period of approval

Total Communication Environment

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Introduction:

At Ysgol Bryn Derw, Total Communication is at the heart of everything we do. The term "Total Communication" describes an approach that strives to create supportive and inclusive means of communication so that everyone can understand and be understood (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists). This approach encourages pupils and staff to use every available form of communication, with an emphasis on what is most relevant and meaningful to each individual.

A Total Communication approach recognises that communication is not simply about talking. It values and promotes the use of body language, gesture, photos, symbols, signs, and objects alongside spoken language. Our policy is further supported by the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), which includes objects, photographs, symbols, signing, and electronic aids to support understanding and expression.

No-tech and Low-tech AAC

- Gestures and facial expressions, writing, drawing, and spelling words
- Schedules / "Now and Next" boards
- Core boards and communication/activity boards
- Communication books
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Switches / recording buttons

High-tech AAC

High-tech systems require power to operate-often using an iPad or tablet. They typically include a dynamic display and synthesised voice output. These devices can be personalised using different software to meet individual communication needs.

Every pupil at Ysgol Bryn Derw has autism, and their communication is impacted in different ways and to varying degrees. Therefore, a Total Communication approach is essential for each pupil, supporting both learning and understanding by presenting information in multiple, accessible formats.

To ensure this approach is embedded across the school, we hold a Communication Forum once a term, attended by the Headteacher, the Total Communication HLTA, and the Speech and Language Therapist. The forum provides an opportunity to review whole-school communication approaches, identify training needs, and discuss individual pupils who may benefit from specialist input from the NHS Speech and Language Therapy Department.
We also value strong partnerships with parents and carers. Communication Workshops and 1:1 discussions are offered through our in-house Speech and Language Therapy service, providing families with advice, practical support, and opportunities to share experiences.

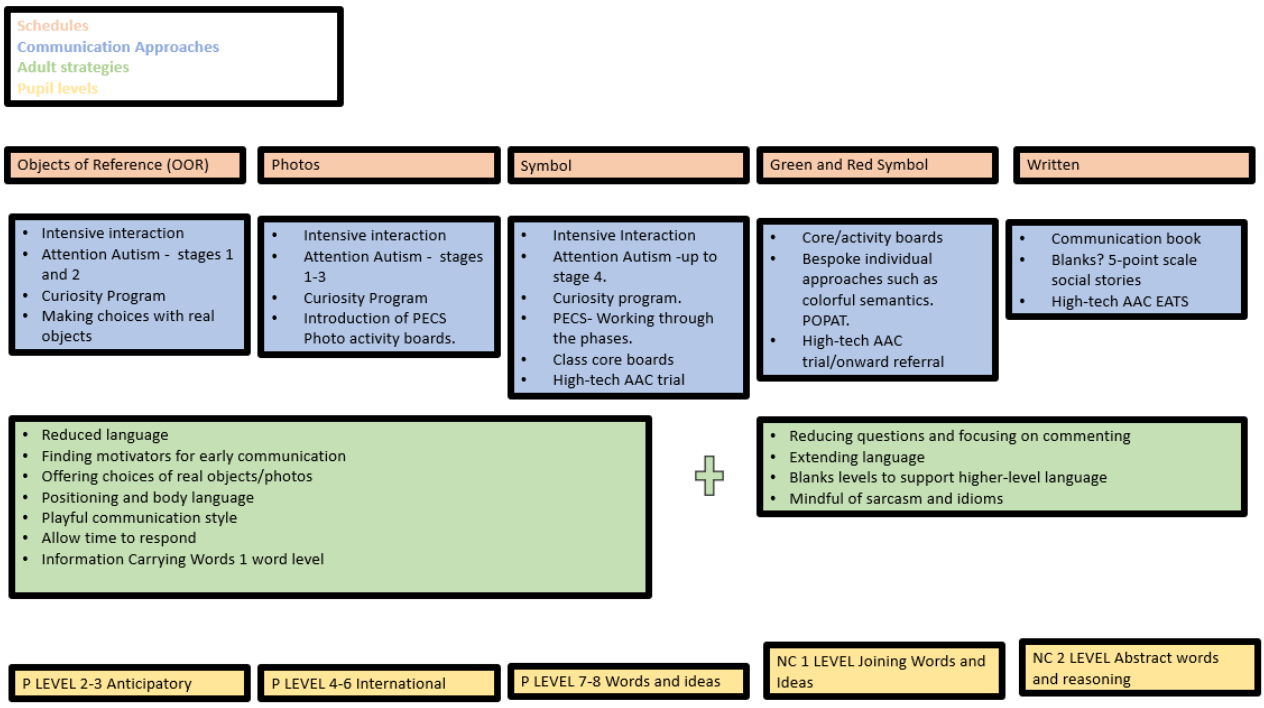
At Ysgol Bryn Derw, we recognise that a large proportion of autistic pupils are Gestalt Language Processors (GLP). Gestalt Language Processing involves learning language in whole "chunks" or "gestalts," which are later broken down into individual words and recombined

in new ways. In contrast, Analytic Language Processing (ALP) begins with single words that gradually build into longer phrases and sentences.

As part of our Total Communication approach, we support GLP pupils by adapting our communication methods to match their stage of language development. This may include modelling natural language scripts, using AAC systems, and providing visual or sensory supports that promote understanding and expression.

At Ysgol Bryn Derw, we aim to provide an enjoyable, structured, engaging, and stimulating environment where every pupil can learn and communicate effectively. Each pupil is an individual with their own preferred way of communicating, whether verbally and/or non-verbally. We believe that all children and young people have the right to understand and be understood in all aspects of life. Therefore, it is our policy to support pupils through a range of communication approaches tailored to their unique needs.

Ysgol Bryn Derw has a clear Communication Pathway that supports pupils' communication and ensures that the most appropriate strategies are implemented at each stage of their school journey. This pathway provides a structured approach, helping staff to consistently identify and use the right communication methods for every pupil.



Communication Approaches

a) Visuals and TEACCH (including timetables, whiteboards, timers, lanyards, workstations):
Visual supports help pupils understand routines and transitions, encourage anticipation, and provide consistency in communication. They also offer opportunities for pupils to make choices. As our pupils are primarily visual learners, the school's structure, rules, and daily routines are presented visually and tailored to each pupil's stage of symbolic understanding (using objects, photos, and symbols alongside written words). TEACCH schedules, workstations, timers, and whiteboards all support attention, engagement, and comprehension. Staff also carry standard school symbols on lanyards to reinforce spoken directives.

b) Labelling:
Clear and consistent labelling of rooms, equipment and resources using symbols and written words (bilingual where possible, English/Welsh) supports pupils' understanding of their environment and aids independence.

c) Objects of Reference (OOR):
Objects systematically represent items, activities, places or people, helping pupils develop early symbolic understanding. Locations around the school are labelled with OOR and relevant objects are replicated in classrooms to enable pupils to anticipate events and navigate routines.

d) Sensory Supportive Environment:
Many pupils experience sensory processing difficulties. The school provides a communication-friendly environment by managing sensory input through minimal decor, sensitive lighting, and reduced background noise, helping pupils stay focused and engaged.

e) Verbal Interaction:
When interacting verbally, staff position themselves at the pupil's level and face them without insisting on eye contact (which can be challenging for some pupils). Spoken language is simplified, accompanied by open body language and expressive facial cues. The "ten-second rule" is used to allow pupils time to respond.

f) GLP Strategies:
Strategies for Gestalt Language Processors (GLP) involve understanding how pupils learn language in chunks ("gestalts") and adapting communication to their stage of language development. This includes modelling natural language scripts, using AAC and providing visual or sensory supports to promote comprehension and expression.

g) PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System):
PECS helps pupils communicate their needs across all parts of the school day. Staff provide support according to each pupil's stage of development, and PECS cards are regularly updated to reflect changing interests and evolving language.

h) Core Boards and Communication Books:
Forms of low-tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) that support pupils to express themselves and understand language through symbols and visual cues.

i) High-Tech Devices:
Technology-based communication systems, such as voice-output devices and apps, that support pupils to understand, express themselves and communicate with greater independence and confidence.

j) Signing (Signalong):
Where appropriate, staff use Signalong, a speech-supported signing system. Only key words in a sentence are signed to emphasise the message and support comprehension.

k) Intensive Interaction:
An approach that develops the fundamentals of communication using eye contact, facial expression, body language and vocalisations through turn-taking. It is delivered daily through structured sessions and embedded into spontaneous communication during the school day, supporting social interaction and early communication skills.

l) Curiosity Programme:
Developed by a Speech and Language Therapist, this play-based approach supports children in the very early stages of communication. Underpinned by Intensive Interaction, it uses child-led play and curiosity boxes to develop joint attention, social engagement and motivation to interact with adults.

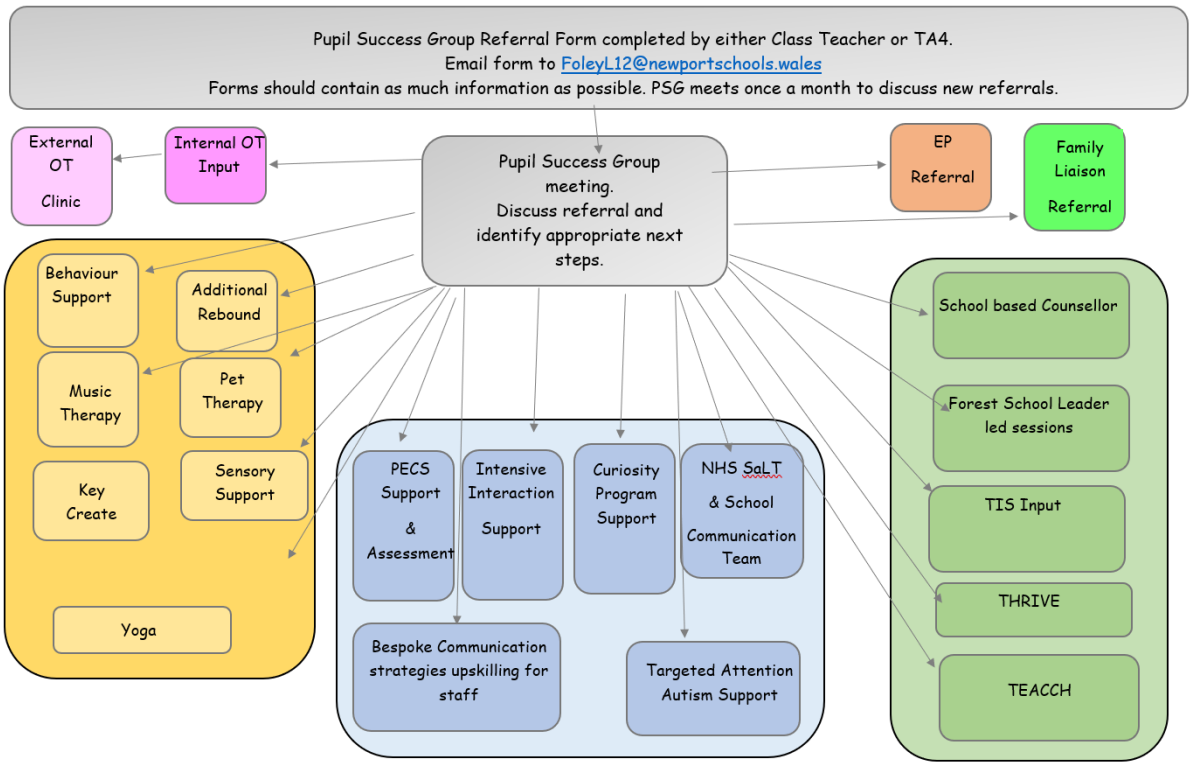
m) Attention Autism:
An approach that delivers irresistible sensory learning experiences to develop early communication and social interaction skills. Used daily in group sessions, it promotes shared attention, understanding of facial expressions, turn-taking, resilience and shows that communication can be fun!

n) Colourful Semantics:
A visual approach that uses colour-coding to highlight the different parts of a sentence (e.g., who, doing, what, where). It helps pupils understand sentence structure, develop grammar skills and communicate more effectively by supporting language comprehension and expression.

o) One-Page Profiles:
Each classroom displays one-page profiles summarising pupils' communication preferences, medical needs and sensory requirements to ensure consistent, tailored support throughout the school day.

Pupil Success Group

The Pupil Success Group has been set up to support our pupils to reach their full potential and enable our staff members to get bespoke individual advice and interventions.



Teachers or TA4s can refer individual pupils or whole classes to the pupil Success Group to receive support with communication needs.

The Pupil Success Group Referral Form can be found in Teacher Shared under Pupil Intervention Referral. (see example on the next page)

Pupil Success Group Referral Form

Date of Referral:
Name of Individual Pupil or Whole Class Referred:
Pupil DOB:
Referred by:
IEP TARGETS
1. **2.** **3.**
Current attainment (P levels/ NC levels)
Main Reasons for Referral- Current Challenges.
Does the pupil receive any additional therapies /interventions? If so what therapy/intervention, how often and how is this going?
What are you hoping for from this referral?
For the Pupil Success Group to complete
Pupil Success Group Feedback: **Date of meeting:**
Next Steps: **By who:**
Signed:

APPENDIX A

TEACCH

The TEACCH approach has five basic principles: physical structure, scheduling, work system, routine, and visual structure. The use of visual structures to organise the environment and tasks is crucial when teaching skills. It focuses on the pupil and their skills, interests and needs. It gives structure to support transition and provides choices. TEACCH is implemented throughout the school in schedules, workstations, whole classroom layouts, and other strategies including working towards and now & next boards. Staff have a responsibility to continually assess the pupils to ensure they have the right TEACCH approach and support for their current needs.

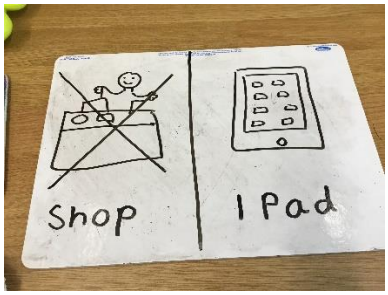
Workstation

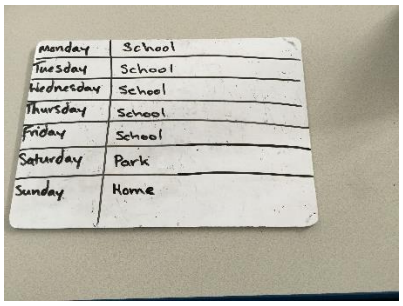
Classroom Schedules

Working Towards Card

Whiteboards

Whiteboards are used with some pupils to support transitions, give routine and signal an end to an activity. They can be used with drawings or the written word.





Timers

Timers are used throughout the school to give a visual understanding to how long an activity will last. This can give more time to processing a change and reducing anxiety. All classes have a range of timers for different situations from 30 seconds to 10 minutes.

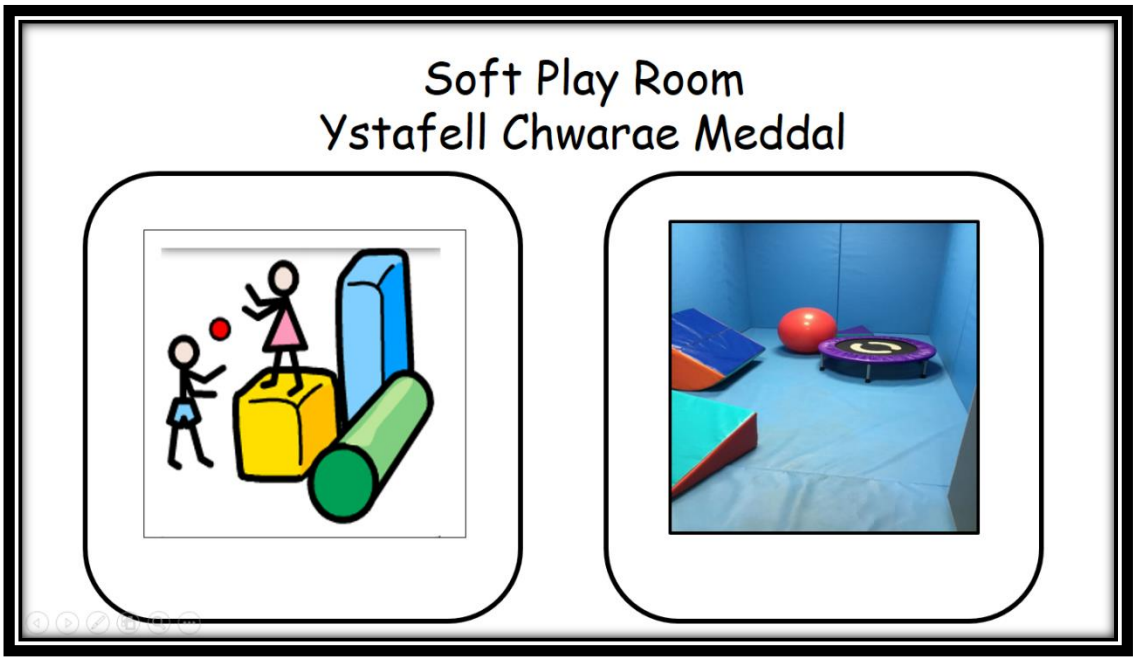
Lanyards

All staff have standardised visuals on lanyards to support transition and understand school rules. It is the school staff's responsibility to ensure they use the lanyards and keep them in good condition. Lanyards can be customised to support some individual pupils needs.

APPENDIX B

Labelling

To support understanding of routine and transitions, every classroom and activity room is clearly labelled with a photo, symbol and the written word in both English and Welsh.



Classrooms and the Independent Living Skills room have clear labels on cupboards. This enables to pupils to be independent and supports communication choices.

APPENDIX C

Objects of Reference (OOR)

An object of reference is any object which is used systematically to represent an item, activity or place. Understanding real objects is the first stage of symbolic development. Objects of reference are used with pupils who find it difficult to understand spoken words, signs, symbols or photographs.

Some pupils in the school will use OOR to help them transition or understand their routine. Show the OOR just before a pupil is about to start a new activity or make a transition whilst using short simple language saying what will happen e.g. before going swimming, give the pupil a 'towel' OOR and say "swimming".

Encourage pupils to take the OOR with them to the location. It is best if the pupil keeps in contact with the OOR. If they do not want to hold it, the adult can do so, keeping the object in the pupil's view throughout the transition.

Once a pupil has been introduced to the OOR they need to make the transition immediately in order to help them understand the connection between the object and what happens next. It is very important that the same object is used consistently (i.e. every time you do that activity/ transition.)

APPENDIX D

The Sensory supportive environment

Many people with ASD have difficulty processing everyday sensory information. The individual's senses may be over or under-sensitive, or both, at different times. These sensory differences can affect the way our pupils experience the world around them. This can have effect on eating, physical activity, sleep, and behaviour. It is vital to our pupil's communication that we recognise this and help adapt the school environment accordingly.

As a school we achieve this by ensuring the school is a calm environment, with minimal decor, sensitive lighting and a reduction in background noise. Pupils are offered ear defenders when needed. Quite spaces are available, offering time out of busy classrooms. Sensory rooms and activities are given value across the school to reflect the pupil's choices. Staff follow a policy for displays which ensures that they are not over stimulating. Contractors and gardeners do not undertake any noisy work on site when the pupils are in school.

APPENDIX E

Verbal Communication

Five top tips for clear Communication

1. **Positioning and body language**
   Try to get down to the pupils' level and face them when you speak. Ensure that you have open body language and you want to listen and engage with them. This can be shown through exaggerated facial expressions and warm responses.

2. **Say the pupil's name before you speak to them.**
   This just clarifies that you are talking to them as this can be missed by people with Autism.

3. **Reduce your language**
   Too much information can be hard to possess so keep to single words or short sentences. If you want a pupil to come and sit for group time you may want to say:

   "Jim, group time, sit on the chair" or even tap the chair and just say "sitting" as opposed to:

   "It is time for group, come and sit down on a chair with your friends"

4. **Ten second rule**
   People with Autism can have a delayed processing time so give the pupil ten seconds to respond to you, stay quiet but show you are waiting for a response by looking at them. Remember that ten seconds can seem like a really long time so if it helps count it quietly in your head.

5. **Repeat the same instruction word for word**
   It helps the pupil to process the information if when repeating an instruction, you use the exact same words, for example:

   "Jim, do you want banana or apple?" is repeated – do not change it to a sentence meaning the same message:

   "Which one would you like Jim - apple or banana?"

APPENDIX F

Gestalt Language Processors (GLP)

Stages of GLP

- Stage 1 – Whole gestalts: Language is learned and used in large "chunks" with rich intonation. Utterances may sound like babble and are often used out of context.
- Stage 2 – Mitigation: Pupils begin to "mix and match" parts of gestalts, e.g. *"Let's go"* + *"eat pizza."*
- Stage 3 – Isolation: Pupils start to isolate single words or short combinations, e.g. *"pizza," "got dinosaur."*
- Stage 4 – Beginning grammar: Pupils begin to generate their own simple, grammatical language.
- Stages 5–6 – Advanced grammar: Pupils use more complex, self-generated sentences and grammar structures.

Strategies for Supporting GLP Learners

- Be led by the child: Use play opportunities and incorporate their interests and hobbies to create natural communication moments. Spend time tuning in to their communication to understand what they are expressing.
- Reduce questions: GLP learners are not typically able to answer questions independently until around Stage 4. Instead, use natural language and comment during play to model communication.
- Acknowledge and respect their communication style: Show understanding through responses such as smiling, nodding, saying "yeah" or "ok," or repeating the gestalt back to them.
- Be a language detective: Try to uncover the meaning behind unintelligible utterances by considering what the child has been watching, listening to, or hearing from others.

Useful sentence starters for modelling

Lets +
I'm +
We're+
It's +
Look at+
Where's+
How about+

APPENDIX G

PECS

PECS teaches the pupil how to communicate or what the basic rules of communication are, then the pupil learns to communicate specific messages. The pupil learns to communicate first with single pictures, but later learns to combine pictures to learn a variety of grammatical structures and communicative functions.

PECS Phases

Phase I – Physical Exchange

Phase II – Distance and Persistence

Phase III – Discrimination of Symbols

Phase IV – Sentence Structure (I want …….) then attributes

Phase V – Answering "what do you want?"

Phase VI – Commenting in response to a question

APPENDIX H

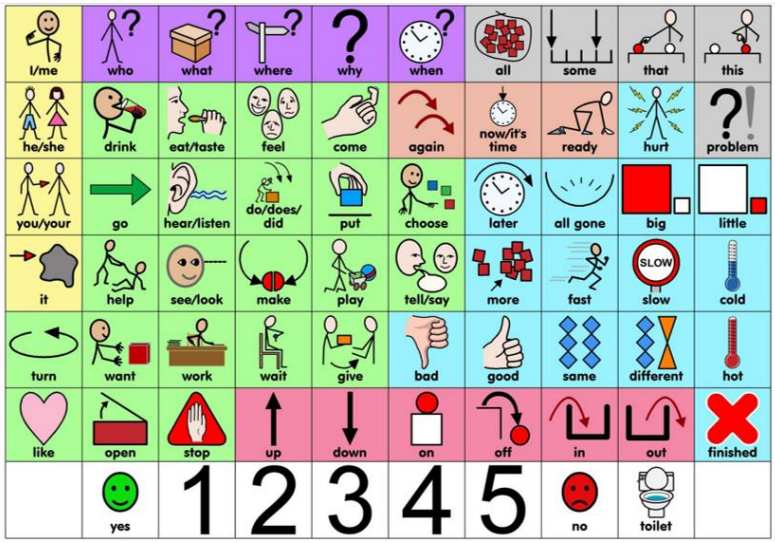
Core Boards and Communication Books

Access to core words enables AAC users to communicate for a wide variety of purposes; for example, to request, comment or share an opinion. It is therefore important that communication is not limited to nouns alone. AAC learners need frequent, meaningful opportunities in their daily lives to be immersed in their AAC system and to see and hear others using it for real, purposeful communication throughout the day.

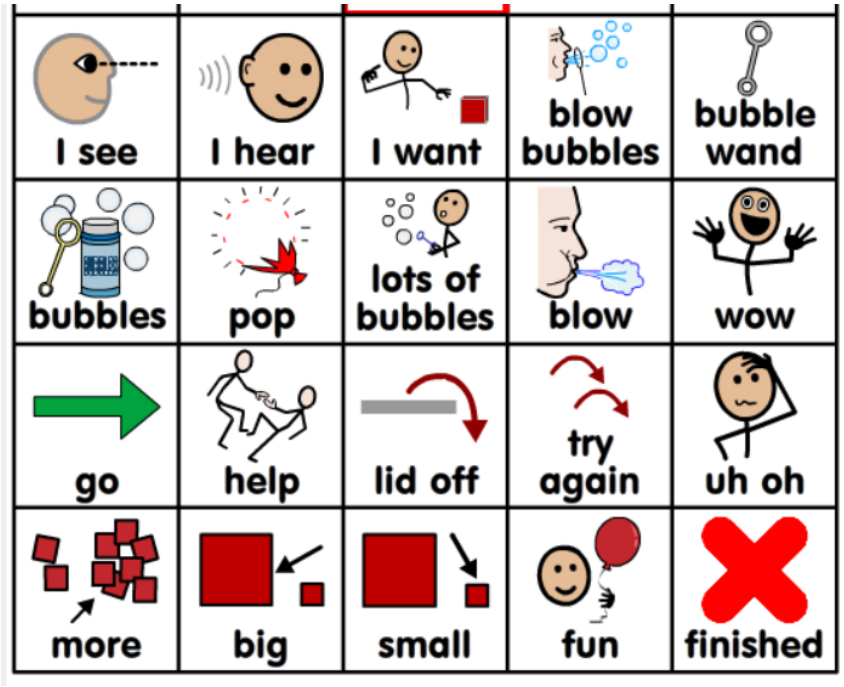
Model Regularly and Consistently

- Modelling demonstrates how symbols can become a natural part of everyday interaction.
- It mirrors the natural language development process, showing pupils how communication works in real contexts.
- It helps the learner understand the meaning of words and how they can be used.
- We model language without expecting a response, reducing pressure and encouraging exploration of new vocabulary in a relaxed way.
- Begin by saying a sentence and modelling a key word on the board.
- Model one step above the AAC user's current level-for example, if they are not yet using single words, model at the single-word level and point to a key word only. You do not need to point to every word you say.
- Adjust your modelling to suit the AAC user's stage of development. For example, if the learner is not yet pointing to symbols, point to one key word at a time.
- There is no expectation for pupils to point to symbols when they are first introduced to a communication board.

School Core Board



Bubbles Activity Board



Visual Scene Display

ask about
BRING US A SAMPLE AND WE
introducir

APPENDIX I

High-tech Devices

High-tech AAC provides a range of benefits, including enhanced communication, increased independence, improved social interaction and support for language development. These devices give individuals a voice, greater control over their environment and can be personalised to meet specific needs-helping to improve overall quality of life. They may be used to support developing speech, to augment existing speech or as a primary means of communication for non-speaking individuals.

There is a wide variety of AAC systems available, and no single approach suits everyone. Each pupil at YBD is assessed to identify the most appropriate AAC tools for their needs. Some pupils may use a combination of systems, such as PECS and core boards, alongside a high-tech device.

Staff are trained in the use, adaptation, and implementation of a range of AAC devices. The school currently has ten devices using TD Snap, an accessible communication app designed for individuals who cannot speak or who need support to be understood. Featuring natural-sounding voices, including real children's voices, TD Snap offers a simple yet powerful AAC solution.

Children are routinely referred to the NHS EATS service for assessment. When accepted, a Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) will recommend the most appropriate AAC system, tailor the device to the individual, and provide training for both the AAC user and their communication partners to ensure successful use.

Each child using a high-tech device will also have a low-tech communication option, ensuring they can always express themselves regardless of technology availability.

APPENDIX J

Signing

Signalong is the school's speech supported signing system.

Five top tips for signing

1. The spoken words should always be used alongside the sign (never the sign on its own).
2. Used the Signing Window-this extends from the top of the head to the waist and just beyond each shoulder.

3. Position – ensure that the pupil can see you, ideally down at their level.
4. Only sign the key words in the sentence (one sign may be all that is needed – e.g. "It is time to go to the bus" can be signed with just 'bus')
5. Practise and practise with colleagues to ensure consistency.

APPENDIX K

Intensive Interaction

Intensive interaction teaches and develops the “fundamentals of communication”. This is an approach that uses eye contact, facial expression, body language and verbalisations through turn taking to exchange the patterns of conversation.

What is Intensive Interaction?

The pupil gradually learns to communicate as they grow, develop and socialise. Intensive Interaction builds on the existing communication skills your child already has.

It focuses on the interactions that happen naturally between adults and children throughout the course of any day. These are the light-hearted, fun, face-to-face exchanges of eye contact, facial expression, touch or sounds.

We need to communicate with pupils on their own level, so they can understand and relate to us. If we do this, they may be more responsive and sociable in a verbal or non-verbal way.

How can it benefit the child?

- Intensive Interaction sees the child as an individual - important for their self-esteem.
- It can help to strengthen the relationship you have with the child.
- It may help the child feel more relaxed and secure. This may have a positive effect on their behaviour.
- It may help children who feel isolated, anxious and who may head bang or who rock to blank out confusion. Intensive Interaction can help them to develop early communication skills.

APPENDIX L

Curiosity Programme

The Curiosity programme has been developed by a Speech and Language Therapist to support children in the very early stages of communication. It is underpinned by Intensive Interaction and uses play-based activities to help children with social communication differences develop early joint attention skills, experience a shared sense of fun and feel motivated to engage with adults.

Key features:

- Based on research into strategies that support the development of early communication skills.
- Delivered on a one-to-one basis.
- Supports joint attention, social interaction, and communication.
- Encourages adults to join the child in their activity, interests and play, building skills in sharing attention and enjoyment through activities or sensory play.

Delivery of the Curiosity Programme

The supporting adult engages the pupil through child-led play using interesting and inspiring resources. Activities are presented in curiosity boxes or bags to spark interest and encourage engagement.

APPENDIX M

Attention Autism

Attention Autism is an intervention model designed by Gina Davies, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist. It aims to develop natural and spontaneous communication through the use of highly visually and sensory based and motivating activities. It is a group activity that develops shared attention and social communication skills such as eye contact, understanding of facial expressions and how to take turns. It aims to prompt communication through fun and laughter, creating shared positive experiences.

Although Attention Autism is a lot of fun, it follows a structured routine which is made up of four stages:

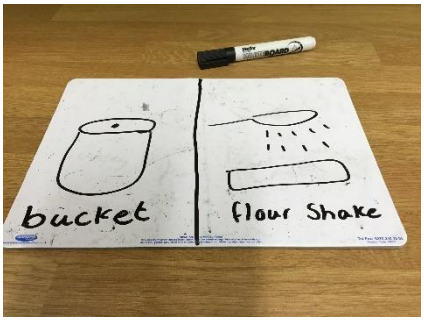
Stage 1 The bucket

Stage 2 The attention builder

Stage 3 The Interactive game

Stage 4 The table activities

The use of a whiteboard help gives the pupils the understanding of what comes next and when an activity has finished.



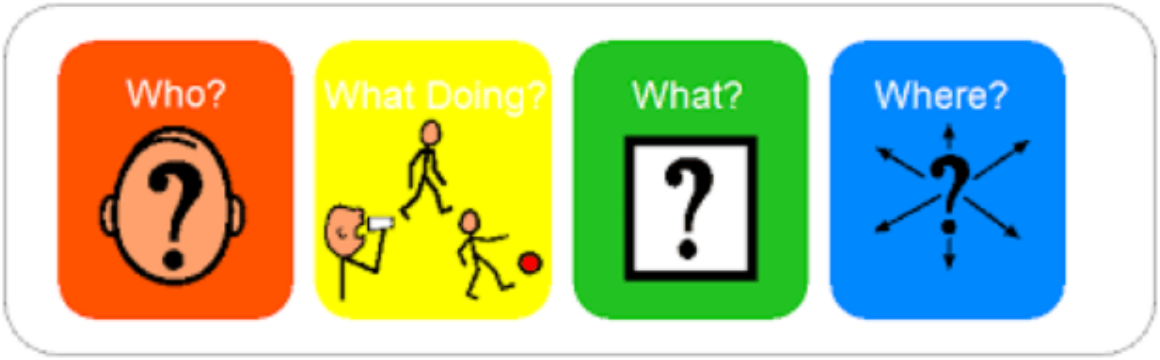
APPENDIX N

Colourful Semantics

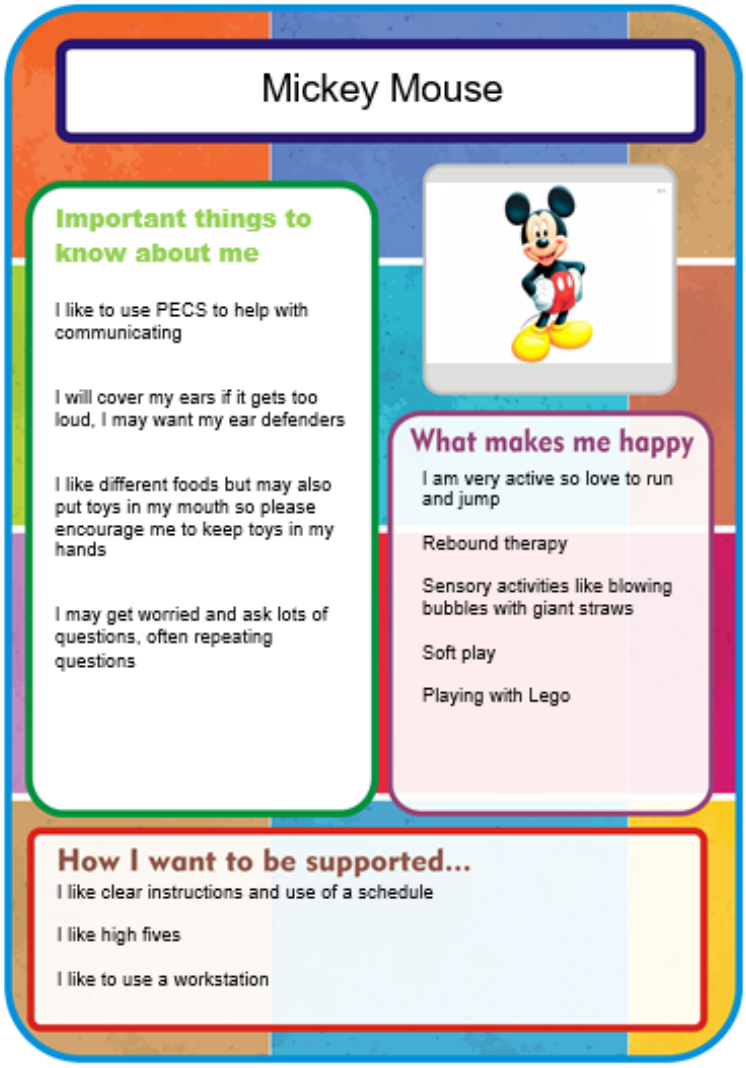
Colourful semantics is an approach to support spoken and written language. It aims to help children develop skills when it comes to understanding language by supporting sentence development, understanding questions, understanding written text and developing vocabulary.

It uses colour structure with symbols to help the pupil learn the meaning of the language Patten.

There are four main areas Who, Doing what, What and Where. It uses nouns and verbs then builds up to add in adjectives and more complex language structure. It can be made personal to the pupils by using photographs of themselves or their peers.



APPENDIX O

One Page Profile

Every pupil in the school has a One Page Profile detailing personal information such as individual communication uses (e.g. PECS), likes and dislikes and personal care. These One Page Profiles are displayed in each classroom to ensure that pupils are supported in their preferred manner. It provides information to supply staff giving consistent support to each pupil.