



Pupil Communication & Voice Policy

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An academy within:



Learning together, to be the best we can be



1. Context

- 1.1. Communication forms a central part of the school day at North Ridge Community School. Our aim is to provide a total communication enabling environment, where young people have access to communicate effectively and develop their own means of communication appropriate to their individual needs. We use an individualised approach for each pupil to meet the young person's specific speech, language, and communication needs. We aim to provide opportunities to give every pupil a 'voice' and create opportunities for communication throughout the curriculum, to enable each young person to communicate to the best of their ability. We aim to support families using communication strategies at home to provide pupils with consistency between home and school.
- 1.2. At North Ridge Community school, we use a number of methods and tools to best support the young person's speech, language, and communication needs. We do not follow one approach as the needs of each pupil vary. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to any means by which an individual can supplement or replace spoken communication. Augmentative communication methods support individuals by enhancing any existing speech. Alternative communication methods provide individuals with a way to communicate when speech is not possible or effective. AAC can also help the user's understanding, as well as provide a means of communication. There are two types of AAC – aided (requires use of equipment or tools in addition to a person's body) and unaided (does not require any external equipment or tools), most AAC users combine both methods.
- 1.3. Unaided communication does not require additional equipment; people use many unaided methods to communicate, for example body language, pointing, eye pointing, facial expressions, vocalisations, gestures, and signing (Makaton).
- 1.4. Aided communication requires equipment or tools in addition to a person's body.
- 1.5. Equipment used across North Ridge Community school includes no/low tech and high tech. No/low tech AAC includes the use of Makaton, paper-based symbols/photographs, visual schedules, communication books, objects of reference and simple switches. High tech AAC devices are computer-based systems that enable an individual to communicate as and when they require. This is known as SNUG (Spontaneous Novel Utterance Generation). At North Ridge we use Grid 3 software which has a wide range of symbols and text-based grid sets suitable for all abilities and ages. Grid 3 is a complete communication solution accessible across school that enables our pupils to have a voice, control their environment and become more independent.



2. Helping people to communicate improves their quality of life.

- 2.1. Communication is the successful transmission of a message from one person to another and is not limited to the use of formal systems, such as speech, sign or written word. All children have the right to communicate. The overall aim of the AAC provision is to provide each pupil with a 'voice'; in which they become effective and life long communicators. We aim for every pupil to leave North Ridge with the understanding and use of functional vocabulary to communicate effectively for a range of purposes.
- 2.2. All pupils have the right to access the service of a speech and language therapist whilst in North Ridge Community School, when it is felt that a young person requires additional support beyond the daily offer. Access to which is done through a referral system in co-operation with the family and the professionals educating the child.

3. Pupil Voice

- 3.1. The term pupil voice refers to a way of listening to the views of children and young people and/or involving them in decision making; at North Ridge Community School we promote the use of modified and adapted devices to ensure ALL pupils are provided with the opportunity to express opinions and to communicate in all aspects of their own lives.
- 3.2. All pupils are given equal opportunities to communicate in all areas of their school day and all pupil's individual communication needs are considered. North Ridge Community School and Nexus Academy Trust aims to ensure all pupils have access to the school curriculum at a level appropriate to their development, and where appropriate they will provide access to AAC resources and high-quality teaching approaches to support development of pupils' communication and interaction.
- 3.3. We aim to provide a "total communication" environment where all modes of communication are equally valued and pupils are given opportunities to make choices, initiate conversations, and express their own ideas and opinions. Staff are trained to be confident using a wide range of communication strategies that are unique and personalised to each pupil.



4. Collaboration with other agencies

- 4.1. Collaboration with the families is viewed as essential and a successful introduction of AAC systems. Families who are involved in the decision making process are more able to extend use of the strategies into the child's home and social networks.
- 4.2. Collaboration with other agencies (including Speech and Language Therapy) may be required where the scope and experience of the school staff is limited; this collaboration may take the form of a referral for a particular service or an outside agency visiting school to provide support and training.
- 4.3. Organisation of training for families where a pupil has an individual AAC device and or a particular technique of communication should be implemented by the AAC co-ordinator; outside agencies may be involved where appropriate.
- 4.4. Training should be considered as ongoing and needs led. Teachers and staff should make the AAC co-ordinator aware if staff need updated training, or are unsure how the pupil uses their communication device/system.
- 4.5. All training programmes should be regularly reviewed, reappraised and updated. Equal Opportunity and Involvement.
- 4.6. The school will:
 - 4.6.1. Encourage communicative awareness within the classroom by providing opportunities for all pupils to express basic needs, thoughts and feelings.
 - 4.6.2. Provide a communication environment where signs and symbols are used routinely to enhance learning opportunities.
 - 4.6.3. Provide a collaborative approach to assessing and supporting pupils who require more formalised augmented and/or alternative communication systems (AAC).
 - 4.6.4. Ensure continuity of augmentative and/or alternative communication used within the classroom to support learning.
 - 4.6.5. Ensure pupils have a voice for safeguarding policies and procedures.



5. Ways in which pupil voice is enabled at North Ridge Community School

5.1. We provide education for young people aged 3 to 19 years who have a range of conditions and learning difficulties including a large percentage with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition. In line with their diagnoses, lots of pupils at North Ridge Community School have difficulties with communication and interaction. Communication underpins all learning and independence as well as giving the children a 'voice'. We are committed to providing a total communication environment and endeavour to celebrate all of the different methods of communication that the pupils use in our school as well as encourage them to learn something new.

5.2. **Intensive interaction**

This is an approach designed to help those who are at early stages of development; including people who have autism; people who have severe, profound or complex learning difficulties. Intensive interaction works on early interaction abilities- how to enjoy being with other people – to relate, interact, know, understand and practice communication routines. Intensive interaction support individuals to develop the 'Fundamentals of communication'.

5.3. **Makaton**

At North Ridge community school, we use Makaton signing alongside spoken key words to aid verbal language development and support understanding. The pupils are introduced weekly to a new 'Sign of the Week' and this is uploaded onto the website to share with parents. Gestures, actions and body language is an important and universally used form of communication by all. For young people who find it difficult to communicate verbally, gestures and actions may be used as a tool for communicating their needs and opinions to others. We can support young people to extend their natural vocabulary of gestures, actions and body language by teaching them new signs to represent the items and activities that are important to them.

5.4. **Widgit Symbols**

Widgit Symbols are used throughout the school environment. All symbols are to have the written word underneath as this supports the young person with their early literacy skills. A consistent font is used on symbols. Young people who use symbols as a means of expressive communication must have access to their symbols at all times so they can initiate interactions. Staff wear symbols on their lanyards.



5.5. **Visual Aids**

At North Ridge, we ensure we create an enriched total-communication environment. Many of the young people are supported by the use of visual aids. Visual aids such as timetables, now and next boards, choice boards, transition cards, objects of reference and symbol cards aid the young person's understanding of the structure of the day and their understanding of expectations placed on them. Areas within the setting should be clearly defined with symbols.

5.6. **High & Mid Tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication**

Mid-tech devices can range from a single switches, Big Mac's and single touch communication boards. These devices enable the pupil to develop a range of functional communication; this may include but is not limited to greeting others, making choices, commenting, expressing opinions and giving information.

At North Ridge every class has access to the use of high-tech AAC. All classrooms have Grid 3 software installed onto desktops and each classroom also has an iPad; a further bank of iPads with Grid3 installed can be booked for teaching and learning purposes. The software is designed to be used by anyone with complex communication or access needs and includes a wide range of vocabularies and tools that can be controlled through touch, switch, eye gaze and pointing devices. Hardware is audited on a yearly basis to ensure it is fit for purpose for the software to be accessed effectively.

5.7. **Communication Boards and Books**

Some of the young people at North Ridge are at the stage of using communication boards/ books. These are used to develop and progress on from single symbol use. Communication boards/books are used to organise vocabulary to support expression and comprehension for individuals as well as a support for sentence building. Communication boards can be used for both young people who are non-speaking or have some spoken language as they are a tool to support speech, not to replace it.

5.8. **Attention Autism**

Attention Autism is an intervention model designed by Gina Davies, Speech and Language Therapist. It aims to develop natural and spontaneous communication through the use of visually based and highly motivating activities. The primary objective is that the sessions are fun and offer an irresistible invitation to learn. Where appropriate we use this approach with our pupils to develop their concentration and to improve their joint attention, as well as supporting the increase of non-verbal and verbal communication through commenting.