

Ravenswood School

Communication Policy



Introduction

To achieve the school vision to “**Dream, Achieve, Believe**” we believe everyone has the right to be heard and know that they have been listened to. At the heart of effective communication lies interaction.

All of the pupils at Ravenswood communicate. For some pupils, others within the school community need to take time and adapt their own communication to engage with them meaningfully.

Communication is the exchange of information by any means possible. This includes:

- Written
- Oral- Vocalisation and tone
- Body language and behaviour
- Facial expression
- Eye contact/ eye gaze
- Gesture
- Pointing and leading
- Makaton/ signing
- Photographs and symbols
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Objects of Reference
- Songs of Reference- see appendix 1
- Communication aids e.g. Go talk or iPad apps
- High and low tech Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC)
- Behaviour

Pupils at Ravenswood have a variety of different communication needs and levels. We are aware they may perform better in either their receptive or expressive language skills. Communication is not limited to one form or another, so we recognise that Ravenswood should be a ‘Total Communication Environment’ responding to pupil’s needs and using their communication as a start point. We then need to develop a reliable communication method for each pupil.

Aims

- At the end of each key stage we set clear goals for all of our pupils to achieve- see *our curriculum intent*.
- To provide an environment rich in communication opportunities in its many forms.
- To celebrate when pupils achieve communication in the most appropriate form.
- To provide communication opportunities that build on prior learning and extend pupils’ abilities to be heard utilising the most appropriate system for the pupil, their family and their community.
- For pupils who have specialised forms of communication to be understood by staff and peers and know that they are understood.
- To provide a high level of expertise in different communication methods amongst the school staff and other professionals.



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- For communication to be recognised as cross-curricular and key to accessing all learning opportunities. All pupils should have meaningful opportunities to communicate in their preferred mode throughout the school day.
- For assessment to have due regard to the individual's communication method.
- To ensure pupils' achievements are not limited by adults not having the skills, time or empathy to communicate using communication methods particular to the individual.

Objectives

Each pupil will acquire, use and develop his/her language and communication skills across subjects, people and situations both in school and in the wider community. Communication is everyone's responsibility. Staff are expected to adapt their communication to meet the needs of individual pupils. This means;

- Staff have core skills in different communication methods including symbols, Makaton and reading body language.
- Know finger spelling and Ravenswood's Makaton Handbook signs.
- Staff to use symbols (Widgit) and portable symbols to ensure interaction for every child around the school site.
- For portable symbols to be made available to regular visitors to the school.
- For symbols to be visible in all areas of the school.

The persons responsible for co-ordinating Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) within the school are the Speech and Language Therapists (SALT) with advice sought from the Paediatric Communication Aids Service (PCAS). They meet to discuss issues of AAC as required for the individual pupil and work closely with families and class teams.

Strategies to be used at Ravenswood school to enhance communication.

1. Receptive language:

Ensure that language used in lessons and communication is appropriate to the receptive language of the student.

You will find an analysis of the receptive and expressive language of all students within the care plan of each student. All pupils are assessed within 6 weeks of starting at Ravenswood on their communication abilities and this is recorded and regularly updated to inform teacher's planning. This information needs to be used in all interactions with the student. So for example if the student has a recorded receptive language of two-word phrases such as "Good sitting" or "Good listening" would be appropriate. Some other useful phrases include "hands down" or "feet down".

Avoid using negative, e.g. don't run/no spitting, as Ravenswood School promotes the use of positive language. Positive suggestions of replacement behaviour should be suggested and directed by adults such as "feet on floor", rather than "don't climb", or "walk in corridor" rather than "don't run".

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2. Motivators during Time to Talk:

Many of our pupils, especially those who are on the Autistic spectrum, find social communication very difficult. We need to provide powerful motivators at times when we are teaching them to communicate socially.

Food and drink items are typically strong motivators. We maintain Healthy Food Standards for lunches. However, we provide motivating drinks (high juice orange and blackcurrant) and foods (cereals and plain biscuits) for the pupils to choose as a snack during Time to Talk sessions. Wherever possible we encourage and reward a healthier choice (e.g. water, fruit, yogurts, raisins) but we are aware that for some pupils they need the strong motivators to encourage them to communicate.

3. Use of symbols:

For continuity purposes, Widgit symbols should be used across the school. The symbol should be of a sufficient size for pupils to access the meaning of the symbol. This is particularly important for pupils with a visual impairment.

All pupils should have access to a timetable. For those with particular communication difficulties a clearly displayed visual timetable for the day will be more appropriate; this will be specified on their care plan/ EHCP and be tailor made to the needs of the pupil (see Timetable guidelines). Visual timetables should reflect the activities of the day – including changes to what normally happens. These are supported by songs of reference in Primary and Social Communication Classes.

Pupils working at levels 1-3, would have access to songs and objects of reference to support visual symbols of what activity they are doing. Moving towards 'now and next'.

At level 4- 9 in reading, pupils would have access to a whole-class large timetable and if appropriate to their needs, an individual timetable, located at or near their desk or workstation. This will have photos, pictures or symbols to support their understanding. For those pupils with severe visual impairments songs and objects of reference will continue to be used alongside brailled symbols.

At level 10-11, pupils would have access to an individual timetable and all symbols will be supported by words (brailled for those with severe visual impairments).

Pupils working at level 12-13+ would follow a classroom, teacher led timetable but may still benefit from an individual timetable. Often these would just consist of the words for their lessons.

Where applicable, symbols should be available in the classroom to enable communication of need. Portable symbols should be used outside of the classroom. Pupils who use PECs or a symbol system to communicate should have access to their PECs book/ communication book/AAC at all times throughout the school day.

All staff should carry with them a selection of symbols throughout the day and use these to guide pupils appropriately. Spare sets of symbols are available for visitors and temporary staff.



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A selection of symbols, reflecting the snack options, is available for choosing at snack time.

4. Makaton:

As a number of our pupils use Makaton/ signing as their main form of communication, staff will use Makaton signs where appropriate to support pupil's understanding of spoken language. As it is important that these pupils are able to communicate with others around school, we teach specific weekly Makaton lessons for pupils up to the end of KS3 in Social Communication classes. For Social Communication Learners this is an alternative to learning French as a Modern Foreign Language. For Formal Learners, a weekly Time to Talk session will teach them the key vocabulary they need to communicate with their peers and to help with understanding the current topic.

The Makaton subject leader prepares a weekly set of 'signs of the week' which are shared during Monday briefing to all staff, and centred around a particular topic or relevant theme. These are shared with pupils during Time to Talk sessions throughout the week.

As a school we have created a Ravenswood Makaton Handbook which consists of the key vocabulary needed for social interactions and understanding basic school terminology. All staff are trained in the school core signs. Recordings of these can be found on our school website.

5. De-escalation techniques:

55% of communication is non-verbal, all staff are trained in Safer Interventions to ensure that they make good use of non-verbal cues and communication techniques. Communication in these instances include: posture, proximity and position.

To communicate with a child who has been over-stimulated and is anxious the following applies:

- Withdraw to a safe place.
- Remain calm and speak in a low, consistent tone
- Use positive language, e.g. focus on what you want the child to do, not the behaviour the child is exhibiting.
- Reduce verbal communication to minimum - 1 or 2 word phrases to redirect the pupil. For some pupils no language should be used – only visual prompts
- Use symbols to reinforce important messages
- Follow pupils' Positive Behaviour Support plans/risk assessments.

Adults should model positive interactions throughout all engagement and relationships, including between pupils/ staff and in adult interactions. Praising small compliances and using positive language to support communication and interactions will aid in guiding pupils to understand how to create and maintain positive communication and interactions, building self-esteem and helping pupils feel safe at school.

Expectations of pupils

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Communicating with pupils with communication difficulties in a meaningful way often elicits a similar response and helps increase their confidence in making communication attempts.

We expect all pupils to show tolerance and an interest in engaging appropriately with those pupils with communication needs. All pupils are encouraged to develop basic signing skills. Some of our older pupils choose to support pupils with communication difficulties in assemblies and on the playground. All pupils have the opportunity to learn and experience Makaton signs in department assemblies, 'time to talk', whole school communal celebration assemblies, and whole-school Makaton songs (usually produced at Christmas, Easter and end of academic year). Signing and joining in this collaborative communication approach should be supported and encouraged by all, for all.

All pupils work towards End of Key Stage Standards which include a number of communication specific targets. These ensure that all pupils can keep themselves safe, are ready for their next stage; and can express and explore what makes them happy.

Recording:

Pupils' communication needs are recorded in their Care Plan/EHCP. Their progress in communication development is reported through: Learning targets, Annual Reviews, End of Year Reports (Communication), 3x yearly data collections and where appropriate, SALT reports. These are all available to parents.

All pupils are assessed against the school communication level descriptors as part of the school English curriculum, which use end of year targets to set challenging goals. Staff should use a range of evidence to monitor and assess progress towards pupil outcomes through a variety of learning opportunities, not only in designated communication or speaking and listening lessons.

Communication devices

Where a communication device has been provided for an individual pupil following SALT advice, the device will be locked onto the recommended communication app e.g. predictable or proloquo2go. This is following SALT advice that it should be used exclusively for communicating to ensure that all pupils reach their full communicative potential. This will support the pupil as the communicator, and those they wish to communicate with to understand that they wish to exchange a message and not use the iPad for leisure.

As AAC (Augmentative Alternative Communication) devices are used to support pupil communication and allow them 'their voice'. Communication devices should be kept with pupils at all times to promote spontaneous and functional communication alongside structured learning opportunities. This includes accompanying pupils during less structured times in the school day such as lunch time and break time.

History of Document

Previous versions now deleted from system. New issue:

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New Issue No.	Author/Owner	Date Reviewed	Approved by Governors on	Comments
5	School	April 2017	10/5/17	
6	School	April 2018	9/5/18	
7	School	May 2019		
8.	School	April 2020	05/06/2020	Updated with New school vision, introduction of Makaton Handbook and Makaton lessons. Also updated with more specific guidance for pupils with severe visual impairments
9.	School	May 2021	12.05.2021	Updated with links to Makaton videos and appendix 1- songs of reference used in social communication classes.
10.	School	May 2023	10.05.2023	Explicit links made to end of key stage outcomes, further detail about non verbal communication in line with Safer Interventions training and minor clarification updates,
11.	School	May 2025	07.05.2025	There had been some minor changes to the policy and an update to reflect the SEND Information report.
12.	School	May 2026		Minor changes to reflect reduction of PECS use and increase of symbols as a general term.

Linked Policies:

Behaviour Policy

Assessment Policy

Curriculum Policy

Teaching and Learning Policy

Link to school Makaton Handbook:

<https://www.ravenswoodschool.org.uk/assets/components/resources/teaching-and-learning/teaching-strategies/Makaton%20Handbook%20-%20Nov%202025.pdf>

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Links to School Makaton signs videos:

<https://www.ravenswoodschool.org.uk/teaching-and-learning/teaching-strategies/makaton-handbook-signs.html>. **Appendix 1 - Songs of Reference**

Core songs:

Morning circle-time song

(Tune- Are you here? Harry Strong)

X (pupil's name/ class name) are you here, are you here x2

X Are you here, or are you over there?

X are you here, are you here?

I am here, I am here x2 ('We are here' if class not individual)

I am here I'm not over there.

I am here, I am here.

Checking timetable song – for every lesson/activity switch

(Tune- this is the way we...)

It's time to check our timetables, timetables, timetables,

It's time to check our timetables, it's time for XX.

Lunch time song

(Tune-spoken fast)

Thank you for the world so sweet ho hum,

Thank you for the food we eat yum yum,

Thank you for the birds that sing-along-along,

Thank you for everything,

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Ho hum, yum yum, sing-aling!

ADD ON:

Before I eat my tea at night,

I give those germs a nasty fright,

I wash my hands until I think,

I've washed those germs right down the sink.

Afternoon circle-time song

(Tune- Hello everyone – Harry Strong)

Hello X (Class/ Pupil name), how are you? X3

How are you today?

Hello everyone, I'm alright/ Ok/ happy/ sad. x3

Thank you very much.

Home time song

(Tune and longer version - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGT9hjGcA10>)

Day-O, Day- O, we had fun but it's time to go home.

Day, we say Day- O, we had fun but it's time to go home.

Day- O, Day- O, we had fun but it's time to go home.

Gold – on the traffic lights

(Tune: Spandau Ballet)

You're on gold! Gold!

Always believe in yourself.

Additional supporting songs:

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Tidy up song

(Tune- one finger and thumb keep moving)

We stop, we stop, we finish, x3,
it's time to tidy up!

Snack time

(Tune- In and out the dusty bluebells)

*Let's sit down and have our snack,
let's sit down and have our snack,
let's sit down and have our snack before it's time for play.*

Assembly song

(Tune- On top of Old Smokey)

*It's time for assembly, we sit and we stay,
it's time for assembly, then out to play.*

Swimming

Tune- Just keep swimming (Finding Nemo)

Let's go swimming x2

End of play/lunch time

(Tune-I hear thunder)

*Playtime's finished, playtimes finished,
in we go, in we go.
Now it's time for X class, now it's time for X class,
In we go, in we go.*

Washing hands

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(Tune-wash your dirty hands, Sticky Kids)

Wash your dirty hands,

Wash your dirty hands,

Rub and scrub and rub and scrub,

And wash your dirty hands