

## Inclusive Communication Policy

### 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to describe the ethos and practice of Inclusive Communication across all of Ambitious about Autism's schools, colleges and communications, recognising that communication difficulties, such as reading, writing, formal language and symbolic understanding, can affect not only our students, but also wider members of society, including families and advocates.

### 2. Statutory & Non-Statutory Guidance

- Equalities Act, 2010 [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Inclusive communication - GOV.UK](#)
- [Inclusive communication overview | RCSLT](#)

### 3. Policy Statement

This policy has been written to describe Ambitious about Autism's approach to Inclusive Communication because good communication is important to all aspects of quality of life including:

- Relationships and being part of the community
- Achieving academically, building skills and fulfilling potential
- Physical and mental well-being
- Being able to self-advocate and have choice and control over one's life
- Confidence, resilience and managing life's challenges.

### 4. Key principles

This Inclusive Communication policy is based upon all of our student's indisputable rights to be:

- treated with dignity and compassion
- valued
- listened to, and have choices heard in line with the Mental Capacity Act (2005)
- supported to have the best quality of life possible
- empowered to make choices and decide on how they want to live their life, and communicate these effectively in all situations; school/college, home, and community.

Research shows that people without effective communication are at increased risk of:

- A lack of choices and involvement in everyday decisions
- Limited relationships
- Increased vulnerability to abuse and hate crime
- Low mood, anxiety and depression, and withdrawal from community life.

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- Reduced employment and housing opportunities; increased placement breakdowns.
- Lower standard of healthcare, diagnostic overshadowing, and more inpatient admissions.
- Over reliance by staff on restrictive approaches and interventions.
- Overuse of specialist services.
- Increased use of behaviour which challenges, mental health distress or offending.
- Poor access to verbally-mediated therapeutic input focused on criminal offences.
- Staff teams consistently overestimating an individual’s abilities, impacting negatively on staff perceptions and affecting the individual’s overall care.
- Poor compliance with the legal requirements of the Mental Capacity Act, Human Rights Act, Disability Discrimination Act and Equality Act.

We adopt a person-centred, equalities-based approach to promoting communication whereby all forms of communication are equally valued. We support pupils/students to trial and adopt the forms of communication that work best for them within their profile of strengths and needs.

Communication is a two-way process and can only exist in the context of:

- Positive everyday relationships and interactions
- People valuing individual personality, strengths, interests and communication style
- Meaningful joint activities and experiences
- People who can understand communication needs and adjust their communication accordingly.

The aims of our inclusive communication policy align with the Royal College of Speech & Language Therapist’s Five Good Communication Standards, which are:

- There is a detailed description of how best to communicate with individuals.
- Settings demonstrate how they support individuals with communication needs to be involved with decisions about their care and their services.
- Staff value and use competently the best approaches to communication with each individual they support.
- Settings create opportunities, relationships and environments that make individuals want to communicate.
- Individuals are supported to understand and express their needs in relation to their health and wellbeing.

### **Inclusive environments**

The most effective way to support the development of communication skills of children and young people with autism is through ongoing and natural interactions within the social environment as part of meaningful activities and warm relationships. Through our universal offer (the provision available to all pupils/learners in our settings), all staff at Ambitious support and promote communication and its development throughout every part of every day, through formal and informal learning opportunities in lessons, play, social interaction and by having fun together.

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Good communication is present in:

- The physical environment – communication aids; visual timetables; clear, accessible labels; clear activity instructions and learning materials at the right language and communication level for individuals
- The social environment – staff interacting with pupils/students (not just to deliver instruction) at the right language and communication level and responding to student's communication attempts.

Speech & Language therapists support this through universal level work alongside Senior Leadership Teams, including activities such as audits and observations, staff training, observations, modelling and coaching staff.

In our settings, all forms of communication are respected and responded to. Students are enabled to make use of a wide range of strategies to communicate their wants, needs, ideas, feelings and thoughts, including:

- facial expression, gesture or eye-gaze
- tactile communication or objects of reference
- signing systems such as Makaton
- low tech alternative and augmentative (AAC) systems such as PECS and communication books (using photos, pictures or symbols)
- high tech AAC systems such as communication systems using specialist software installed on tablets
- vocalisations, single words or spoken sentences
- technology, such as texting, WhatsApp, facetime

The decision about which modes of communication to teach and use is based on an individual and specialist assessment by our Speech & Language Therapy team of student's strengths and needs, communication and cognitive abilities alongside previous responses to different communication systems. All progress is valued and celebrated, not just progress with speech.

Curriculum staff and the Speech & Language Therapists work together to ensure:

- Everyone is clear about the best methods to support the student's understanding and expressive communication
- There are jointly set targets and plans for how to develop communication skills in a way that is meaningful and functional for the student
- Where specialist interventions or onward referrals are needed, that these are completed in a timely way.
- Specific resources or equipment to support communication are provided
- Specialist assessment and provision of AAC is based on individual student profiles, and these systems are accessible in all settings, including home, school/college and community.

## Monitoring

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Monitoring the presence of appropriately differentiated communication environments is a joint responsibility between curriculum leaders and Speech & Language Therapists. This is achieved through:

- Physical and social environmental audits and joint Trust-Based Observations
- Jointly set targets in school / college development plans
- Ensuring that each student has a current Integrated Plan which clearly indicates individualised communication supports.
- Monitoring the impact of communication training in terms of changes in staff behaviour in the classroom and not just enjoyment / knowledge training outcomes
- Ensuring that sufficient S&LT time is allocated to indirect activity, focusing on the communication environment, not just direct intervention with a pupil/ student.

## **5. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **a. Staff will:**

- Understand each student’s receptive and expressive needs and ensure communication is adapted, in line with recommendations in their individual Integrated Plan
- Deliver / engage in training, to ensure that all staff have the necessary communication skills to communicate with students
- Ensure available communication aids are used consistently, and gaps or barriers are flagged to the Speech & Language Therapy team
- Ensure that families are also able to use communication tools in the home setting, to ensure pupils have a voice in all areas of their lives and that communication skills are generalised
- Follow up feedback from Integrated Services or SLT teams, to ensure that lesson delivery best meets the needs of students in classes

### **b. Learners/Pupils will:**

- Use all forms of communication available to communicate and self-advocate
- Provide feedback – verbal and non-verbal – about which communication tools do, and don’t work for them
- Respect the communication styles of their peers

### **c. Governors/Trustees ensure that:**

- The communication environment and practices in settings align with the values and practices in this policy
- There is opportunity to feedback and information about the use of appropriate inclusive communication as part of reviews of teaching quality, safeguarding processes and behaviour support and monitoring

### **d. Managers/ELT/SMT ensure that:**

- Communication is central in quality teaching, safeguarding, positive behaviour support and pupil voice is understood by all
- Support is given to ensure resources are available to enable all pupils who need it, to access high or low tech AAC
- The oversight, auditing and training is available to monitor and implement inclusive communication environments, in collaboration with Speech & Language Therapy Clinical Lead and teams

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- Parental communication needs are also considered at all stages, including assessment, EHCP annual review and parent’s evenings, including supporting English as a second language.

**6. Other Key Policies**

This policy should be read alongside the following other policies, which can be found on the website, or requested:

- Behaviour Policy
- Learner Mental Health and Well Being Policy
- Curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment
- Learner Voice
- EDI Policy
- Education Practice statement

**7. Monitoring Arrangements**

This policy should be reviewed every two years by the Head of Integrated Services and Clinical Lead for Speech & Language Therapy and approved by the Education and Care Committee.

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