



## Augmentative and Alternative Communication Policy

### Introduction/Rationale:

At KTS Academy communication and language is taught throughout the school at level appropriate to the age and individual needs of each pupil. An augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) approach is adopted by the use and teaching of a range and combination of different forms of communications – verbal language, Makaton signs, PCS symbols, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) photographs/pictures and objects of reference (OOR) and using the Ipad with the app Proloquo2go. ICT (through Voice Output Communication Aids-VOCAs such as Eyegaze systems, iPads, and switches) are used, where appropriate, to further enhance access throughout the curriculum.

AAC is overseen by our two English and Communication lead teachers. They are involved with all aspects of AAC – liaising with SALT, monitoring the use of AAC across school, through audits, lesson observations etc. We are also part of AAC networking groups involving special schools from across the region to share good practice and work towards common goals.

It must be ensured that all pupils are offered the opportunity to use the mode of communication that is identified as being their Chosen Method of Communication (CMC).

Speech and language therapists (SALT) with assistance from the Communication Champion support teachers in developing appropriate methods of communication for individual pupils. This often involves supporting parents, as consistent approaches are most effective.

### Pre-Linguistic Communication

Pupils who are non-verbal or at a pre-linguistic level of development need to employ many different strategies in order to communicate. These strategies need to be adopted in order to develop both comprehension and expression. Such strategies may include the use of: -

- Facial expression/body language/gesture
- Objects of reference:

This is an association of specific object with a familiar activity or routine. This opportunity enables pupils to anticipate/understand the routine of their school day. It is important that the objects are used consistently, both throughout the day and throughout the school. For example, cutlery may be used to indicate the arrival of lunchtime. Objects of reference are standardised across the school.

- Photographs/pictures and symbols

Once pupils have demonstrated an understanding of OOR, the next step would be to replace the objects with actual photographs and then progress to pictures/ symbols to be used in the same way. This may be developed further, allowing pupils the opportunity to make choices. For example, choosing milk or juice at snack time.

- Symbols

In school we adopt the use of Boardmaker, Communicate in Print and Proloquo2go (IPad) symbols, depending on individual pupils/situations. Pupils can use symbols to communicate for many purposes such as making requests, commenting and answering questions. Symbols can be used to support pupils in understanding their environment and different situations

for example for schedules, timetables, instructions, requests. Pupils who communicate using symbols, should be equipped to do so in all environments.

#### Visual Timetables

All classes throughout the academy have a visual timetable made using PCS-Picture Communication Symbols. The timetable is displayed in a prominent place and referred to throughout the day. Some classes support each symbol with an OOR or photo of reference. Some pupils have an individual smaller timetable using the same symbols or symbols referring to activities specific to that pupil. Symbols have been standardised, where possible to assist pupils as they move from class to class. Adaptations have included – size of the font and pictures, the names given to each session e.g. literacy, communication or English. Individual pupils may also have variations of certain symbols as decided by the teacher after agreement with the AAC co-ordinator.

Some students also benefit from a further breakdown of the visual timetable to visual structure of the individual lessons also.

- PECS

The objectives of the PECS system is for the pupil to spontaneously initiate communication. Pupils who are using PECS are taught to approach and give a picture of a desired item to a communicative partner in exchange for that item. While advancing through the phases of PECS, the pupil learns to sequence words to create sentences.

Phase 1 - Upon seeing a highly preferred item (Motivator) the pupil will pick up the picture of the item, reach towards the person with the desired item and release the picture into the persons hand. The item is given to the pupil immediately an exchange is made.

Phase 2 - The pupil is taught to discriminate between 2 pictures, one showing the desired object and one which the pupil obviously would not want, e.g. paper clip. If the pupil passes the picture of the undesirable object then the correct picture needs to be reinforced and the pupil may have to revert to phase 1. If the pupil exchanges correctly each time then we can progress on to phase 3.

Phase 3 - Once the pupil has achieved the previous 2 phases then they are taught to look through their PECS book for chosen item. At the time the "I want" card is introduced. This is placed on the sentence strip at the bottom of the book and the pupil is taught to place their desired object/picture reference next to it and hand the sentence strip to the adult.

Phase 4 - The student requests present and non present items using a multi word phrase by going to the book, picking up a picture of "I want," putting it on a sentence strip, picking out the picture of what is wanted, putting it on the sentence strip, removing the strip from the communication board, approaching the communicative partner, and giving the sentence strip to him/her.

Phase 5 - The student can spontaneously request a variety of items and can answer the question, "What do you want?"

Phase 6 - The student appropriately answers "What do you want?" "What do you see?" "What do you have?" and similar questions.

- Makaton

Makaton signing is used throughout school and was chosen as an appropriate method of signing as it was designed specifically for people with a learning disability. It is intended to provide functional communication and encourage and develop language and literacy skills through the combined use of signs and symbols with speech. The key principles of Makaton which we advocate are to sign key words, use a slower rate and use clear/precise signs. Signing is developmentally appropriate to the individual pupil and based around the usual development of early words. We consider vocabulary important to the child and their family and when introducing a sign, use the symbol/picture alongside. Spoken language is always used alongside signing.

All staff are given the opportunity to attend Makaton training through our onsite Regional Makaton Tutor.

### Developing Language

As pupils progress with their language skills, staff are aware of their needs and work to expand both comprehension and expression. Personal Goals are set to encourage students development in the areas most relevant to them. Again, spoken language, signs, symbols or ICT equipment may be used by pupils. Each pupil will select his/her own method of communication with the help and support of staff.

KTS1 and KTS2's work revolves around a 'topic' for each term or half term. Word, sign and symbol banks are used as appropriate for each child. For KTS3 and KTS+ students, word, sign and symbol banks will be utilised as appropriate.

With all these systems in place, the pupils should have access to the most relevant communication for them personally. Pupils will use what they find works most efficiently, supported by staff. It is important for any individual to be able to communicate with their peers as well as adults. Other pupils will be made aware of each individual's chosen communication methods. This may mean teaching a whole class simple signs or how to use a symbol board.

Some students in the academy have also taken on the role of Peer Sign Supporters where they have further training to learn the skills of Makaton signing and then support other students to use signs where appropriate.

### The Role of the Class Teacher

- In planning the communication approaches to use with individuals, **consultation with SALT must take place**, to assess their communication needs. Following this, a joint discussion should take place between teacher, SALT and parents to agree on a common approach.
- Before introducing a new communication approach, the symbolic/language level a pupil is working at needs to be considered for example:  
Objects → photographs → symbols → writing
- When managing the communication systems being used e.g. PECS, Makaton, SALT must be consulted. This includes when/whether to introduce a new system and also how it should develop e.g. moving through the phases of PECS. The decision to cease using a system must also be made in conjunction with the SALT and parents should also be consulted.
- Teachers must ensure that when pupils move classes, they are able to continue using their CMC at all times. This means that staff should receive adequate training where necessary and also that resources are made available to support this.
- Teachers must ensure that pupils progress, as far as possible, in their CMC e.g. moving through the phases of PECS.
- Pupils should have access to their CMC e.g. PECS book, at all times. This includes off-site visits, in the playground, assembly, lunchtimes etc.
- It must be ensured that a pupils CMC is not removed without consultation with SALT.

**Key**

Augmentative and Alternative Communication - AAC

Speech and Language Therapist - SALT

Objects of Reference – OOR

Picture Exchange Communication System - PECS

Chosen Method of Communication - CMC

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Review**

This policy will be reviewed as required.

Signed            E Thompson and S Brown

Date              24.2.21