

Inclusive Communication Policy

Policy Statement

At Houghton School, we believe that communication is a fundamental right and the foundation for learning, relationships, independence, wellbeing and self-advocacy. We are committed to creating an Inclusive Communication Environment where every child can understand, express themselves and interact meaningfully with others, regardless of their communication needs or abilities.

Communication is everyone's responsibility. Through a whole-school commitment to Inclusive Communication, we ensure that all forms of communication are recognised, valued and responded to. We adopt an Inclusive Communication approach, utilising a range of communication methods and supports to ensure that every child has a voice and the opportunity to be heard.

Our approach is underpinned by the Communication Bill of Rights and our Whole School Communication Pyramid, which provide a shared framework for developing communication across all pathways and ensuring communication remains at the heart of everything we do.

Aims

We aim to:

- Create an Inclusive Communication Environment where communication is visible, accessible and embedded throughout school life.
- Ensure every child has access to the communication tools and support they require.
- Promote communication, language, interaction, confidence, independence and self-advocacy.
- Develop staff knowledge, confidence and expertise in Inclusive Communication practices.
- Enable children to express choices, preferences, thoughts, feelings and opinions.
- Foster positive relationships through meaningful communication and interaction.
- Remove barriers to learning by providing accessible communication supports.
- Ensure communication remains central to curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment across all of our pathways.

Our Inclusive Communication Approach

We recognise and value all forms of communication. Children may communicate through:

- Spoken language
- Vocalisations, Echolalia and Gestalts

- Gesture and body language
- Eye gaze
- Facial expression
- Makaton signing
- Objects of Reference
- Photographs
- Symbols
- Written text
- Communication books
- Low-tech AAC systems
- High-tech AAC devices

Staff actively model, scaffold and respond to all forms of communication, ensuring every child's communication attempts are recognised and celebrated.

Visual Supports

Visual supports are a universal entitlement across Houghton School and form a key component of our Inclusive Communication approach. We recognise that visuals reduce cognitive load, increase predictability, support processing and develop independence all of which enable children to access learning, communication and the wider school environment more successfully.

To ensure consistency, Communicate: InPrint 4 is the school's agreed symbol software. A shared bank of symbols for core vocabulary, routines and visual timetables has been developed by the Communication Lead and is used across the school to establish a common visual language.

Visual supports are embedded throughout:

- The whole school environment
- Teaching and learning
- Classroom routines
- Social interactions
- Visual timetables
- Communication supports
- Emotional regulation strategies

- Lesson structures
- Curriculum resources

To support consistent implementation, staff receive training, coaching and modelling from the Communication Lead, PBS Team and Speech and Language Therapy Team. Staff also utilise a Symbolisation Reflection Checklist to support self-evaluation and further development of practice.

Our physical environment is intentionally designed to communicate clearly, promote independence and support children to navigate the school with confidence. Through consistent zoning, labelling and visual cues, children can identify key areas, understand expectations and access the resources they need independently. Clearly defined spaces create a predictable environment that helps reduce anxiety, supports successful transitions and enables children to feel safe, secure and ready to learn. All classrooms and key areas are labelled using agreed photographs and symbols, with classroom doors displaying photographs of both staff and children to support recognition, belonging and successful transitions.

Colourful Semantics is also used throughout the school to support the development of expressive and receptive language, sentence structure, vocabulary, grammar and storytelling. Agreed resources and training ensure a consistent whole-school approach.

Additionally, visual lesson structures, cue-ins and PowerPoint spines have been developed collaboratively with curriculum leaders to create predictable and accessible learning experiences across all pathways.

Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)

Communication development is embedded throughout the curriculum and school day. All children are provided with daily opportunities to develop speaking, listening, interaction and communication skills across a range of contexts including individual, group and whole-class activities.

For children identified with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), additional support may be provided through our Speech and Language Therapy Team. Speech and Language Therapists work consultatively alongside staff, therapy assistants and families to assess needs, provide advice and develop personalised communication programmes.

The SALT Team provides:

- Assessment and target setting
- Individualised communication programmes
- Staff training and coaching
- General advice around the Inclusive Communication offer

- Specialist interventions

Our Therapy Assistants, Richard Boam and Katrina Hassard, support the implementation of Speech and Language Therapy programmes, delivering targeted interventions and working alongside staff to help identified children from the SALT caseload to achieve their communication targets within daily practice.

Makaton Signing

Makaton is embedded throughout the school as a universal communication strategy and forms an important part of our Inclusive Communication approach.

Used alongside spoken language, Makaton:

- Supports understanding
- Reduces language processing demands
- Promotes expressive communication
- Enhances participation
- Supports language development

The Makaton 'Sign of the Week' initiative introduces core and themed vocabulary and is shared daily with all children and also shared with families to promote consistency between home and school.

Staff confidence is developed through regular practice sessions led by our qualified Makaton trainer, alongside curriculum-linked resources and ongoing professional development.

Our commitment to developing and embedding Makaton across the school has been recognised through the achievement of the Makaton Friendly Bronze Award, demonstrating our dedication to creating an Inclusive Communication Environment for all learners.

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)

AAC is a key component of our Inclusive Communication approach and ensures children can express themselves, build relationships, make choices and participate fully in learning and school life.

Children have access to a range of low-tech and high-tech AAC systems, including:

- Symbols
- Communication books
- Communication passports
- Choice boards

- Podd
- Makaton
- Electronic communication devices (e.g. Proloquo2go and Grid for iPads)

Aided Language Displays, Communication Mats and Communication Books are used throughout the school to promote engagement, understanding and expressive communication.

The Communication Lead has developed bespoke large-scale Aided Language Boards which are displayed throughout indoor and outdoor learning environments, providing opportunities for adults to model language consistently across a range of contexts.

In addition, Katrina Hassard, Speech and Language Therapy Assistant, has developed a General Class Communication Book for every classroom. These universal resources complement personalised AAC systems and ensure communication support is readily available throughout the school day.

Children who use AAC are supported to access their communication systems at all times. Communication aids move with the child and remain available during lessons, playtimes, lunchtimes, transitions and educational visits.

Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is an integral part of our Inclusive Communication approach and reflects our belief that connection comes before communication.

The approach supports children in developing the fundamental communication skills that underpin future learning and interaction, including:

- Shared attention
- Turn-taking
- Anticipation
- Facial expression
- Vocalisation
- Social engagement
- Relationship building

Intensive Interaction principles are embedded throughout the school day and implemented during:

- Play
- Sensory exploration

- Regulation activities
- Transitions
- Group sessions
- Everyday communication opportunities

Identified children may also access dedicated Intensive Interaction sessions as part of their personalised provision.

Haughton's Intensive Interaction Champions support implementation by modelling good practice, sharing successes, offering peer support and helping colleagues develop confidence in using the approach effectively.

Objects of Reference

Objects of Reference are used to support understanding, anticipation and communication for children who benefit from concrete representations of people, places, activities and routines.

Following consultation with the Speech and Language Therapy Team and First Links Team, an agreed bank of Haughton Objects of Reference has been established to ensure consistency across the school.

Objects of Reference are used to:

- Support transitions
- Develop anticipation
- Introduce activities and lessons
- Establish daily routines
- Promote understanding
- Support expressive communication

They are used particularly within Butterflies Class and the Topaz Pathway, although they may be utilised more widely according to individual need.

Communication Resources and Environmental Supports

Lanyard Key Rings

All staff wear communication lanyard key rings containing agreed core vocabulary symbols developed in partnership with the Speech and Language Therapy Team. Supply staff are also provided with key rings to ensure consistency.

Class teams may supplement these symbols to meet the specific communication, sensory or regulation needs of their cohort.

Zones of Regulation visuals are included on all staff lanyards to support emotional literacy and regulation conversations.

Transition Visuals

Visual supports for transition are embedded throughout the school.

All rooms display:

- Photographs
- Symbolised signage
- Staff photographs
- Children's photographs

Shared areas including the Assembly Hall, Food Technology Room, Sensory Room and Sensory Gym also display agreed Objects of Reference where appropriate, increasing predictability and supporting successful transitions.

Curriculum and Communication

Communication underpins every pathway within our curriculum.

- **Emerald EYFS Pathway: Doing and Exploring**
Communication develops through play, exploration, interaction and shared experiences within a personalised and nurturing environment.
- **Topaz Pathway: Doing**
Communication grows through regulation, engagement, connection and meaningful interactions. Strategies include Intensive Interaction, RISE, Story Massage, Learn Together and sensory learning experiences.
- **Amethyst Pathway: Doing and Responding**
Children develop receptive and expressive communication through highly adapted curriculum experiences, repetition, overlearning and opportunities for generalisation.
- **Sapphire Pathway: Doing, Responding and Interpreting**
Communication skills are explicitly taught and applied across subject-specific learning, enabling children to question, explain, reason, collaborate and advocate for themselves with increasing independence.

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary development is explicitly taught through the Word Aware framework across all curriculum pathways.

Planning identifies:

- Core vocabulary
- Specific vocabulary
- Specialist vocabulary

Vocabulary priorities are embedded within curriculum planning, teaching and learning activities and are shared with families to support generalisation beyond school.

Children are encouraged to take on communication roles including:

- **Word Wizards** (Emerald and Topaz)
- **Word Detectives** (Amethyst)
- **Word Experts** (Sapphire)

This approach develops language knowledge, curriculum access and communication confidence.

Self-Advocacy and Child Voice

Child voice is central to our Inclusive Communication approach.

Children are supported to express their views through:

- Symbols
- Photographs
- Objects of Reference
- Communication books
- Choice boards
- Talking Mats
- AAC systems

Staff adapt communication methods to match individual communication profiles and ensure all children can participate in decision-making opportunities.

Communication is recognised in all its forms. Staff value and respond to gestures, body language, vocalisations, eye gaze, behaviours and facial expressions as meaningful communication.

Children's views inform:

- Planning
- Target setting
- Annual reviews
- Curriculum development
- Regulation Plans
- Personalised support

Staff Development

High-quality professional development is essential to successful implementation.

All staff receive:

- Communication induction
- SALT training packages
- Whole-school communication training
- Ongoing professional development
- Coaching and mentoring

Staff are provided with the rationale and research underpinning Inclusive Communication and enabling environments, alongside a reflective communication environment checklist to support self-evaluation and continual improvement.

The Communication Lead works collaboratively with the PBS Team, SALT Team and Senior Leadership Team to provide:

- In-class modelling
- Team teaching
- Coaching
- Shared planning
- Organising and coordinating the delivery of bespoke professional development opportunities, including training delivered by external specialists, practitioners and guest speakers, to address identified staff development priorities and meet the evolving communication needs of our children.

A shared communication resource bank is maintained and regularly updated, providing staff with access to visual supports, communication mats, symbol resources and communication templates.

Training needs are continually reviewed to ensure staff knowledge remains current and communication provision continues to develop.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through:

- Classroom observations
- The schools SDP
- Learning walks
- Communication environment audits
- Pupil voice activities
- Tapestry evidence
- Staff feedback
- Annual reviews
- iASEND communication assessment data
- EHCP target reviews
- SALT recommendations and outcomes

Communication remains a standing priority across every pathway within our school to ensure that every child can communicate, participate, belong and thrive.

Communication underpins everything we do. Through our shared commitment to Inclusive Communication at Houghton School, we strive to ensure that every child is understood, valued and empowered to have their voice heard.