Fox Hollies School

English/Literacy Policy

Spring 2019
To be reviewed spring 2020
Introduction

This document outlines the English policy at Fox Hollies School, and also signposts to related documents in the appendix and elsewhere.

Literacy faculty

English/Literacy is a co-ordinated team comprising:

- Literacy subject Leader (Sarah Youngson)
- Speech and Language Therapy Assistant (SALTA) – (Amy Daniels)
- Makaton leader – (Chynna Daly)
- PECS implementers (Amy Daniels, Ruth Henderson, Tom Allport)
- Reading Ambassadors (many...)

.........which is overseen by Keith Youngson (Head Teacher)

English/Literacy comprises:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

Listening and Speaking are closely linked in our whole school approach to Communication, which is multi faceted, and includes Makaton signing, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Communication books and Communication aids.

For each of the above areas, there is policy outline followed by guidance.
Listening and Speaking (‘Communication’) at Fox Hollies School.

Rationale

‘Communication’ within a community of Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD) pupils, has a broader interpretation than within a mainstream community and is central to all aspects of English. In the developmental process, listening precedes speaking, which precedes reading, which precedes writing. Communication, listening and speaking are fundamental aspects supporting all learning.

We aim to:

- Define what communication at Fox Hollies comprises
- Maximise the limited time available to focus on ‘real and relevant learning’ to prepare pupils for a post-school world
- Honour ‘outcomes’ defined in EHCPs, with regard to the individual and highly personal communication priorities for each pupil, whilst considering their potential post-19 destinations
- To support the safeguarding of the individual by enabling pupils to express their personal social, emotional and health needs

We have respect for the Communication bill of rights (1992):

- The right to request desired objects, actions events and people
- The right to express personal preferences and feelings
- The right to reject or refuse undesired objects, events or actions
- The right to request and be given attention from and interaction with another person
- The right to have communication signals acknowledged and responded to
- The right to be informed about people, things and events

[The version above is cited as being ‘Adapted from the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities (1992).’]

We acknowledge that:

- All behaviours (positive or negative or highly personalised behaviours) have an underlying communicative basis
- Allowing pupils access and exposure to a wide range of communication methods enables staff to encourage use of those most accessible and engaging to the individual, forming a personalised ‘toolbox’
- The communication style of the individual (which may be a mixture of methods) should be valued
- The use of speech is important with all communication methods
- We should be looking for and maximising opportunities to communicate in formal and informal times of the school day
- Modelling communication methods ourselves (communication books, electronic aids/speech,) is the way pupils learn, by copying
- Within any communication method there may be limitations; e.g. a pupil may respond appropriately when signed to, but may not sign in response
Pupils’ sensory impairments may cause additional barriers to learning. We should be aware of these issues and any adaptations which need to be made to meet their needs. e.g. VI pupils may need larger text, or a different coloured paper.

Even if pupils have no sensory impairments, as SLD learners they may need additional processing time, and a slower rate of delivery of communicative information.

We should genuinely listen to pupils and honouring their ‘voice’ and opinions (e.g. student council).

**Stages of communication**

It is important to be aware of the various stages in development of communication, listed below hierarchically:

1) Interaction with and selection of favourite objects/toys
2) Matching and linking a picture of an object to the object itself (Phase 1 PECS)
3) Recognition and understanding that a pictorial symbol can also represent the object
4) Recognition that an abstract symbol can link to an object/desire
5) Developing communication from a personal immediate tangible want (e.g. a yellow brick), to more abstract requirements such as toilet, music, walk to garden (experiences and environments)
6) Linking building blocks of spoken language to make increasingly complex and meaningful constructions, which may be augmented by the use of: PECS, personalised communication books, voice output communication aids (VOCA)

Due to the communication impairments of our pupils, any of the above stages 1-6, may be accompanied by:

- Pupils, vocalising (making a sound e.g. buh/gah)
- Echoing (copying an adult’s speech, either intelligibly or unintelligibly)
- Signing (copying an adult’s signing, either intelligibly or unintelligibly)
- Speaking
Stimulus and motivational resources for communication may be:

- A wide range of printed materials
- objects
- activities
- personal experiences
- personal social emotional and health needs

Makaton

Fox Hollies School has a strong history of Makaton signing, supporting the other communication systems, (speech, PECS etc.) Consistent use of Makaton across school by staff and pupils enables equality of opportunity of access to the curriculum. Chynna Daly leads on this, and can provide help. Please see Guidance section.

Benefits of Makaton signing are:

- Signing at a key word level Whilst speaking, creates a steady pace of verbal information
- It provides an additional visual linguistic clue
- Enables pupils to have time to process and understand verbal information

Picture Exchange Communication System PECS

- All staff are trained in the use of this
- Please refer to Reading section for PECS information per stage of development
- PECS links very closely with stages of development and P levels
- Please refer to ‘PECS Mastery Criteria’ in Appendix for further detailed guidance

Communication Books

A communication book comprises personalised pictorial symbols, to support the additional communication methods currently being used by the pupil.

Main benefits of these are:

- It enables the pupil to have quick access to symbols to communicate their ideas
- It allows the person being communicated with, to understand the subject matter easily
- It is an easy method of communication requiring no specialist training to understand
- It is easily transferable and used in a variety of environments

Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCA)

- Following successful use of other communication tools such as a communication book, pupils may be considered for an alternative aid. Speech Therapists with extensive training in augmentative communication aids will perform the assessment.
- This may result in a voice output device with symbols, being allocated to a pupil, funded by the NHS.

Guidance
Where to find speech and language referrals/reports:

After they are written by SLT (Sandra Rogers), they go to the head teacher (Keith Youngson). Amy Daniels then scans them and they are currently placed in: Shared drive/Pupil information. The eventual intention is to also have a copy of each assessment in the pupils’ individual folders as well, in pupil information. This is to enable consistent and effective sharing of current and relevant information.

Key words

Crucial to all communication by whatever method, is a clear understanding by staff of what constitutes key words. An understanding of key words is vital to be able to accurately assess pupils’ levels of functioning, enabling accurate interpretation of levels of advice given by the speech and language therapist following assessment.

Please note the following:

- Often we use too much language with our pupils, and this obscures the key word meaning
- Key words are the main meaning-carrying words in a sentence, not the total number of words
- Assessment of the level of key word understanding does not rely merely on identification of key words. To test understanding of key words there needs to be equivalent ‘distractor’ key words, so that the pupil’s understanding is accurately ascertained. E.g “Give me all the big plates”. The teacher needs to supply small plates as well, otherwise the instruction is a 2kw one effectively: “give plates”
- Key word awareness supports Makaton signing (we sign only the key words)
- Key word awareness supports how we write when using symbol writing programs – we do not ‘translate’ every word into symbols but at the key word level suitable for the pupil(s)
- Key word awareness by staff enables clear communication appropriate to the differing comprehension levels of the range of pupils in our classes and groups
- Key word awareness enables clear communication appropriate to pupil’s context and emotional state – e.g if angry/upset a 2kw communicator may need single key words with pauses

If further guidance with key words is needed, please see Amy.

Cued articulation

This is a system used in school where by each sound has an associated hand position, helping the actual vocal production of the sound. Many staff are trained in this. Amy is able to advise.

STAFF SUPPORTING COMMUNICATION
Speech and language therapy assistant  AMY DANIELS:

She:

- Makes referrals to NHS speech and language therapy
- Supports and trains school staff
- Is a PECS implemener
- Delivers personal intervention programmes devised by the SLT
- Designs and create communication books and other additional resources
- Programs and maintain VOCAs (electronic communication aids)
- Liaises with other professionals including NHS SALT and ACT (Access to Communication Technology)

Makaton Leader  CHYNNA DALY:

She:

- Supports the use of Makaton across school
- Trains staff and pupils – one Makaton assembly per week
- Models good usage and encourages others to sign consistently and to a high standard
- Creates and maintains displays to support Makaton usage
- Generates enthusiasm for Makaton signing

Reading Policy

Rationale

‘Reading’ within a community of Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD) pupils, has a broader interpretation than within a mainstream community.

We aim to:

- Define what reading comprises for our pupils
- Maximise the limited time available to focus on ‘real and relevant learning’ for to prepare pupils for a post-school world
- Honour ‘outcomes’ defined in EHCs, with regard to the individual and highly personal priorities for each pupil, whilst considering their potential post-19 destinations

At the earliest stages of reading, valuable support is provided by use of Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) leading to encompass elements common to learners in Key stage 1:

- phonics, sight vocabulary and traditional reading
- elements of stage-appropriate vocabulary: rubbing in (cooking), spanner, jig-saw, (carpentry).

A common entitlement: All pupils have access to a range of written/printed materials in class resources reflecting their personal interests. These may be traditional story books, but equally may be the Argos catalogue, a TV listings magazine or a football programme. For some pupils
reading is purely taking pleasure from *interacting and self-occupying* with printed materials. We value this as an important post-19 life skill in itself.

3 stages of reader

Pupils fall into three definable stages, forming a continuum. Most readers progress *within* their phase, and very occasionally may progress *between* phases.

a) **Early stage - PECS users:** PECS forms a complete ‘diet’ of English as PECS encompasses aspects of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Using PECS, pupils in the very early stages of learning/interacting,(comparable with typically developing pupils aged from birth to 12 months), are able to develop communication skills which may lead to reading and writing.

- PECS usage supports pupils from the earliest beginnings of English, through to the end of the Middle phase (see section b).
- Early PECS phases reflects early speaking and intentionality to communicate.
- From PECS phase 3 onwards, pupils realise that a book (their PECS folder) contains symbols, which have a permanent meaning and can be exchanged for items.

b) **Middle stage:** Pupils at this stage of learning/interacting are comparable with typically developing pupils aged 12-26 months/2-3 years and may be functioning around P5-7. Pupils may:

- have some very early level of phonics knowledge
- begin working on 'Letters and Sounds' activities (DFE)
- may interact with print and pictures
- may read books with symbols
- may be in the middle phases of PECS usage
- may engage a 'whole word' style of learning
- may take pleasure from recognising familiar words in their environment
- may start to make links between the written word on their PECS symbols when the picture is not present

and

- may or may not progress to demonstrating elements of becoming a ‘traditional’ learner

From PECS phase 4 onwards, pupils construct simple sentences, which comprise reading and ‘writing’, having a level of permanence. The teacher is also able to check comprehension, accuracy and consistence of use.

Phase 6 PECS usage (comparable with P7 and the most advanced phase of PECS), may give some pupils a foundation to move on to the stage of more traditional learning.

c) **Advanced stage -‘Traditional’ learners:** ‘Advanced’ in our context is a relative term. Pupils at this stage fall into ‘early emergent’ readers, ‘emergent’ readers and ‘early fluent’ readers.
This stage of learning/interacting is comparable with typically developing pupils aged 3-6 years functioning at the level of what is sometimes described as ‘Moderate learning Difficulty’ (MLD).

C1) ‘Early emergent readers’ may:

- have some sight vocabulary
- know a range of sounds
- be starting to blend simple words
- be starting to extract some meaning from words
- be engaging with ‘Letters and Sounds’ phase 2-3
- function around NC Level 1

C2) ‘Emergent readers’ may:

- have a range of sight vocabulary
- be able to read simple texts fluently
- have some understanding of what they have read
- be engaging with ‘Letters and Sounds’ phases 3+
- function around NC Level 2+

- C3) ‘Early fluent readers’ may:
  - not have a formal ‘reading book’
  - may read a range of functional printed materials: e.g Amazon purchases, recipes, application forms,
  - may read a range of personal interest related materials: tv gossip magazines, song lyrics, do word searches, read the football pages of the paper,
  - may read online or on the computer for practical purposes
Reading Guidance

Reading Ambassadors: These are trained teaching assistants who regularly hear pupils read, who fall into the category of ‘traditional learner’. In addition to TAs other English skills awareness, they have had additional training and support with:

- Phonics
- Blending/segmenting
- Shared/paired reading techniques
- Simple assessment of suitable texts
- Are responsible for hearing pupils read
- Maintain class reading records
- Are a first point of contact with the Literacy Faculty

‘Letter and Sounds’

This is the government’s suggested format for teaching reading using phonics, in mainstream for Reception age pupils. We use this as appropriate. There are resources contained in these documents (can download as PDFs) with excellent resources and advice. We also have resources in school related to ‘Letters and Sounds’ phases.

Sounds versus Names of letters, and their purity of articulation

When working with early stage readers, it is important to learn the sounds not names of the letters first, and that they are said in a pure way with no ‘schwa’ e.g. b not ‘buh’ (avoid the ‘uh’).

‘Whole word reading’

We believe that for some pupils print and reading is more easily accessed through learning sight vocabulary. For pupils who may ‘plateau’ at around level 1, and never really ‘get’ phonics this may be an important way forward. In the past we have found that some pupils later make connections between words that are similar, e.g. shoes, and shop (sh) and ASC pupils who may have great facility at whole word memorisation, may reach a good level of functionality in this manner.
Seating and other considerations

When hearing pupils read, give consideration to seating appropriate to the pupil.

- Is it best to sit to one side, or opposite? How is the pupil following along the text? With a marker, finger or not at all?
- Who is holding the book? Pupil or adult or together? Some pupils need help, others need to have ‘ownership’ of the reading by holding it themselves.
- How much reading aloud by the pupil, the adult or together? What reading together or re-reading a sentence is needed for the pupils to carry the meaning of what they are reading in their head?

Resources

The English Leader, Sarah Youngson, has a range of resources to advise upon. There are reading resources in all departments of the school.

Reading embedded in the curriculum

We aim to include elements of reading frequently throughout the day, and in all lessons, at a level suitable for the pupil. It is not just timetabled ‘English’ lessons where there is a reading focus.
Writing Policy

Rationale:

- To define what writing comprises for our pupils
- To maximise the limited time available to focus on ‘real and relevant learning’ for preparing pupils for a post-school world
- To honour ‘outcomes’ defined in EHCs, with regard to the individual and highly personal priorities for each pupil, whilst considering their potential post-19 destinations

Background and history:

- To have regard for the level and amount of input a pupil has received in Key stages 1 and 2, and the resulting progress – baselining in Year 7
- To realistically assess the type of ‘writer’ each pupil may become during their time at FHS, bearing in mind that former NC Level 2 constitutes a ‘high achiever’ for us, and that even these pupils may be reading at early ‘Letters and Sounds’ phases

Leading to:

- Nurturing the development of written skills, firstly from a functional (practical, nonfiction, ‘real life scenarios ’) aspect, then in a creative one if appropriate - (there are other opportunities for alternative recording of e.g drama, story-telling)

The purpose of writing in the wider world

- Intentionality - recording of ideas/events/creativity
- Permanence and portability

Advantages of being able to write/record

- Accessibility - pencil and paper cheap and available
- IT supports many aspects of written communication: email, texting, touch screens, I pads, social media

Purpose of writing for our pupils (refer to MAPP guidance)

- To inform: FHS - yes
- To write lists/instructions: FHS – yes
  [Mainly functionally based]
- As a creative process for pleasure: FHS – yes for some
- To persuade/influence others: FHS ??? – probably not
- Recount events or stories/drama – video? –probably not -other recording media for FHS pupils
  [Mainly creatively based]

Factors influencing the acquisition of writing ability at a very simple level

- Concentration/attention
• Need/Motivation
• Ability to listen/hear (in order to acquire spoken language)
• Ability to speak? (but there are some hearing-impaired writers in the world)
• Ability to see (upper ability VI learners may require support), many pupils wear glasses!
• Ability to manipulate appropriate writing instrument (keyboard, IT device, pencil) – all dependent upon fine motor skills and hand strength,

Leading to:
• An ability to independently write or produce (IT) letters and words
in conjunction with:
• An ability to read to a basic level of fluency (Level 1+) and verbally express ideas with a level of cohesion/fluency at sentence level

Stages of writing at FHS

Non-traditional
• PECS symbols - how does this fit criteria of intention/permanence of ideas?
• Mark making – for pleasure, art, precursors to letter formation (but lots of this will have been done at KS1-2 already.) We need to consider if this going to be productive in light of other priorities . We must not being afraid to give pupils benefit of doubt as we have had some late developers !
• Informed/meaningful mark making: e.g. ticking items written (symbols or writing) required – shopping list?
• Use of IT to record/write

Traditional – assuming reading at Level 1 and S&L similar, preferably higher

1) Over-writing (pupils says a sentence, adult scribes, pupil writes over the top of letters accurately)

2) Copying underneath a sentence (pupils says, adult scribes, pupil copies)

3) Supported composition (e.g writing with vocab lists – pupil says sentence, and may ask for ‘difficult’ words or selects from thematic word list)

4) Simple independent writing (pupil is able to say a simple sentence they wish to write, writes it, and it is legible and understandable to an ‘outsider’).

Elements of each stage may be subtly combined, e.g. a pupil may say a sentence, ask for a ‘difficult’ word, but then still be at stage 2) for actual writing. Equally, stage 4 may contain a sub-stage, where the pupil’s writing clearly has ‘letters’ and ‘words’, and the pupils can tell you what it ‘says’ consistently if they ‘read’ it aloud, but it may be illegible or not understandable to anyone who does not know the pupil.

These stages form a continuum.


**Writing guidance**

**Teacher writing/home school diaries:** We should aim to set a good example in all our use of written media. If we are expecting a pupil to copy our writing, our letter formation should be clearly printed at a size appropriate for the pupil’s fine motor and visual needs. A VI pupil may need a writing slope and suitably coloured paper.

**Fonts:** Careful choice of font is important. If we are expecting pupils to write, we must give them a good example. Some printed fonts have different formations for g and a and other letters. Pupils need to be able to recognise these, but not to write them. Our pupils are very literal, and may copy exactly if we give a printed example which contains these. E.g. Arial font: g a, Calibri: g a, Cambria: g a, Times New Roman: g a

**Comic Sans:** has websites dedicated to mocking it, but it is a clear and simple font with a and g written as if it was printed. This is why it is widely used in schools. Our pupils, will probably not be ready to do cursive (‘joined up’) handwriting. It is better to encourage pupils to do clear and readable printing to as high a standard as possible.

If we should have a pupil for whom developing cursive writing is appropriate, using a font such as Primary Sassoon Infant which has serifs (‘flicks’) on the letters, which encourage joining up is helpful. In this case we would also make sure we demonstrate our own handwritten printing with serifs (‘flicks’) for the pupil.

**Paper/guide sheets:** Many pupils will be mark making and benefit from plain paper. If a pupil is at the stage of conventional writing, choice of width of lines and number of lines on a page used, will depend on the fine motor skills of the pupil, and the size of the writing they are able to produce.

**Right or left handed ?** It is important to know which hand is the preferred (‘dominant’) hand, *if the pupil has one*. Many of our pupils are at a stage where they do not have a preferred hand and may vary their use from one to the other. If they are at this stage of not being sure, and we notice that they are more able with one hand than the other, it is helpful to talk about their ‘writing hand’, and consistently encourage them to use it. It is also important to seat pupils of different ‘handedness’ sympathetically, to avoid a right hander bumping elbows with a left hander.

**Seating and posture:** It is important that a pupil is comfortably seated on the correct sized chair, with feet on the floor before starting to write. A right hander will need the paper slightly angled to the right, to facilitate writing on the line without getting physically cramped, and a left hander will need angling to the left. Be aware of left handers/ right handers seating (see above).

**Grip:** Pupils in the early stages of mark making with writing implements may hold with a ‘dagger’ or palmar grasp. As their skills improve, a conventional ‘tripod’ grasp using thumb, first and second fingers is to be encouraged.

**Writing implements:** It is good practice to have a range of writing and mark making materials available in the classroom. These may be of various widths; paint brushes, felt pens, wax crayons, pencils etc. Pencils that are triangular prism shaped, and extra thick are particularly
useful. Some pupils may benefit from various style of ‘grip’ made of rubber or plastic which can be slid up a standard pencil to encourage a tripod grasp.

**IT support:** Appropriate use of IT: whiteboard screens/pens, I pads and touch screen computers may also aid writing development at all stages.

**Writing tasks:** Most of our pupils will be using their writing skills aimed towards functional, practical, 'real life' rather than creative tasks. Creative work may also be recorded using video or other media. Some pupils may take pleasure from writing creatively. It is important to focus on EHC outcomes and MAPP targets in conjunction with pupils' likely post-19 destinations to decide what is appropriate for the individual.

**Appendix**

1. **PECS Mastery Criteria – guidance for linking P levels with PECS**
   Please look on Shared drive/Speech and Language Therapy/PECS Mastery criteria (PDF)

   Spring 2019
   To be reviewed spring 2020

Policy approved by GB:

Signed ………………………………………………………………………………. Chair of GB
Date ………………………………………………………………………………..