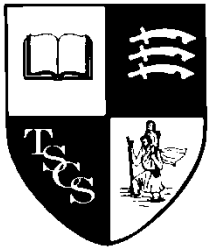


THE ST. CHRISTOPHER SCHOOL

SEN Trust Southend



Academy Trust - Special School

Mountdale Gardens, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex SS9 4AW

Executive Headteacher: Mrs. J. Mullan

Head of School: Miss. L. Brown

Telephone: (01702) 524193

Fax: (01702) 526761

E.Mail: office@tscs.southend.sch.uk

Web: www.thestchristopherschool.co.uk



COMMUNICATION POLICY

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This policy is a statement of aims, principles and strategies which underpin the fundamental principles of working with pupils at The St. Christopher School.

Introduction

The St Christopher School is a specialist school for Communication & Interaction based in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. It has been a specialist school for Communication & Interaction for many years (since 2006) and has continued to develop its work in this area. All pupils have some form of communication difficulty and increasingly almost 100% of pupils (2021) are affected by ASD in some degree or form. 100% are also affected by some degree of learning difficulty and 1 % associated social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Often our pupils have a combination of all of these as well as some minor physical difficulties associated with these developmental difficulties.

Communication and its development with and for pupils is thus is at the heart of the school ethos and pervades all aspects of our work. We are committed to providing pupils opportunities to develop their communication in its widest sense. All staff, from senior leaders, teachers, speech and language therapists, support staff, admin staff and kitchen staff are committed to providing support and an environment which enables communication to be developed in a fun, safe, functional way which ensures pupils can use these skills in everyday life as they move towards independence.

Aims

We aim to ensure there is a communication approach throughout the school day, from when they enter in the morning to when they go home at night.

We aim to enable pupils to develop their communication skills through whichever means of functional communication necessary throughout the day.

Communication is not simply seen as talking, but also emphasises the use of body language, gestures, photos, symbols, pictures, signs, objects of reference and other mediums such as art or music.

We aim to create opportunities for communication in every aspect of the curriculum, and in everyday socialisation situations which occur as a part of the school day.



Learning Outside the Classroom



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Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Support in the School

Working together towards these aims means all staff use the skills and support of each other and the specialists the school employs to help with this.

Speech and Language therapists have been employed directly by the school for over 20 years to enable us to make use of their specialist knowledge and expertise across the school and to ensure all staff are aware of the strategies and needs of our pupils to help us meet our aims with the pupils.

Currently (November 2021) 2.4 therapists are employed directly by the school, with an ever increasing demand we are looking to increase this expertise by at least one additional post.

Speech & Language therapists work across the school from within our specialist Communication and Interaction Centre. This houses therapy rooms, two sensory rooms and different facilities where pupils can access 1:1 therapy or small group sessions in a way which best meets these needs.

Therapists also liaise with NHS and private speech & language therapists who have previously or currently work with children at the school.

We maintain contact with Essex University and provide placements for students in training on the Masters degree in Speech and Language Therapy. This supports the development of speech & language therapists across the country and ensures we stay up to date with the latest developments in the training of others.

They also network with Speech & Language therapists across special schools all over Essex attending termly meetings for sharing best practice and providing mutual support and supervision.

The most important aspect of their work in the school is the daily work in the classrooms with teachers and Learning Support Assistants. Speech & Language therapists are seen as integral to the staff team and are involved in all aspects of school life. They work as part of the school team and work with families as well as school staff to enhance the communication skills of pupils in the school.

Therapy Approaches

Speech & Language therapists and teaching staff use a range of total communication approaches and strategies to meet the needs of individual children. Particular approaches may be more suitable for different classes and for individual children within classes. Children may have strengths, which lend themselves to specific modes of communication. A total communication approach allows for opportunities across the curriculum and is embedded in the daily teaching and interaction at the school. This ensures that children can use a range of communication skills, such as Makaton, gesture, communication through low and High AAC such as an iPad app, visuals or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), as appropriate to their need. Speech & Language Therapists and teaching staff adapt their interaction style accordingly.

Here are some of the main approaches used at The St Christopher School

Intensive Interaction (Hewitt)

We have found many early learners benefit from an Intensive Interaction approach. This is a child led approach to developing early communication and interaction skills, which leads to positive relationships between children and adults as they share joint attention and enjoyment. Intensive interaction works well with the friendly, accepting ethos of the school and our total communication approach. Through building positive relationships and an enjoyment of interacting, we allow the children to flourish and their individual personalities to shine.

Intensive Interaction is used during 1-1 sessions, in the classroom setting and in small group settings in the sensory rooms. As children's skills develop they often begin interacting with their peers in the small group/classroom settings. We extend the child led approach to play with sensory toys, combining approaches such as Curiosity Box (Gina Davies) with intensive interaction skills and then symbolic play toys (such as playmobile sets).

This becomes a framework for further language work, in a way, which is meaningful and enjoyable for the child. As the child's attention levels develop further, they are then ready to begin learning through following instructions and following direction from the therapist.

Picture Exchange Communication System PECS

PECS is a way for learners to request items, by exchanging a small picture in return for a motivating item. This helps children to understand the very early stages of communication as an exchange of behaviour, to realise they can affect their world and to be motivated to develop the ability to discriminate between pictures. Whilst this often begins in the context of 1-1 sessions, many learners benefit from group sessions in the classroom, as they watch and participate from peers who are further advanced in the PECS system. For some, it can encourage spoken language as they hear the name of a motivating item repeated by a peer and adults and associate this with being supplied with the fun activity e.g. bubbles.

Low and High Tech AAC – Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Makaton- This is a sign and symbol language designed to support spoken language and help support the understanding of language. It is used by staff throughout the day to support communication at all levels in the school and used as a targeted intervention for individuals.

Visual support - Many of our children are visual learners and benefit from visual timetables for the day and shorter timescale First and Next boards.

Symbols and photographs – Single symbols and photos on a lanyard and or key ring supporting the child and adult to interact and make comments, requests or give a direction.

Communication Books and Core Boards

Communication books are a way of representing speech/sentences and usually contain a variety of symbols and words recognized into different categories. The individual is required to point to the symbols to make up a sentence, they may or may not be able to speak the message.

A Communication board is a picture or photo symbol board that can be used to support an interaction around an activity or core vocabulary.

The pictures and words on the board will enable the child and the adult supporting them to make comments, requests or give a direction.

Object of Reference

Objects of reference can help to support transitions from one activity to the next and their understanding of language e.g. a soft play cushion going to the soft playroom, using the cup to request a drink.

High Tech AAC- including iPad apps such as Proloquo2go

Proloquo2go to go is an app for iPads, which can be used by children who have a clear understanding about how to communicate, but need extra support to form and express their thoughts. The app provides pages of buttons, which are photos /symbols relevant to the child. A wider range of vocabulary can be made available, than is easily accessible via PECS. Buttons for different types of words can be made accessible, such as adjectives (e.g. big/small) or conjunctions like "because". The app allows for greater flexibility in the types of communication the child can make – commenting, greeting, asking questions, providing information and starting a conversation about a topic.

Talking Tiles

We are beginning the use of Talking Tiles/switches, which provide visual cues, in the form of a photo/symbol and can be pressed to hear the recorded message e.g. Soft Play.

Requesting in class for the toilet and commenting during activities with the class teacher. Many children enjoy the cause – effect nature of talking tiles and this motivates them to explore using them.

Communication Passport

It is a simple and practical guide that outlines your child's communication. It can easily be picked up by someone who may be new to your child to understand their needs. Information can be collected from the child, parents and teaching staff to collectively build an individual profile. The Speech & Language therapy team use them for important transition years such as year 6 and year 11.

Attention Autism (Gina Davies)

Some approaches, such as Attention Autism, are used by Speech & Language therapists and teaching staff throughout the school. In the early years, children soon begin to anticipate that the sight of The Bucket, full of exciting things. It is something they are happy to sit on a chair for, as a whole class. This is the beginning of joint attention in a group and a readiness to learn. More able learners may attend small groups led by a Speech & Language Therapist, focusing on a particular book. This supports literacy work carried out in the classroom. Attention Autism is extended and adapted throughout the secondary school, where more able learners are keen to engage in an interactive and motivating approach to curriculum subjects such as science, maths and literacy.

Language Development

As children become more able to follow adult direction and respond to questions, The Blank Level language model (Rose and Berlin) is used as a framework to guide classroom staff as to what complexity of language work the child is ready for. The model covers a range of skills, from responding to "who, what doing" "Where is the....?" Simple concrete questions to solving more difficult and abstract questions. Blank questions encourage development of general language and vocabulary as well as skills in comprehension, reasoning, inference and problem solving from another person's perspective. For those children who it is relevant for, teachers are provided with assessment results and a guide for each child in their class, so they can adjust the language demands for each child accordingly in class work and for communication around the school. There are many children across the secondary school who continue to benefit from this approach

School Speech & Language therapists are able to support children with individual language difficulties in 1-1 or small group sessions. Assessing children's understanding of spoken language and expressive language, gives teachers a guide of their strengths and difficulties and how this may impact them in the classroom.

Social Understanding

For children who have developed speech and language which enables them to have conversations, but who have difficulty with social and emotional use of language, we have a range of small group approaches. Barrier Games and Lego Therapy provide a context for helping learners to understand how to communicate in a way, which takes into account another's perspective. Approaches like Green Zone help to support learners in understanding how to have conversations, which are meaningful to themselves and others. Zones of regulation, a visual approach used to support the development of self-regulation in children using accessible language and visuals supporting them to identify their feelings and be aware of what zone they are in and what tools they can use to self-regulate. Secondary school and the pathway classes use this approach jointly with the speech & language therapy team.

In the secondary school, we often create practice session, such as a café scenario. Children take on roles such as the customer, chief and the waiter/waitress. They can practice these roles with a range of school staff, using social scripts to their role, develop vocab knowledge, and use conversations cards to help with ideas for talking as they sit and enjoy the class café. Following the regular practicing of the skills needed in class, the class team support children to transfer these skills in the community, visiting local cafés and shops.

Speech work

For those children with speech difficulties, Speech & Language therapists begin 1-1 speech work when they are developmentally ready to focus on changing their speech.

As they make progress, they practice with classroom staff and this helps them to generalise the changes they have made during speech & language therapy sessions to other contexts. Speech & Language therapists and teaching staff have found Cued Articulation (Jane Passy) to be particularly useful in this respect.

This is a set of hand signs, which relate to the way a speech sound is formed and helps the child to trigger an accurate production of the sound for themselves. Eventually they produce the speech sound independently and no longer use the Cued Articulation sign.

In developing speech & language therapy approaches for children with ASD and complex needs across the school, we have found the most effective way to be teamwork. Speech & Language therapists work closely with classroom staff and provide information and training for individual classes and training across the school.

School staff work together to meet the best interest of the individual child and the school as a whole. Class teams and Speech & Language therapists meet regularly to updating and reviewing, formally such as termly and annual target setting for communication and Interaction targets. Informally, staff and Speech & Language therapists liaise at the end of sessions and the day. We work closely with the family as we aware that children may interact and communicate differently at home and school. We support families in transitioning speech & language therapy approaches to the home and build total communication tools that will help the child at home. Tapestry has proved to be a great asset in communication between home and school. The speech & language therapy team will also support face to face with families, class meetings in school, attend parent evening and be available on email and telephone. The Speech & Language therapists also have a page of resources and sign posting for families on the school website.

Written by: Jo Hitchen & Jackie Mullan