

# DRUMBEAT SCHOOL AND ASD SERVICE



**Drumbeat**  
School & ASD Service

## Communication Policy

(JUNE 2020)

APPROVED BY GOVENORS

RESPONSIBLE PERSON – HEADTEACHER

SIGNED BY CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

\_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNED BY HEADTEACHER

\_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# 1. Introduction

Drumbeat School is a Local Authority all age Special School which provides an appropriate education for pupils who have an education, health and care plan for an autism spectrum disorder and associated difficulties. Communication is at the core of our work at Drumbeat since communication difficulties are an intrinsic part of the diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils will have some degree of difficulty in this area of development.

- 1.1 As a specialist ASD provision, Drumbeat has a whole school approach towards total communication. Total communication includes the use of speech, Makaton signs, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), gesture, symbols, photos, Objects of Reference and any other type of Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) or mode of communication that may be personal to a pupil.
- 1.2 All forms of communication are acknowledged and valued. By their very nature, a large proportion of pupils at Drumbeat School will rely heavily on visual strategies, both as an alternative and augmentative means of expressive communication, and to aid their understanding of spoken language and the world around them.
- 1.3 Within a total communication approach, the school community respects the preferred learning and communication styles of individual learners (much of our work is encouraging students to use the communication abilities they already have).
- 1.4 There is also a recognition of wider ASD interventions such as TEACCH, visual timetables, social stories and comic strip conversations.
- 1.5 The school communication handbook contains guidance on a number of communication strategies and interventions e.g. social stories, aided language stimulation and colourful semantics, though this is not an exhaustive list of strategies that could be used.
- 1.6 Drumbeat School recognises the value of the SCERTS framework and assessment methodology that promotes the development of joint attention skills and symbolic use of communication. The framework can be used as a system to signpost appropriate transactional supports and encompasses AAC use and ASD interventions
- 1.7 Communication is central to life and learning. It is a fundamental human right. Through communication we build social relationships and knowledge, make our needs and feelings known, and share ideas with others. Communication involves listening, understanding and responding, and also links to literacy skills.
- 1.8 It is recognised that pupils' self-esteem, communication and language will be enhanced if there is a community of AAC users with whom they can use, share and develop communication.
- 1.9 We have an obligation as professionals to ensure equal access to all learning opportunities. The organisation of the environment is the key to providing the

necessary teaching and structures for developing language and communication skills.

- 1.10 The barriers to successful implementation of AAC must be recognised and broken down in order to achieve an effective and functional communication environment.
- 1.11 Drumbeat School recognises that specialised communication support strategies may be needed to ensure all pupils are given the optimum communication experiences they need to develop and share successful communication.
- 1.12 The school environment is structured to provide predictability and consistency throughout school using similar visual cues (such as labelling of physical environment, layout of classrooms, individual workstations, layout of dining room, etc.). This clear visual structure communicates to them the necessary information to help enable them to access learning.

## **2. Drumbeat Communication Expectancies and Responsibilities**

### **2.1 At Drumbeat School, our overarching goals for pupils' communication skills are:**

- Pupils will develop spontaneous and functional communication skills in order for them to be independent and autonomous communicators.
- Pupils will be ambitious about their own communication potential to maximise their opportunities to take part in daily life and courageous in communicating with unfamiliar communication partners when out in the community.
- Pupil will be resilient to communication breakdowns and taught the skills to have the confidence to repair them successfully.
- Pupil will respect all methods of communication to enable with them to interact with their peers and develop caring relationships with others.
- Pupils will learn to communicate about their needs in order maintain a well-regulated emotional state for learning and interacting in order to stay safe.

### **2.2 Promoting effective communication for Drumbeat pupils is everyone's responsibility. *All staff within Drumbeat (SLT, teachers, therapists, TAs, MDMS, admin, volunteers etc) should adhere to the following:***

- All staff are expected to model different methods of communication to ensure equal opportunities, to reinforce that every method of communication is valued and promote learning in the use of AAC.

- All staff are expected to respond to communication attempts positively and adapt their communication level to that of the pupil.
- All staff are expected to create communication opportunities wherever possible to promote communication development and generalisation.
- Visual supports can help the understanding of pupils with ASD. All staff should use visual supports to aid structure to lessons and the day (e.g. first and then boards, visual timetables etc). They should use visual supports to manage behaviour (e.g. social stories, reward charts etc). They should use and provide visual supports to aid communication (e.g. signing, symbol systems). They should use visual supports to aid learning (e.g. mind maps, visual instructions etc).
- At less structured time of the day staff are also expected to focus on embracing pupil's natural modes of communication e.g. facial expression, gestures and vocalisation to build relationships and promote the fundamentals of communication.

### **2.3 Senior Leadership Team are responsible for:**

- Supporting staff in the continued professional development and understanding of communication needs.
- Ensuring that total communication is embedded across the school.
- Ensuring the school is a supportive communication and ASD friendly environment.
- Demonstrating desired practice when communicating with pupils.  
Working alongside the speech and language therapists to ensure all staff are effective communication partners.

### **2.4 Teachers are responsible for:**

- Seeking advice/help/training if they feel a pupil is not meeting their communication potential
- Organising time and others to carry out or advice, strategies or targets as advised by a speech and language therapist.
- Expecting every child in the class to communicate; valuing every message and every method and mode of communication and promote functional communication skills.
- Providing rich communication environments where pupils have access to their voice and required vocabulary for the lesson or to get their needs and wants met.
- To ensure any recommendations on a pupil's EHCP or personalised plan are put into place.
- Providing frequent opportunities for communication through play, sabotage, LOfC etc
- Observing, waiting and listening to what the pupil is doing before adapting and adding new experiences.
- Using familiar routines to build skills, interpret the child's communication and support understanding.

- Modelling, reinforcing and extending appropriate language, sign/visual symbol use (Makaton, PECS,) so that the pupil links the communication to what they experience.
- Supporting pupils in using their knowledge of communication to underpin their literacy development.
- Working with the speech and language therapist to identify a preferred communication method for a pupil and ensuring this is available and used throughout the day and across environments.

## **2.5 Therapy team:**

Drumbeat directly employs its own speech and language therapist and benefits from further NHS support or bought-in services from speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, counselling and behaviour services. Therapy intervention can be at the specialist level (for example assessment and design of an alternative mode of communication or 1:1 therapeutic support), or targeted level (e.g. intervention groups, or personalised plan target modelling), or at the universal level (whole school training, implementing communication opportunities in the playground or creating pathways and literature).

Speech and Language therapists will:

- Ensure positive working relationship with other stakeholders involved in an individual's communication.
- Be able to observe, assess and advise on the best method or strategy for an individual to develop their communication skills.
- Model the use of communication strategies or AAC within a variety of settings in order to train others in its use.
- Have a clear understanding of how communication difficulties impact upon social skills and learning.
- Train others in language, communication development (including preverbal communication), AAC and communication interventions.
- Be aware of the variety of support available outside the school.
- Advise on curriculum access, AAC strategies, EHCP provision and Personalised Plans taking into account the communication needs of a pupil.

Occupational Therapy:

- Support access to AAC including skills such as building up strength in hands in order to use Velcro symbols or adapting materials for pupils with sensory processing difficulties.
- Liaison and support with readiness to learn, including helping staff and students to understand arousal/alertness levels and the strategies they can use to adjust these.
- Supporting staff to interpret sensory behaviours as communication, and to build on these as opportunities for interaction

Clinical Psychology and counselling:

- Support those around the student to understand behaviour as a

communication and what this communication might be and other ways to meet this need e.g. teaching new skills or changing the environment

- To help students to develop their social communication skills and emotional literacy through advice, individual and group sessions
- To carry out observations alongside psychometric and autism specific assessments to help understanding of a student's learning and communication profile
- Supporting students in individual and group psychological therapy to find ways to safely express themselves and current issues in their life, such as through play and acting out, talking using visual support. From this, to help them to communicate this to others.

## **2.6 Collaboration with parents**

- Training on communication to be offered to parents as part of the series of workshops and forums delivered by the school team
- Any alternative forms of communication should be transportable between home and school.
- Parents are encouraged to talk to teachers and/or the speech and language therapist regularly either face-to-face at parent's evenings/ home visits/ pre-arranged meeting or in their preferred method email/ home-school contact book as appropriate.

## **3. Intervention strategies**

There are a number of whole school strategies that staff are expected to have awareness, knowledge of and use in the everyday practice as appropriate for individual pupils. Relevant staff should become communicatively competent in the forms of communication and ASD strategies used in Drumbeat's community.

General strategies when communicating with someone with communication difficulties can be found in the Drumbeat Communication Handbook and are described as part of the transactional supports within the SCERTS framework. Communication partners should be responsive to pupils and foster initiations. Language should be adjusted and appropriate communication modelled. Alternative and augmentative communication support should be used to foster development.

Drumbeat values a range of communication strategies and interventions which include:

- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Colourful semantics
- Attention autism
- Aided language stimulation
- Personalised communication books
- Single message voice output communication aids
- Personalised Voice output communication apps

- Blank's Level of Questioning
- Social stories
- Comic strip conversations
- Intensive interaction
- Objects of reference
- Makaton signing
- Talking mats
- Derbyshire Language Scheme
- Lego therapy

## **4. Communication and the curriculum**

At Drumbeat School communication is at the core of the curriculum. Communication opportunities are at the centre of all learning and daily activities throughout the school day rather than having a focused 'communication time' ensuring that his communication development is embedded and generalised. Emphasis is placed on the importance of engaging, fun and meaningful interactions and experiences.

ASD theories and speech and language therapeutic approaches are embedded within individual personalised plans and the Drumbeat curriculum and assessment model. Speech and Language Therapy is provided within the classroom setting and the therapist works alongside staff to ensure therapy is integrated into a pupil's school day. Drumbeat school aims to set and develop foundations needed for successful learning in literacy; starting from where the pupil is and valuing the pupil's strengths and special interests. Also aiming to provide skills for life that promote functional communication skills both in and outside school. This focus on communication continues as pupils enter into their KS4 and KS5 qualifications where they practically apply the communication skills they have gained to a range of real life situations.

### **4.1 Planning and Assessment**

Communication activities and opportunities are planned around pupil's individual levels and is differentiated accordingly. In EYFS skills communication skills are taught as part of the communication and language area of learning and skills and are assessed against EYFS assessment framework. The KS1, KS2, KS3 English curriculum based on the Drumbeat levels curriculum and assessment model and contains the subjects; Communication, Reading and Writing. It incorporates communication skills based on ASD theory and frameworks such as PECS, Derbyshire Language Scheme, Blank's levels of questioning and colourful semantics. It incorporates skills in attention, listening, comprehension, expressive

language, social interaction and their functional application. The KS4 core curriculum is based on the AQA unit awards accreditation pathway and the 6<sup>th</sup> Form Curriculum is based on the ASDAN course work.

Drumbeat School and ASD service use SOLAR as its summative assessment. SOLAR is an administrative tool for adding progress towards targets. Assessment methods are used as appropriate for individual pupils depending on their communication level, these methods may include:

- Ongoing observations, teacher judgment and assessment using Drumbeat's Communication Curriculum framework on SOLAR
- Ongoing teacher judgment and assessment using relevant assessment tools and resources e.g.
  - Intensive interaction attainment descriptors
  - Attention Autism Profile
  - Information carrying word activities and resources e.g. CLEAR pictoys
  - Blank's level of questions
  - PECS Phases progression framework
  - Colourful semantics level of support
- Formal assessments carried out by a speech and language therapist e.g. BPVS, RAPT, TROG
- Informal assessments and observations carried out by a speech and language therapist e.g. Derbyshire Language Scheme, TALC
- MDT assessment using SCERTS assessment (SAP-Observation Form)