

Sperrinview Special School
Communication Policy

Introduction

Sperrinview School is committed to maintaining and enhancing communication with all members of the school community, staff, children, parents, other schools and outside agencies.

This document is a statement of the aims, principles and strategies for communication within Sperrinview School.

This can be divided into two areas of communication

- The total communication used to enhance the pupils' opportunities
- The various means of communication used to ensure that everyone involved with school is kept fully informed about the life and work of school.

Sperrinview School caters for pupils aged from 3-19 years with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties, complex medical needs and challenging behaviours. The majority have significant communication difficulties. Communication underpins all learning and therefore we are committed to providing individualised teaching to promote speech and language skills.

Pupils

Aims

We aim to:

1. Support and augment social, verbal and non-verbal communication
2. Work towards a total communication approach throughout school, where pupils have access to their own means of communication throughout the day and facilitate carryover outside of the school environment
3. Develop a means of communication appropriate to each child's individual needs to include both comprehension and expressive language skills
4. Create opportunities for communication throughout the curriculum to enable each child to communicate to the best of their ability.

Pupils' needs are best met when education and Speech and Language Therapy Services (SaLT) work collaboratively in the following ways:

- SaLT observation in classes to share good practice and negotiate further communication goals within classroom setting.
- SaLT will contribute to IEPs as appropriate
- Joint planning and delivery of social and communication groups.
- All classroom staff to attend group therapy sessions as appropriate, to support generalisation of new skills being taught.

- Baseline level of communication training for all staff and specific training according to individual needs

Monitoring & Evaluating Pupils' Progress

The importance of monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress is central to their development. As with all communication methods, regular opportunities to use these are vital for the pupil to achieve success. Signs, symbols and communication aids should always be available to the pupils and staff must be aware of the need to modify their communication to facilitate pupils' comprehension:

- Within the class
- Around school
- In the community

The appropriate SALT will monitor pupils' progress. Class staff continually monitor and evaluate pupils' progress in the area of communication. Support will be given as needed and/or requested.

Communication Methods in School

At Sperrinview School we aim to adopt a total communication approach using a range of alternative and augmentative communication methods(AAC) to support and encourage speech and language development. These methods include use of gestures, signs, symbols, communication boards/books as well as Voice Output Communication Devices. These are not used in isolation and a pupil may use several or a combination of these methods. AAC strategies will evolve and change over time.

Picture Exchange Communication System - PECS

PECS is used in school, where pupils learn to exchange picture symbols/photographs to communicate. There are 6 phases of PECS that pupils will move through. These are:

1. Exchanging a symbol
2. Travelling
3. Discrimination
4. Sentence structure
5. Spontaneous requesting
6. Social communication

Communication Aids

Communication aids, ranging from low tech to high tech, are used throughout the school. A number of devices are available for assessment purposes and, if appropriate, are supplied to individual pupils as required.

Communication aids currently used in school:

Simple Communication Aids:

- Big Mack which records a single message for example, asking for the register
- placemat for break time
- picture communication board etc

Complex Communication Aids:

- Go Talk
- Springboard Lite
- Proloquo2go app for the iPod/iPad under SaLT supervision etc

Communication Passports

These give people vital information, at transition to post 19 provision, about a pupil's individual needs including personal information, as well as how they communicate. The SaLT is responsible for collating information to prepare these passports and seeking advice from the classroom team, parents/carers as appropriate. These should be prepared as part of the Person Centred Planning process and are updated if information changes significantly.

Visual timetables/ Schedules

These are pictorial references or written timetables enabling pupils and staff to order an activity or events for the day.

Makaton

This is a language programme using signs to support comprehension and encourage communication.

Writing With Symbols

As appropriate, this is used when writing notes for pupils/families, to allow the pupil the opportunity to read the message.

General methods of communication throughout school

Communication with staff

A variety of methods of communication are used to ensure that all staff are fully informed of the day to day management and organisational issues and are actively informed of all school developments.

Regular scheduled meetings include

- Weekly Monday morning meeting with teachers
- Class staff meetings on Monday afternoons
- Class de-briefing and planning meetings at the end of each day
- Monthly block meetings
- Regular School Development Plan meetings with teachers
- Monthly classroom assistant meetings

- Monthly therapists meetings, with Principal
- Class staff meetings with therapy staff, as necessary on a Wednesday afternoon between 3-3.30pm

Other methods of communication with staff include:

- Email
- Online school calendar
- Noticeboards around school and in the staffroom
- Staff Reviews
- Staff Handbook
- Internal telephone and voicemail system
- Front screen at entrance of school
- Message books beside telephones
- An open-door policy with the Principal and Vice Principal

Staff are provided with minutes from the meetings and all staff have a responsibility to seek and share information. Communication is a two-way process. Part-time and job share staff, as well as those who have been absent, also have a responsibility to ensure that they update themselves with all necessary information, both in class and throughout school.

Communication with parents

Good communication and partnership between school and home is essential to enhance the learning opportunities for the pupils. We work on the understanding that parents are empowered to further support their child's education and development if they are informed of educational targets and how they can reinforce these in the home environment. In Sperrinview we communicate with parents using a range of strategies.

Parent/ Staff meetings

Individual Education Plans are devised for each pupil twice a year and targets and progress are discussed with the parents.

Annual Reviews

These take place each year. Parents are invited into school to meet with the teacher, therapists and other professionals to review their child's statement of special educational needs and receive a verbal report on progress. These usually happen in January, however for those pupils of transfer age, they happen in October.

Annual Report

In June of each year, parents receive a written report reflecting progress in all areas of the NI Curriculum and suggesting areas for development.

Home/School Diaries

Each pupil has a diary which is used to communicate news or information to and from home. The diaries can be used as a stimulus for pupils with significant communication difficulties. They are used by classroom staff, therapists and parents. Visual diaries are used in some classes to pictorially record events and promote communication.

Telephone

Parents are welcome to contact the school at any time to speak to the Principal or Vice Principal, or to leave a message for classroom staff, either through the Secretary or the classroom telephone voicemail service. Parents can speak directly to classroom staff between 8.45-9.10 or 2.50-3.20 and to therapy staff after 3.00pm.

School Prospectus and Other Information

- The school prospectus provides parents and prospective parents with a range of information about the school. The prospectus is reviewed and updated annually.
- Parents of pre-school children also receive information about the activities in which their child will engage and the facilities available.
- Parents of those pupils who are new to the school are asked to complete a "Starting School" booklet, which helps make the transition from home or other setting to school or school to school.
- Pupils leaving Sperrinview are provided with Communication Passports where appropriate, along with a range of other documents and evidence to support their new placement.
- SaLT Dept provide an information brochure detailing the service to all new pupils attending school

Other forms of Communication

Some of the other ways in which we communicate with parents include:

- Messages with Bus/Taxi Escorts and drivers
- Consultations
- Governors' Annual Report to Parents
- Open Evenings
- Parent Workshops
- Sperrinmag - the school magazine produced twice a year
- Monthly Newsletter
- School website - www.sperrinview.ik.org

School Policies

Copies of all school policies are available on the school website and in hard copy in the Principal's office

Communication with Others

In Sperrinview we actively seek to promote the work of the school in the local community. Celebrations and achievements are recognised and on occasions shared in the local and regional media.

The school is used by the local Autism NI group for their monthly meetings, Charis Youth Club once a month, Middletown Centre for Autism as a training venue and the NI Children's Hospice several times a year, to provide day respite to local children.

We enjoy links with local Nursery Schools, Primary Schools, Post Primary Schools, other Special Schools and Colleges. We are part of the Dungannon and Cookstown Area Learning Community and the Dungannon Learning Partnership.

In addition, we engage with a range of other statutory and voluntary agencies eg RDA, Appleby Trust etc.

We maintain links with all of the above through:

- Meetings
- Telephone Contact
- Email

Roles and Responsibilities

All stakeholders have a responsibility in this area. The Principal has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The policy will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Review

A sub-committee of the board of Governors will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy as part of a time tabled ongoing process,

Signed : _____ (Chair of Board of Governors)

Date: _____