

Ingfield Manor School

Curriculum Statement for Communication – Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Rationale:

Due to the nature of their motor-neurological impairments, a large majority of the students at Ingfield Manor School have dysarthria and are therefore non-verbal or have unintelligible speech. To support their communication, these students are learning to use Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) as an alternative or to support their speech. Students with this nature of neurological impairment may also struggle with their expressive and receptive communication skills and benefit from the structure and modelling of AAC.

AAC can be both low tech (facial expressions, signing, symbol cards, communication book) or high tech (Voice Output Communication Aids – VOCA). Due to their physical disabilities, students will also require support to develop an effective access method to enable them to use both the high- and low-tech communication aids.

At Ingfield Manor School, we recognise the importance of the communication curriculum to enable students to:

- Become active communicators
- Develop their independence skills
- Develop their knowledge of vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar
- Develop their physical access skills for low and high tech AAC
- Develop strategic, problem solving skills
- Develop social skills by encouraging co-operative learning and discussion
- Feel they are valued as holistic, active learners and empowered with the confidence and self-esteem to make choices and be motivated.

**Students who have verbal speech are also supported to develop their communication skills, however this is encapsulated within the English curriculum statement under ‘speaking and listening’.*

Curriculum Intent:

Throughout the school (EYFS, Key Stage 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5) our long-term plans are designed to support students follow a clear communication pathway to enable them to become independent, proactive communicators. This pathway is personalised to each student depending on their individual communication needs and enables students to develop in all four strands of Janice Light’s AAC Competencies.

Ingfield Manor School encourages a ‘total communication’ environment to ensure that students have as many personalised opportunities as possible to develop in all four strands in unison:

Linguistic	Receptive and expressive language development; and knowledge of linguistic code that is intended for use on the AAC system. Including: - ➤ Understanding spoken words and/or sentences
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Attaching meaning to objects, signs/gestures, images, symbols and/or text. Learning to use these resources to convey messages ➤ Ability to combine words into phrases and sentences to differentiate meaning ➤ Understanding of categories for organising vocabulary ➤ Using vocabulary and syntax to differentiate interaction functions e.g. greeting, requesting, questioning, commenting, protesting, directing (overlaps with social)
Operational	<p>Skills needed to access and operate AAC resources efficiently</p> <p>Including: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Visual acuity & perception ➤ Attention control ➤ Development of gross and fine motor skills ➤ Postural control and consistent timed movements for access ➤ Understanding scanning or search and dwell for eye gaze etc ➤ Use of special functions e.g. jump home, jump back, backspace, clear, rest, print etc ➤ Settings controls e.g. on/off; volume, brightness of the screen, etc ➤ Use of a contents page/categorisation
Social	<p>Understanding and application of social communication conventions</p> <p>Including: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Looking at partners when delivering message and when listening ➤ Attracting attention and taking turns ➤ Initiating, maintaining and terminating interactions in a socially, culturally and contextually appropriate manner ➤ Expressing different interaction functions e.g. greeting, requesting, commenting, protesting, directing (overlaps with linguistic) ➤ Matching communication styles to context e.g formal and informal communication e.g swearing with friends, but not your teacher etc.
Strategic	<p>Adaptability in using the most appropriate communication tools for the occasion</p> <p>e.g. signing may be quickest method, but only functional if partner understands the signs</p> <p>Including: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Using the most efficient strategy for gaining attention (e.g. fixing with gaze/using quiet vocalisation may work in some but not all situations) ➤ Compensating for limitations e.g. being creative with limited vocabulary using by other ways of conveying words (such as 'not good sleep story' for nightmare) ➤ Repairing communication breakdown e.g. having a way to signal 'I didn't mean that.'

- The four areas may develop at different rates, and specific competencies may need more support than others.
- There will be some overlapping of skills and blurring of boundaries within the four areas.

- It is important to look at the student holistically and consider all four areas in their development of AAC competency, as relative deficits in one area may mask potential in others. For example, if a student has limited physical access to their communication aids, they will struggle to show their full potential with their independent linguistic, social and strategic skills.
- The curriculum should be personalised for each student depending on their individual communication needs.


Implementation:

The staff involved in implementing the communication curriculum are:

- Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs)
- SaLT Assistants
- Specialist AAC teachers
- SEN teachers
- Teaching Assistants (team members)
- Occupational Therapists
- IT Team
- Assistive Technology technicians

Vocabulary

Ingfield Manor School uses the following vocabulary sets to support and develop students' communication pathway:

Ingfield Manor School AAC Vocabulary Pathway		
	Go Steps and Building Blocks	Activities and games to build and develop early communication skills – cause and effect, turn taking, etc.
	Ingfield Dynamic Vocabulary - IDV	<p>This is a PCS, category-based vocabulary set used by all students who use AAC at Ingfield Manor. The levels of vocabulary are differentiated by the number of cells on the page and therefore the amount of words available, beginning with IDV A and moving up to B, C, and D. IDV B and C also have a '+' level where some wordlists are introduced. The students can access their IDV vocabulary in both their communication book and VOCA.</p> <p>By the end of KS2 a decision will be made about which pathway students will continue on as they move into Secondary. Students will either continue to develop/expand their skills in using IDV, or be introduced to VfL which offers context based, pre-saved sentences.</p>
	Vocabulary for Life - VfL	<p>This vocabulary set is aimed at older students who already have experience of low and/or high tech AAC and is introduced in the secondary phase. The 'Vocabulary for Life' grids include context specific pre-stored messages. These contain 'sentence starters' and 'wordlists' which when selected change the available vocabulary within the page so users do not have to change pages as frequently as on their core vocabulary IDV grids, thus increasing the speed at which they can build phrases. It has been designed to provide vocabulary to support the City and Guilds Effective AAC qualification.</p> <p>VfL works in parallel to the Ingfield Dynamic Vocabulary – they are at no time to replace IDV. Two levels of VfL have been created to support the students working at</p>

		different levels. A simplified version of VfL has been made for students who will find the full vocabulary set too complex. The teacher and SaLT will work together to decide which students will use which version.
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Students require opportunities to learn vocabulary sets in a similar way to when someone learns a foreign language. At Ingfield we believe that you can't simply put an AAC aid in front of a student and expect them to use it proficiently. This is the case for both students who are literate as well as those with early to no literacy skills who may be learning to use symbols. Students require opportunities to explore their vocabulary sets to learn:

- the graphic or auditory representations for the words/pre-saved sentence. This may be through written words, auditory prompts, symbols or pictures.
- the meaning of these words and the context in which they are used.
- the location of the words within the high or low tech AAC device, so that they can be located when needed.

Communication lessons are the ideal opportunity for students to explore their vocabulary without the cognitive demand of other curriculum subjects. Within these lessons, strategies such as modelling and aided language stimulation are used to expose the students to the vocabulary available to them. Vocabulary workbooks provide a clear structure and focus for communication lessons and ensure that students are exploring the rich variety of language within their AAC device.

Within the long-term plans for communication, each vocabulary set becomes the focus for a half term topic across the different key stages – see attached LTP. Vocabulary sets are divided into core and secondary categories. Core sets are repeated frequently throughout the rolling LTP, as these are deemed as priority for students at Ingfield Manor School. Secondary sets are included at least once within the LTP to ensure they are covered throughout the students' communication pathway.

In line with the total communication ethos of the school, students are not only exposed to vocabulary in isolation within their communication lessons, but also as part of the whole school day, including curriculum lesson, social times and within the residential provision. However, structured communication lessons do provide a suitable environment for students with motor-neurological impairments to explore vocabulary without other cognitive, physical and social demands.

Sentence structure and grammar:

During their communication and English lessons (as well as other NC subject) students at Ingfield Manor School are encouraged to develop their correct use of sentence structure and grammar when using AAC aids for both communication and recording their work. This supports clarity for their communication partner and gives greater context to their work products. This includes the use of sentence starters, pronouns and conjunctions.

However, if the physical demands of accessing vocabulary (either high or low tech) outweighs the benefits of using full sentences, students will be supported to use key words to convey their message. It is essential that students are able to communicate their needs and wishes in the simplest way possible.

Access:

All students take part in an on-going, dynamic access assessment with key members of the transdisciplinary team including SaLTs, OTs, AT technicians and teachers. Access is a key focus for all students using AAC, as to effectively demonstrate their linguistic, social and strategic communication skills, they must develop their physical access skills. This assessment will be on-going as students grow

and develop and their body movements change as a consequence. Practise and repetition are key to enable students with neurological motor impairments to learn the motor pattern to locate specific vocabulary – also referred to as muscle memory.

Students must also learn to categorise vocabulary, either through visual or auditory prompts. This requires repetition and exposure across different contexts.

Strategies to support communication:

Students are supported to use alternative strategies if they don't have the correct vocabulary in either their high or low-tech devices. Strategies may include:

- Use of alphabet pages to spell the word or give the first letter as a clue (linked with development of phonological skills)
- Use of predictive text and word banks
- Strategic vocabulary to give clues e.g it sounds like, it's similar to, it's the opposite of

Teaching strategies may include:

- Dedicated communication lessons
- Individual, paired & small group work,
- Modelling of language,
- Aided Language Stimulation,
- Word webs,
- Vocabulary workbooks – students explore and locate the available vocabulary on their device/book,
- Teacher led lessons/activities demonstrate vocabulary on the Smartboard,
- Role play and scenarios,
- Programming - personalising symbols and vocabulary (add and remove),
- Trips/outings to practise using communication in real life context/different settings,
- Current affairs – sharing thoughts, opinions and feelings on a topical news story using vocab sets,
- Makaton signing – group work, sign and sign sessions,
- Wall displays and posters,
- Physical facilitation – gradually reducing support as the students develop their independence.

Impact of the Communication Curriculum:

The impact of the communication curriculum will be reviewed on an on-going basis to ensure an engaging, meaningful, holistic education for students who use AAC.

The staff involved in reviewing the impact of the communication curriculum are:

- Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs)
- SaLT Assistants
- Specialist AAC teachers/Curriculum lead
- SEN teachers
- Teaching Assistants (team members)

Each student at IMS has an EHCP which sets out clear, long-term communication outcomes. From these, students are set annual targets and then termly targets which are reviewed and evaluated by the staff members above. The termly targets are used to inform daily communication lesson targets across the

whole of the curriculum, which are reviewed by the student themselves as well the support staff and teachers. This formative assessment is used to inform future planning.

Progress in communication is recorded formally via the Ingfield Holistic Assessment (HAS) tool on a termly basis. Progress in the use of AAC is measured in line with students linguistic, operational, social and strategic skills. Teachers, SaLT's and Heads of Department meet termly to review students' communication progress and implement additional support strategies as required.

Students in key stage 4 & 5 work towards achieving an EL1, EL2, EL3 and L1 City and Guilds qualification in Effective AAC.

Impact is also measured in terms of qualitative feedback from stakeholders including students, parents and the school team.