



"Learning is a journey, to be taken together, one step at a time"



Onchan Primary School
School Road, Onchan, Isle of Man IM3 4PD
email: OnchanEnquiries@Sch.im
tel: 01624 673465

Onchan Unit Communication Policy

A Total Communication approach is used to develop the functional communication of children attending Onchan Special Needs Unit.

Total communication means that we encourage the use of all appropriate means of communication:

- Verbal skills including speaking and listening
- Signing including gesture and body language
- Written text
- Picture symbols accompanied by written word(s)
- Photographs
- Objects of reference
- High Tec. communication aids (such as the Go Talk range or Gridplayer)
- Low Tec. Aids e.g. symbolic/pictorial representation

Our aims:

- To help children find a way to express themselves using good functional communication.
- To enable children to develop their receptive and expressive communication skills
- Each child's individual communication system(s) will be used consistently across the Unit, including assistance to parents/carers.
- All staff are expected to contribute to the maintenance of individual's communication system(s) in accordance with the Unit Manager and Speech and Language Therapists input
- All staff will be able to understand and work with all aspects of total communication and are offered training (induction, mandatory, signing sessions, off- site day courses) throughout the year.

Communications Targets

- A full set of communication targets is written up after assessment has been completed.
- Communication targets are agreed with the speech and language therapist, SESO's and parents
- Copies of communication targets are given to the SESO's, on display in the classroom and is kept in the child's file.

Resources to Develop Communications

- All resources that are needed to support the development and maintenance of an individual's communication will be provided by the Unit
- SESO's have the responsibility of maintaining the equipment
- Support is readily available from the SLT department.



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Review of Communications Skills

- An IEP review of a child's communication skills is carried out with input from the Unit Manager and Speech and language therapists
- Reassessment, using formal and informal assessments, is carried out as and when appropriate.
- Targets are updated and the necessary equipment provided.
- A communication profile is produced for each child, outlining key information, which is laminated and distributed to parents and education staff and forms part of the transition documentation.

Transitions

- We aim to make an individual's transition from Onchan Special Needs Unit to another placement as smooth as possible.
- We aim to meet with workers from the new placement on a number of occasions to discuss the person's communication needs, explain, and model the use of all equipment.
- We will send a communication profile and transfer all the necessary communication equipment to the new placement.
- We will offer training in the new placement, where possible, to enable a smooth transition of the child's communication skills.

Resources

Copies of all resources used by individual children in the Unit or at home are kept in a separate file. This helps us to quickly replace picture symbols, visual timetables, sign books, etc. should they go missing.

Video Recording

We aim to make videos of good practice in the classroom and of speech and language therapy sessions. These can then be used for developing ideas for use with an individual child or a number of children; they can also be used as part of the Unit's communication training programme and to induct new staff, parents and interested others to individual child's communication methods.

Liaison

Onchan Special Needs Unit aims to initiate, encourage and develop good liaison with people based both on and off site. It is important for us to continue to work towards building up a good liaison network so that communication strategies may be used with individual children consistently. This approach helps to build up a child's confidence in using total communication and reduce any anxiety or frustration that may be associated with attempting to communicate with others.

On-site Liaison

We aim to develop liaison with:

- Education staff
- Other professionals based on site

On-site liaison may take the form of:



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- Discussions with relevant education staff about an individual's communication targets and strategies, mealtime procedures, need for staff training, etc. An open-door policy enables staff to discuss relevant issues, resources and good practice there and then or, alternatively, set a time that is convenient for both parties
- Regular meetings within the Special Needs Unit Team (both formal and informal)

These vary in regularity, most being pre-booked and meetings but others may take place as the need arises

Off-site Liaison

We also aim to provide and develop good liaison with those based off site:

- Parents
- Speech and Language Therapists involved in the care of a new or leaving child
- Those people involved in the transition process who will be working with our child in their future placement
- Residential staff
- Social care
- Medical staff

The level of liaison for those based off site may vary from individual to individual. It may take the form of:

- face-to-face meetings
- telephone conversations
- written information
- training for the new placement

We always aim to ensure that each school leaver takes their resources with them to the next placement. This may include their Picture Exchange Communication System file containing a full set of photos or picture symbols, a personal signing book, a chat book, visual timetable, etc. Each child also leaves with recent reports, which may include communication targets, copies of assessments and strategies used and an up to-date communication profile outlining their communication strengths and weaknesses.

Functional Communication

All children verbal and non-verbal, are working towards good functional communication. The Unit strive to cover active listening, appropriateness, turn taking and organization.

Verbal children may be working on one or two areas at one time. For example, developing active listening so that they can indicate when they have not understood or say when they do not understand a particular word and also learning to maintain a conversation for more than one conversation exchange.

Non-verbal children may be working on good listening and turn-taking skills.

The Picture Exchange Communication System is used in the Unit in all situations and teaching contexts. For some pupils, PECS will augment other communication systems in use. For other pupils, PECS may be their main or only means of establishing effective functional communication.



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- PECS is a communication system that a number of children have used at previous placements.
- PECS encourages functional verbal communication.
- PECS encourages the child to initiate a request or comment and develops other social and functional communication skills such as eye contact, making contact with others, turn taking, humour and organization.
- The PECS principles can be put into practice using 1 to 4 inch picture symbols (with text underneath), photos and, to a lesser degree, objects of reference.
- We aim to support progression by finding the appropriate medium for each child.

Those children that are unable to use PECS will be transferred to alternative systems to develop their skills.

Intensive Interaction

Intensive interaction is used primarily with hard-to-reach children. It encourages social interaction and is led by the child. No demands are put on the child; it is up to the staff member to follow the child's lead and to help them build on it. It encourages eye contact, smiling, turn taking and vocalization.

Intensive interaction is carried out 1-1:

- Usually, it is carried out in a quiet, relaxing room with an adult, the child and sometimes an observer
- It may be part of a child's timetable of activities, as part of their communication syllabus
- It may be carried out by the Speech and Language Therapist, Unit Manager or SESO's
- It may be carried out in between activities in class

Signing

Onchan Special Needs Unit supports the use of signing across and off site. Signing is seen as a valuable support to verbal language for all children, both in providing a visual focus and supporting verbal understanding and as an expressive form of communication for some children.

Signing Systems Used

- We use a predominantly Sign-a-long based signing system
- All staff are encouraged to use signing across and off site when talking with children.
- Children are encouraged to sign, whether they are able to use 1 or 200 signs.
- Children's IEP's may well contain signing targets as appropriate to their behavioural needs.
- All staff will complete a Sign-a-long course as part of their CPD
- Signing is encouraged in the music, dance and drama sessions as well as story telling sessions

Symbols

The use of symbols in communication at Onchan Special Needs Unit is wide ranging. Although the spoken and written word is used throughout the school, many children need to use symbols in other forms to access and support expressive and receptive language.

Symbol Forms:

We use three forms of symbols in the Special Needs Unit



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1. objects of reference: used with those children whose communication is predominantly at the pre-intentional and intentional level but who have yet to consistently manage the use of 2 dimensional symbols in a formal communication system.
2. photographs: used with those children who can recognise 2 dimensional representations of an object but are unable to recognise colour or black and white line drawings consistently.
3. picture symbols: Widget picture symbols are used with children who have the ability to recognise black and white or colour picture symbols.

Photographs and picture symbols will be of varying sizes, depending on the ability of the child. They range in size from 1 inch up to A4. Different sizes may be used for different purposes (e.g. a Teacher may use an A4 size symbol to the whole class when setting up the daily timetable, whilst the children may be using 1, 2, or 4 inch symbols or photos).

Children may be encouraged to use more than one form of symbol - e.g. photographs for transition and picture symbols on their timetable. We are constantly attempting to move children from one form of symbol to the next level -e.g. objects of reference to photographs.

Symbol Use:

All forms of symbols will be used across site. Symbols may be used as a means of expression - e.g. the Picture Exchange Communication System, pointing boards - and as a support to verbal understanding - e.g. social stories, timetables and calendars. Each child will have access to one or more of these visual supports using symbols relevant to their communication ability:

Expression:

- The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- A pointing file/board

Verbal understanding:

- Visual timetable
- 'Working towards' system
- Feelings board, body parts board
- Social stories
- Wait card
- Don't touch card
- Chew and swallow card
- Chat book
- Finished card
- Sequencing board

All these visual support systems can be personalised to meet the needs of individual children.



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Other symbol based systems that may be used in the classroom include:

Personal PECs files – everyone, staff and children, at Onchan Special Needs Unit will have on them at all times a basic photo communication card so that a child can communicate at all times.

Mealtime Procedures

Eating and drinking is a complex sequence of actions that develops at different rates when children have diverse learning and behavioural difficulties.

The Unit Manager and support staff will encourage and support good eating and drinking by assessing individuals, suggesting ways of developing good eating and drinking skills and providing appropriate resources.

Referral

Children who are experiencing any problems with eating and drinking should be referred to the Speech and Language Therapy Department for assessment.

This Policy will be reviewed bi-annually

Adopted: October 2019

Next Review due September 2021

