

# Total Communication Environment Policy



## **Our Vision**

Parkhill Secondary is a non denominational school. Within our school community there is a wide diversity of beliefs and culture, hence:

Learning, Respect and Responsibility are at the heart of Parkhill Secondary School.

We aim to create a safe, inclusive environment that allows every person to achieve and fulfil their potential.

## **Our Values**

We at Parkhill Secondary place emphasis on all stakeholders contributing to establishing shared values within our school as we believe values underpin all we do.

We believe that what we do improves the lives of our pupils, parents and staff.

Our school values are:

RESPECT

RESPONSIBILITY

AMBITION

RESILIENCE

## **Our Aims**

At Parkhill Secondary we aim to provide a learning environment

- Where learners needs are met through providing innovative, high quality learning experiences
- Which offers a challenging and dynamic curriculum which has breadth, pace and depth
- Which provides an outward-looking school which, as a matter of policy, seeks opportunities for social inclusion and mainstream experience for pupils and teachers
- Where all practitioners are working cooperatively and collaboratively to make the school attractive, successful and well managed
- Where fairness and equality for all permeates through all aspects of school life
- Where staff skills and expertise is continually enhanced through high quality CPD
- Where creativity and enterprise is actively promoted
- Where pupils develop skills to become Confident Individuals, Successful Learners, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens

## Parkhill School Statement on Total Communication Environment:

What is a Total Communication Environment (TCE)?

**Communication** is the exchange of meaningful information between people. Communication may be verbal and/or non-verbal. A **total communication environment** is where all relevant means of communication are used and supported, e.g. Makaton signing, symbols, objects of reference, intensive interaction, on-body signs, changes to adult talk and high and low tech communication aids.

The total communication approach is about finding and using the right combination of communication methods for each person. This approach helps an individual to form connections, ensures successful interactions and supports information exchanges and conversations. A combination of methods are used, which reinforce each other and strengthen meaning for the individual.

All staff are responsible for supporting the Total Communication Environment and helping students to have access to systems of communication that are appropriate to their needs. Adults' communication is one of the most important factors – all adults in the inclusive communication environment should be aware of their own communication and adapt their language levels accordingly. Adults should support their spoken language with visual supports (aided language stimulation) and sign. Modelling is vital in pupils learning other ways of communicating.

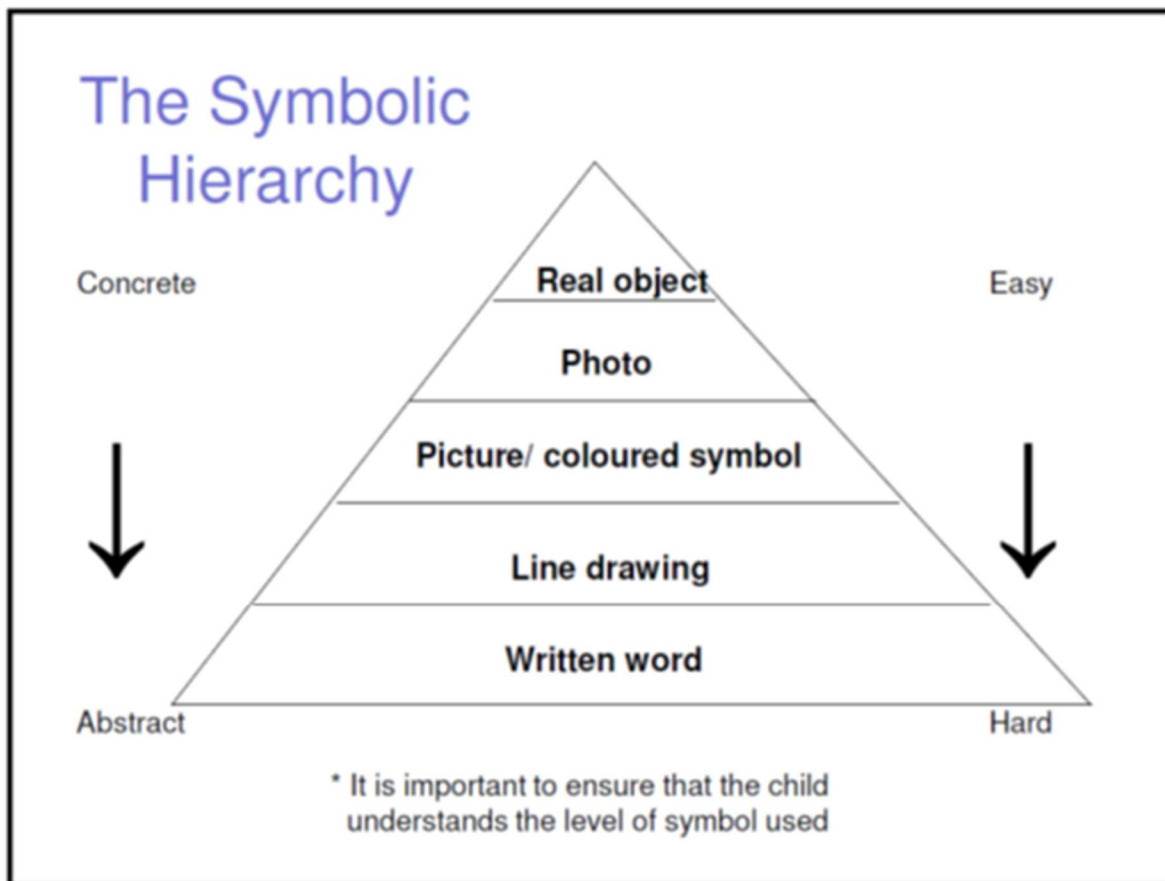
Pupils at Parkhill will be supported to use a wide variety of methods of communication including: communication books, switches, high tech and low tech communication aids appropriate to their needs.

## How does this work at Parkhill?

At Parkhill :

- We are committed to providing a total communication environment
- We understand the relationship between communication and behaviour
- We employ an individualised, child-centred approach to communication
- We work with children, families and speech and language therapists, jointly identifying and implementing strategies for communication enhancement
- Have received training on our inservice days on TCE
- Have a branch of our working parties dedicated to the TCE
- Have provided a variety of training for staff including Makaton. Talking Mats, Proloquo to Go and many more
- Use ICT to support communication where relevant
- Have a staff team brimming with skills and expertise in methods of communication
- Have clear visual display information relating to the definition of a TCE around the school
- Use a variety of Alternative and Augmentative Communication systems such as PECS, Makaton, symbols, objects of reference, signing and key word approaches in conjunction with each other to support the variety of learners that we have
- Use a mix of high and low tech communication to meet the needs of the individual

## Symbolic Hierarchy



We all use multi-sensory prompts, especially visual ones, everyday: for example logos, road signs, maps and lists but also title music or even the smell of bread in the bakery department of a store. They help us to understand information in a quick and easy way.

Children usually find it easier to recognise things they see and experience before words, for example, they will usually recognise a photo of a dog before they understand the word “dog”.

In addition to helping a child understand what you are trying to communicate to them, visual and multi-sensory supports can help develop understanding of actual words.

There are several types of visual support we can use, to help children understand what we are saying such as:

- **Real objects (See Objects of Reference section)**
- **Photos**
- **Dolls’ house (small world) versions of real objects**
- **Coloured or black and white pictures**
- **Line drawings and symbols such as Boardmaker or Widget symbols**
- **Gestures, or sign language such as Makaton**
- **Written words**

Introduce visual supports gradually. Use them repeatedly so the child or young person gets plenty of practice.

Examples of other types of multi-sensory support are:

- **Textures (for example for children with a visual impairment)**
- **Sounds and music**
- **Sensory experiences (for example a plant watering spray to symbolise a shower)**

Some of these multi-sensory supports are easier to understand than others. Discuss with a speech and language therapist which will be best for any particular child.

Some examples of how multi-sensory supports can be used are:

**Timetables** – a sequence of pictures to help a child understand what he is doing and what will happen next

**Photo albums** of familiar people and objects

**Building understanding of pictures and symbols** by attaching visual supports to the things they represent

**Adding 'sound effects'** and gestures to stories and rhymes

## **Using real objects (Objects of reference)**

### **What are objects of reference?**

Objects of reference are objects which have a special meanings for the user. If the child cannot see what is happening or where they are going and cannot hear or understand what you are telling them, objects give an alternative way of communicating this information to the child. Objects “stand for something” in the same way words or signs do for children who can understand them.

### **Why use them?**

There are several reasons why a child might need them and the reason for using objects may be different for different children.

- Behaviour – may reduce behaviours- caused by fear, frustration or the insecurity of not knowing what is happening next or where they are going
- Multisensory skills – encourages children to use all their available senses (touch, smell, sound, sight) to explore objects. This is particularly useful for children who are tactile defensive (very sensitive to touch)
- Object recognition – leads on to the use of senses to recognise and differentiate between objects
- Association – develops the ability to associate objects with a specific activity/room.
- Understanding – Once they know what the object stands for, their understanding of language may develop as they repeatedly hear the word relating to that object and activity/place
- Expression – some children may quickly learn the meaning of objects and use them to tell us a message either by their reaction when given an object (they may pull a face or refuse to take an object if they know it means an activity/place they don't like), or by choosing between objects to show what they want.

## How to use Objects of Reference

Choose objects which are only used in a certain activity/routine. For example, use a favourite toy to show playtime, but only if the child would not have the toy at other times such as to cuddle in bed.

Try and keep the objects in a box when they are not in use so they easily accessible.

Before taking the child to an activity, give them the object to hold/touch. Allow them time to explore it and talk to them about what it means. If the object makes a noise, help the child make the noise. After the activity has finished put the object away in the box. Draw the child's attention to the fact that the object has gone and the activity has finished, for example, 'drink finished'.

Try to use real objects at first, although you may build to the use of some miniatures or objects with more abstract associations , for example, a star for song time

Be consistent in your use of the object, even though the child may not understand at first.

Currently at Parkhill we use the following signifiers –

Library/Story Time	
Sensory Story	
Dance	
Art	
Assembly	
Drama Room/Drama	
Hygiene Suites or Toilet	
Outside Play	
Maths	
Literacy	
Janitor	
Office/SMT Suite, PT Room, HT office	
Music/Music Therapy	
Lunch	
Soft Play	
Sensory Room	
Swimming/Hydro	
Home	
Gym hall/P.E.	
Rebound	
Lifeskills/Cooking	
Sensory Garden	
Physio	
Work Experience	
Community Outing	
Classroom	

**Fill in with Parkhill signifiers (as agreed with LCFE SIP group)**

## Now and Next Board (sometimes referred to as 'First and Then')

### What is a 'Now and Next' board?

The board has the words 'Now' on the left-hand side and 'Next' on the right-hand side with a space underneath to add a symbol or a paragraph. It could be described as a miniature version of a visual timetable and helps a child to move on from one activity to another.

### What does it look like?



### Who might benefit from a 'Now and Next' board?

- A child who has difficulty finishing one activity and starting another
- A child who is reluctant to participate in a particular activity, for example messy play (in this case the second item would be something you know which the child really enjoys)
- A child with limited attention skills

### How does it work?

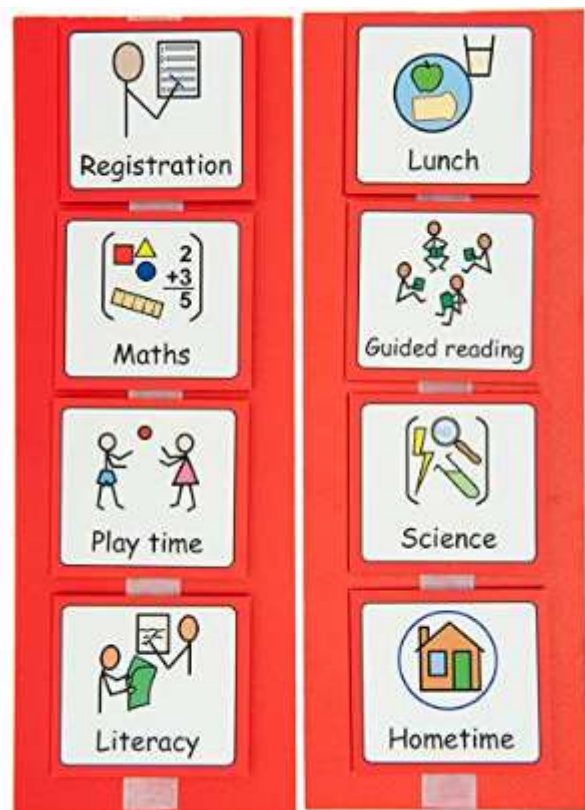
- Place a symbol on each side of the board. It's a good idea to place an activity that really motivates the child on the 'Next' side of the board. This acts as a 'reward', something for the child to aim for.
- Show the child the board, point to each symbol individually and support the child by saying 'glue now....cars next'. Reduce language by using key words only.
- When the child has engaged with the gluing activity for some time the adult should inform the child by saying 'gluing finished... now cars' whilst pointing to the next symbol.
- Encourage the child to move on by supporting them to 'post' the now symbol into a box/turning it over before moving on to the next activity.

## Visual Timetables

As adults, we have a good understanding of the hour of the day, how time passes and how long we are likely to have to wait for something important in our schedule.

A visual timetable, timeline or visual activity schedule is a way of supporting a child to predict what will happen next. It enables a child to know the things that must happen first, before they can do the activity that they are often focused on. It also helps them to understand where they are in the day, by knowing what has gone before and what will come after the present moment.

The visual timetable can cover activities across the whole day, or across a shorter period of time such as a morning or afternoon, or even be broken down into smaller steps within an individual activity or routine. It might be particularly helpful with key routines such as washing hands or getting ready for home-time.



These are examples of a visual timetable using symbols. The first one depicts the sequence of an activity, and the next one is the sequence of a day.

Here are a further two examples of visual timetables using symbols. The first depicts a days worth of activities for 3 pupils. The second is a visual timetable spanning a week for one pupil.



This photo shows two daily visual timetables which use photos. One is using objects of reference, and the far right one is a photos with symbols also, so the pupil is able to start associating the symbol with the activity/place.



## **How does this tie in with the Parkhill values?**

**Respect** - The communication system/s and choices that are most meaningful to each learner are used, staff value and respond to all communication

**Responsibility** - Our children and young people use the communication systems that are most relevant to them and reflect how they see themselves as a communicator. Independent initiation is encouraged as much as possible

**Ambition** - Learners are encouraged and challenged to reach the next level in their communication with adult support

**Resilience** – Learners adapt to new environments using their preferred method of communication, creating and building understanding with adults

## **What will the impact on our learners be?**

The progress of individuals is continuously monitored and recorded via teacher assessment, target monitoring, review procedures and SLT input where appropriate. This will allow children and young people to continually move forward in their communication and achieve their full potential as a communicator.