

Communication Policy



The Unicorn School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment

Introduction

This document is a statement of the aims, principles and strategies for communication at The Unicorn School. All new staff are given a copy of the policy to highlight the communication ethos at The Unicorn School.

The Unicorn School provides specialist education for pupils aged 6-16 years who have Specific Learning Difficulties: dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Communication underpins all learning and therefore we are committed to providing a total communication environment.

Aims and Philosophy

The school provides a positive, nurturing environment in which every child is helped to build self-confidence, appreciate their learning difficulties and develop their own personal learning style. Our goal is for every child to flourish at The Unicorn School, leaving with the confidence to learn, the appetite for study, and the desire to continue to succeed in their education and beyond.

Our school aims are to:

1. Adopt a total communication approach throughout school.
2. Develop means of communication appropriate to each child's individual needs.
3. Create opportunities for communication throughout the curriculum to enable each child to communicate to the best of their ability.

We are a small, nurturing school with circa 120 pupils and small class sizes averaging 10-12 pupils per class. Our teachers are specialists in working with dyslexia and related difficulties, equipping our pupils with strategies for learning that will enable them to succeed in their education and beyond.

Our bespoke approach integrates all aspects of learning under one roof: highly qualified teachers with a passion for special educational needs, small class sizes, an adapted National Curriculum made accessible to those with learning difficulties, specialist teaching techniques, daily one-to-one tuition for every pupil (up to Y8 and in small groups for Y9-11), focused study sessions to support GCSE preparation, and for those who need it, in-house Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy.

Pupils Starting School

A pupil's communication needs are assessed in their previous school setting and within The Unicorn School setting during their visit days, using a combination of individual assessments, classroom observations and liaison between staff and family. On entry to The Unicorn School most children who require support from the Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) will already be known but other children may be referred in discussion with the class teacher and the parents.

Pupils' needs are best met when they receive communication support within every aspect of their education, during every lesson.

- Class teachers, One to One teachers and Teaching Assistants will use the techniques discussed and demonstrated through the ELKLAN training delivered by leading practitioners. This training enables them to be more effective in their support of children with speech, language and communication needs.
- The teaching staff will work closely with the Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) -the SaLT will make observations in classes to share good practice and negotiate further communication targets within classroom settings.
- Through the ELKLAN training there will be joint planning and delivery of lessons using a variety of techniques which provide more accessibility to learning for students with SLCN.

- Teaching staff will be supported by Lead Practitioners in the implementation of new skills or the consolidation of different strategies being taught. There will be a baseline level of training for all staff and specific training according to individual needs.
- Communication targets will be embedded across all areas of the curriculum.
- Other professionals will be updated on the means of communication for pupils they work with (eg. physiotherapists, occupational therapists, Play/Creative Arts therapist).

Monitoring and Evaluation

The importance of monitoring and evaluating a pupil's 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, photographs, objects of reference and communication aids must always, with appropriate support from staff, be available to the pupils:

- Within the class
- Around school
- In the community

The class teacher is to continually monitor and evaluate pupil's progress in the area of communication. Support will be given as needed and/or requested. The SaLT will monitor pupil's progress if they have been referred for further intervention.

Communication Methods in School

At The Unicorn School we adopt an approach using a range of alternative methods to support and encourage two-way communication and speech and language development. These are not used in isolation and a pupil may use several of these methods.

Makaton Signing

This is a signing system that some individual pupils will use alongside their talking to develop their understanding of language and their ability to express themselves. The Communication Policy

use of signing throughout the school day by some staff will enhance a child's ability to be an effective communicator.

Objects of Reference

Some pupils will need to use objects of reference to aid their communication and understanding of language. An object of reference will be a real object that represents an activity or a place.

Symbols / Photographs (e.g. Visual Timetables)

The use of symbols/photographs provides valuable support and is encouraged even if pupils. It is the responsibility of teaching staff to provide symbol/photo vocabulary as appropriate.

Communication Aids

A range of voice output communication aids are used throughout the school. These include iPads, voice to text software, reading pens and ClaroRead.

Visual Aids

Different strategies will be used in lessons and one to one sessions that encourage development of speech, language and communication e.g. graphic organisers, Mind Maps, Word Maps, Venn Diagrams, Double Bubble, Essay Plans, Persuasion Plans.

Vocabulary Development

Teachers will target Core, Describing and Specialist words when teaching topics. Teachers will not assume understanding and will target up to 10 Describing words at a time. To strengthen vocabulary development different strategies will be used such as Word Maps, Word Storms, Word Connections, Word bluff, True or False, Word-In, Word-Out, Attribute Webs, Multiple Meaning Trees and Spidergrammes.

Communication Books

These are indexed books of symbols that can be used to aid a pupil's communication. Initially these would be produced by the SaLT and are then the responsibility of the class staff and they will require updating regularly if a pupil is using them.

Pupil Learning Profile

The One-to-One teachers will usually be responsible for writing and updating these plans, seeking advice from SaLT and Class Teachers for Key Stage 2. The Study Skills teachers will usually be responsible for writing and updating these plans, seeking advice from SaLT and Class Teachers for Key Stage 3 and 4. These should be reviewed and updated at least once a year, and preferably three times per year if information changes significantly. These give people vital information about a pupil's individual needs including personal information, as well as how they communicate.

Zones of Regulation

In school, children need to be able to self-regulate for them be ready to learn. Children whose states of arousal are too low or too high will struggle to focus on the learning activity in the lesson. The "Zones of Regulation" is a cognitive behaviour approach for helping students to self-regulate their behaviours, emotions, and sensory needs. By using concepts and visual aids to help students learn to recognise their feelings and level of arousal, it allows them to employ strategies for optimal learning. Pupils and parents will be aware of the four zones; red, blue, green and yellow and what each represents. All members of staff will have the zones on their ID lanyard and there will be posters in key areas of the school so pupils can point to the zones if they are unable to verbalise their response.

Home/School Communication

In our school we aim to have clear and effective communication with all parents/carers and with the wider community. Effective communication enables us to share our aims and values, through keeping parents well informed about school life. This reinforces the important role that parents play in supporting the school.

Good communication between the school and the home is essential, and children achieve more when schools and parents/carers work together.

We send a newsletter to parents at the end of each school week. It contains general details of school events and activities and a copy is forwarded by email as arranged and is available on the school website. We send other letters of a general nature when necessary.

At the beginning of each academic year long term plans for each year group will be distributed to parents, providing details of the work to be covered during the

forthcoming terms. Teachers will also share termly plans as appropriate with parents and lists of key vocabulary.

The school encourages parents to share any issues about their child at the earliest opportunity. Staff meet with parents as soon as it is possible. There is regular communication via email or using TEAMS for calls.

All pupils have a person-centred review by their One-to-One teachers or Class Teacher to evaluate and develop an action plan regarding the educational aspects of the child's life.

We arrange three parents evening meetings for parents/carers in each academic year. These are evening meetings to explain areas of our curriculum and discuss progress. Parents are invited into school prior to residential visits regarding the planning and content of the visit.

If a child is absent from school, and we have had no indication of the reason, the school reception will contact a parent (by telephone, if possible) to find out the reason for the absence.

Professional Development

Identifying training needs of staff is vital to ensure continued progress for our pupils. These needs will be identified and met as follows:

- An induction package for new staff where they begin to access an understanding of the strategies delivered by the ELKLAN training course. It is the school's responsibility to identify the staff members training needs and the SaLT will support the implementation of these modules.
- Staff are also responsible for identifying their own training needs and can apply to Senior Management to discuss relevant courses. This may be through the performance management structure or at any other appropriate time.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be regularly monitored and will be reviewed by the communication lead teachers and curriculum committee governors.

Created by Ann-Marie Martin

Reviewed by Ann-Marie Martin and Andrew Day

Reviewed September 2021

Reviewed September 2022

Reviewed by Ann-Marie Martin and Alex Foster

Reviewed November 2023

Next review September 2024