




Total Communication Approach

Policy Owner	Tim Barker
Role	Head of Site
Date issued	June 2020
Chair of Governors Signature	R D' Angelsis
Date and Minute Number	884 29th June 2020

Next review date	Reviewed Date	Reviewed By	Changes made to the policy	Date and Minute number	Chair of Governors signature
June 2022		Chloe Lawrence		960 19 th June 2023	<i>Jo Goleman Jones</i>
June 2025	June 2024	Jessica Lacey	Removed overlapping content Clarification	1023 17 th June 2024	<i>R Watts</i>
June 2026	June 2025	Tim Barker	Clarified references. Change of terminology from non-child facing staff when referencing being called by their forename. References to daily smell removed. Sealed pot and PECs intervention removed	16/06/25 - 1080	<i>R Watts</i>

June 2027	April 2026	Tim Barker	Updated the introduction and additional text re: extending conversation. Reference to core 4 and pre, emergent and functional.	15/06/2026 – 2029	

TOTAL COMMUNICATION APPROACH

DEPUTY HEADTEACHER

TIM BARKER

Introduction

Brackenfield Special School caters for a wide range of pupils with varying levels of communication and cognition. Many of our pupils experience barriers to understanding, expressing themselves and making sense of the world around them. At Brackenfield, we recognise that behaviour is often a significant form of communication for our pupils; please see the Understanding and Supporting Behaviours Policy for more information.

At Brackenfield, our common mission is clear: we prepare our pupils for adulthood; pupils are at the heart of every decision; and we enable pupils to have Choice and Voice, Independence, Functionality and Joy in Living through the Core Four. Communication is central to this mission.

A Total Communication Approach aims to make the environment more comprehensible and to reduce the extent and impact of communication difficulties (Mesibov, Shea and Schopler, 2004).

Brackenfield's Total Communication Approach is designed to support all pupils to:

- Communicate their needs and wants
- Express opinions, information, ideas and thoughts
- Understand and follow instructions
- Understand information being given to them
- Navigate the school environment independently
- Manage their anxiety levels related to their SEND
- Understand the passing the of time
- Develop transferable skills

An important aspect of Brackenfield's Total Communication Approach is supporting pupils to develop communication in ways that are meaningful, functional and increasingly generalisable across school, home and the wider community. This includes early interaction, expressive and receptive communication, the use of AAC, and the development of literacy where appropriate. Please also see the Literacy Policy for further information.

Brackenfield's Total Communication Approach supports pupils across pre-, emergent- and functional levels of learning. Communication strategies are adapted to individual need so that pupils can develop Choice and Voice, Independence, Functionality and Joy in Living.

This Total Communication Approach Policy covers:

- Communication Passport
- Communication Opportunities
- Use of Language
- Use of AACs
- Intensive Interaction
- Expressive Communication
- Receptive Communication
- Understanding the Passage of Time
- Supporting Anxiety Levels
- Environmental Considerations
- Strategies Used
- Parental Support and Engagement

COMMUNICATION PASSPORT

All staff are expected to use strategies that are effective in supporting each pupil's individual communication needs. Brackenfield has developed a communication profile tool which encompasses different assessment systems to compile a communication passport for each pupil. The passport describes the pupil's most effective means of communication, so that staff can be better communication partners. Staff can then interact/respond consistently to help the pupil make sense of events and get the best out of what communication abilities they do have.

Communication passports should reflect current pupil need, preferred communication methods, motivators, key strategies, support for understanding, and any relevant use of AAC. They should support all adults working with the pupil to communicate consistently and effectively.

COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

Brackenfield understands that communication will only happen when there is motivation, means and a mate. In other words, there needs to be a reason to communicate, a way to communicate and someone to communicate with. For several of our pupils, snacks and food are very motivating; therefore, snack time is an integral part of communication development. Brackenfield seeks to maximise opportunities to communicate whether this be for preferred items, spaces to visit, items to play or snacks.

Any opportunity to extend communication should be taken. Staff should create meaningful reasons for pupils to communicate, respond warmly and consistently, and avoid closing communication down too quickly. Communication opportunities should be embedded throughout the day and not limited to timetabled "communication sessions".

USE OF LANGUAGE

Staff are expected to adjust their use of language to support individual communication needs. For most pupils this will mean using minimal language and avoiding the use of idioms or colloquialisms.

An area of difficulty for many of our pupils is distinguishing between Mr, Mrs, Miss and Ms. To support pupils with recalling staff names we use the proper noun only. All child facing staff go by their surname and when appropriate pupils are taught to use the correct title. All non-child facing staff go by their first name.

Staff consider the amount of information carrying words used when giving instructions, the Blank Level when asking questions and the use of Makaton to support receptive language skills.

Brackenfield also uses Intensive Interaction approach to build the fundamentals of communication. This approach supports pupils to learn gaining attention; eye contact; facial expressions; vocalisations leading to speech and turn taking in conversations.

USE OF AAC (ALTERNATIVE AND AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION AIDS)

Brackenfield uses a wide variety of AAC approaches to support communication needs. These include, but are not limited to, Makaton, pointing boards, communication books and high-tech devices.

The use of AAC should be based on individual pupil need and may include low-tech and/or high-tech systems. The introduction and development of AAC should be informed by assessment, classroom observation and, where appropriate, advice from Speech and Language Therapy. AAC should be viewed as part of a pupil's communication offer and not as a last resort.

Staff should presume competence, model the use of communication systems consistently and ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to use their preferred communication methods across a range of meaningful contexts.

INTENSIVE INTERACTION

Staff use Intensive Interaction to support the learning and social needs of people who are still at early stages of communication development, through teaching the "fundamentals of communication." Hewett (2018).

The fundamentals of communication are:

- Learning how to have fun with other people - learning how to play
- Learning to give, extend and share attention with another person - then developing such shared attention into and across sociable or joint 'activities'
- Learning about the significance of proximity and sharing personal space
- Learning how to take turns in exchanges of behaviour
- Learning to use and understand eye contact within social interactions
- Learning about non-verbal communication such as gestures, facial expressions and body language
- Learning to use and understand vocalisations, developing more varied and extensive vocalisations that gradually become more precise and meaningful
- Learning to regulate and control emotional responses and arousal levels

Staff use Intensive Interaction to tune into the pupil by listening and observing how and when a pupil is trying to communicate and by responding at their level of understanding. This allows the practitioner to join in with someone in their world, following their lead and using their 'language'. Staff use Intensive Interaction to support pupils to learn to communicate and build meaningful and equal relationships. Staff use their face, voice and body language as the main tools.

Pupils who will benefit most from intensive interaction are those:


- who are at an early stage of communication development and/or are 'hard to reach'
- who have difficulties with interacting and communicating with the people around them
- who have few or limited communication behaviours
- who lack the social abilities needed for engaging with other people
- who may have ritualistic, challenging, self-involved or self-injurious behaviours
- people who do not yet know that being with another person can be unthreatening and even pleasurable
- who may or may not have a diagnosis of Autism

Some principals of Intensive Interaction can be used and adapted for more cognitively able learner at a higher level of communication skill.

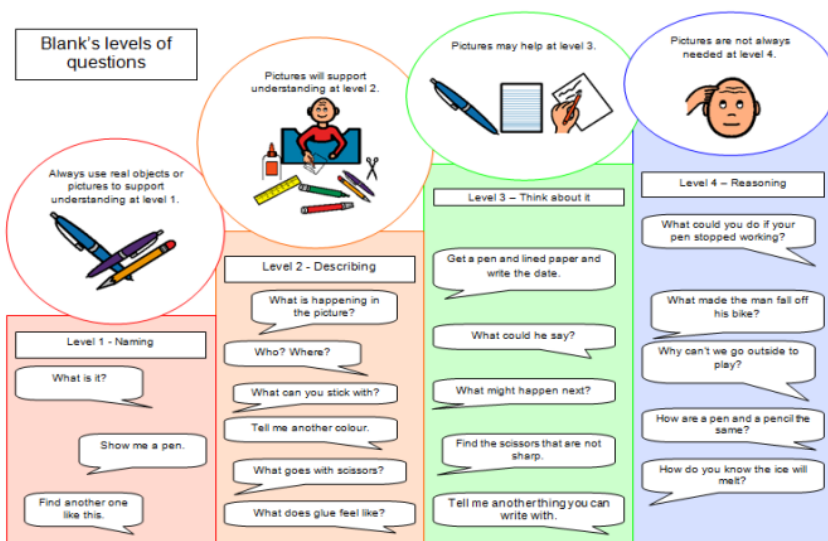
EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

Brackenfield understand expressive communication to be message that pupils are sending to other people. It is how feelings, wants, likes, dislikes, comments, and intents are expressed.

The following table identifies the different approaches used within Brackenfield to support expression of needs and wants.

Expressive Ability of Pupil	Strategies to Support	
<p style="text-align: center;">Pre-verbal</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">High degree of expressive language</p>	Pictorial / symbols	Intensive Interaction Call & Response
	Augmentative and Alternative Communication Aids	
	Spoken or written single words	
	Spoken or written phrases	
	Spoken or written sentences	
	Narrative	
	Discussion	

In Brackenfield also utilises Elkan's Blank Level of questioning. The use of this model is to pitch questions at an appropriate level to ensure the pupil understands what is asked of them and can respond appropriately.



RECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION

Brackenfield understands receptive communication to be the process of receiving and understanding a message from another person. The following table identifies the different strategies used within Brackenfield to support receptive communication.

Receptive Ability of Pupil	Strategies to Support	
Low High	Object of Reference True Object Based Icon (TOBI) Photograph & (Written Word) Symbol & Written Word	Makaton Signing & Spoken Word

In addition to this pupil's personal areas (peg, chair, table) are identified by either their photograph or their name, again, as appropriate to their level of needs.

UNDERSTAND THE PASSAGE OF TIME

Many of our pupils do not feel time passing, we use a range of approaches to both support understanding time passing and to reduce anxiety. To support pupils' understanding of different days within the week Brackenfield uses a multi-sensory approach to support pupils who might navigate by sound or sight.

Day	Sight	Sound
Monday	Purple	The Monkees – Monkees
Tuesday	Orange	Elton John – Crocodile Rock
Wednesday	Yellow	Queen – You're My Best Friend

Thursday	Green	The Beatles – Yellow Submarine
Friday	Blue	The Cure – Friday I’m in Love

To support passage of time throughout individual days all classes have visual timetables displayed. Depending on the needs of the learners these may be displayed as the entire day or as Now and Next. When appropriate pupils also have individual timetables that they tick off or remove the symbol when the lesson has finished. Other key parts of the day such as morning, lunch time and home time are also signified using a routine. Although the routines are different in each class all classes share the common approach of having a morning, lunchtime and home time routine to support pupils understanding of time and what happens next.

SUPPORTING ANXIETY LEVELS

Brackenfield recognises that the TEACCH approach provides a very high level of structure through systematic organisation of learning environments and habits, such as the use of trays, left-to-right working, workstations, privacy screens, low stimulation environments. All of these can be extremely effective in lowering levels of anxiety. Brackenfield recognises the value of TEACCH and it is used selectively to support emotional regulation and at times of raised anxiety such as transitions. TEACCH is also used to develop pupil’s independent working skills so that they can complete tasks without adult support; an important functional life skill. The TEACCH approach is utilised when designing school and classroom spaces.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

All classrooms at Brackenfield are decorated and set up in a similar way to ensure commonality across the school in line with the Total Communication Approach. The paint, carpet and vinyl colours have been specifically selected to be calming and support children with communication and sensory difficulties. In each room there is one wall that is painted a darker shade of grey – this is the focus wall and encourages eyeline to be drawn to this wall.

Through research, Brackenfield believes that too many displays/items crowding the walls or windows and lots of information can be overwhelming to pupils with communication and cognition difficulties. The only items that have a direct impact on pupil outcomes are displayed in classrooms. For example; a visual timetable to support knowledge of routine and reduce anxiety; a noticeboard to inspire learning; and examples of pupil work to inspire confidence. Specific resources to support literacy and numeracy should be given to pupils when required. Items on walls do not change often enough and are not specific to each child so should not be displayed.

Resources required by pupils are appropriately labelled. This might be symbols, photos, TOBIs , braille dependent on needs of the class and pupils.

All classroom spaces are provided with grey tall storage cupboards. As above this enables resources, books etc. that are not being used to be shut away- keeping the classroom space clear and uncluttered. Due to the health needs of our pupils, cleaning is also incredibly important, and the storage allows work surfaces to be left clear for daily cleaning.

Classroom spaces have kitchenettes for the preparation of snacks as snack time is a key opportunity for developing communication. Classes are provided with safe crockery and cutlery for use by the pupils- this is stored in the kitchenette. All classes have a lidded purple box for storage of food and

any PEG feeds should also be stored in the kitchenette. As with all other areas within the classroom, the surfaces and sink of the kitchenette are left clear to support cleaning.

There are shared spaces in school for teaching and learning, PE, stationary and arts resources. For this reason, there is not a requirement for these items to be stored in classrooms. Though clearly some class teams may store some resources which are used daily.

Pupils are provided with pegs within the classrooms for storage of coats, bags, PE/swimming kit, these are in appropriate locations for pupils to access whilst also leaving exit/fire exit routes clear. Classes are provided with large boxes for the storage of Wellington boots and outdoor shoes.

Key information about the class- timetable and class rationale as well as the staff who are in the room are displayed on the door. The timetable and rationale- enables visitors to the school to gain an understanding of how the class operates and what they are doing. The information about the day and staff- is to prepare the children for who will be in the room and also help children in other classes navigate the school and have an understanding of which staff are in which rooms, this key information also enables visitors to identify the roles of the staff in the room.

APPROACHES TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

Brackenfield employs several approaches to support communication needs and development; some of which are spoken about above. A list is below and more information about each of these approaches is in the TCA Guide.

- Call and Response
- Narrative
- Attention Autism
- TOBIs
- Symbols
- Pointing Boards
- Communication Books
- Intensive Interaction
- Information Carrying Words
- Informal Language Assessment
- Colourful Semantics
- Hanen Approach
- Makaton
- Objects of Reference
- High Tech AAC

Brackenfield also utilise the advice and guidance of Speech and Language Therapists.

PARENTAL SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT

Tools that are used within school are sent home for use at home as well. Parents are encouraged to participate in communication workshops to further support communication development. These include Makaton, communication books and pointing boards and attention autism.

References

Mesibov, G. B., Shea, V., & Schopler, E. (2004). The TEACCH approach to autism spectrum disorders. New York: Plenum.

Hewett, D. (2018). The intensive interaction handbook. London: SAGE.