



DAWN HOUSE SCHOOL – STAFF HANDBOOK	
Policy Title: Augmentative & Alternative Communication	
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Dawn House School aims to provide an environment where all modes of communication are accepted, valued and developed. Where appropriate, this may include forms of Alternative or Augmentative Communication (AAC). The environment will embrace current technology where this supports and complements the child's development.

We aim to create an environment where pupils, staff and visitors can communicate with each other through a range of means.

AAC refers to methods of communication that supplement or replace spoken (or written) communication. This includes signing, use of symbols, supportive writing software, gesture as well as electronic voice output communication aids (VOCAs) including apps on electronic devices. All of these can be used at Dawn House School. They can also be used to support a pupil's understanding by providing the pupil with a more permanent visual representation of language.

NB: The term VOCA will be used throughout to refer to any form of electronic communication devices including apps.

Objectives

- Alternative and Augmentative Communication systems should:
 - enable all pupils to develop effective communication: to interact, express needs and preferences, make choices, ask questions, make friends and to express feelings.
 - enable all pupils to participate actively in all school activities in and out of the classroom so that their learning potential is achieved.
- All staff should promote more effective communication and equality of access for pupils who benefit from AAC systems.
- Staff should be aware of the range of AAC systems and achieve a basic level of competence through training opportunities in and out of school, and developed through their practice.
- All staff will develop a higher level of competence in all aspects of specific VOCAs related to individual pupil needs.
- Staff should be familiar with the logic of systems in use, and to understand methods of interaction.

Signing

See signing policy

Use of symbols

Dawn House aims to support the development of language, literacy and communication through the consistent use of symbols. This is done, where appropriate, through:

- Labelling the school environment – using symbols alongside the written word; effectively supporting the development of literacy throughout school and organisational skills.
- Use of supportive writing software – this can be used:
 - In a range of curriculum lessons.
 - In individualised sessions for specific teaching of literacy and language.
 - As an integral part of Dyslexia friendly resources
 - In the residential setting for homework, reporting and displays.
- Use of symbols on voice output devices.
- Symbol books as low-tech communication aids.
- The use of picture exchange communication systems.
- Use of choice boards/ mats.
- Using symbols in school information e.g. pupil handbook, information for pupils on assessment.

Resources

The school holds site licenses for Clicker, Symwriter and Communicate in Print. These programmes are available on classroom computers where possible. The notebook computers are kept in the TA working area in Secondary, in Primary and Sixth Form, and there is a booking out system for their use in Secondary.

Computers and notebooks are also available for use by pupils in the residential houses.

Preparation of symbol-based resources may be requested by any member of staff and usually carried out by Speech and Language Therapy Assistants or Teaching Assistants. Staff are also encouraged to develop their own resources once they have received the relevant training.

Training

All school staff receive training on the supportive writing software as part of their professional development. Staff members working with students who use AACs also received training in this area so that they are best able to support their students to use their AACs effectively. Refresher sessions are offered at intervals during the school year.

Voice output communication aids (VOCAs)

There are a range of voice output communication aids available including devices where the primary focus is AAC e.g. DynaVox. There are also an increasing range of apps for tablets and phones. Some of these are free to download. Apps available vary according to the make of tablet/phone e.g. apple versus android. Within school '*Proloquo2go*' and '*Grid Player*' are available on one of the iPads and can be used as a trial before further investigation.

The VOCA recommended for a pupil is dependant on his/her cognitive ability, level of language, fine motor skills, level of literacy, age, intended use and cost. Lower-tech versions operate on 'press and say' basis e.g. 'My Choice Pad'. These tend to have a limited grid range. Higher-tech versions rely on a menu system similar to pc technology (some reading required), or on a symbol system (no reading required).

A range of VOCAs can be used in school. Dawn House currently encourages students for whom it is appropriate, to use VOCAs on iPad or tablet devices as often the bigger screen makes it easier for students to use as well as enabling students to also comply with the no phones policy at Dawn House. Despite this, individual needs are monitored through the Annual Review/EHCP Process.

VOCA Assessment Procedure

Pupils who have severe speech production difficulties, resulting in limited intelligibility, may be referred for assessment for the use of a communication device.

Funding for assessment and for recommended devices has changed. This is currently usually through the application to a pupil's Local Authority; charitable funding or met by their parents. Some pupils, upon entry to DHS, already have a VOCA and appropriacy of the device will be monitored through the process detailed above.

Some companies e.g. '*Sensory Software*' and '*Therapy Box*' may be able to offer advice regarding the assessment procedure.

Intervention

Pupils who use VOCAs should have access to all curriculum areas. This will require significant differentiation by all staff to enable them to realise and fulfil expected goals.

Within therapy sessions the main areas which are worked upon with users of VOCAs are:

- Functional language skills
- Independence

- Concept building e.g. understanding the layout of devices in terms of categories, folders and files.
- Vocabulary development.
- Syntax.
- Social skills.

Intervention may include:

- 1:1 therapy.
- Group work with other VOCA users.
- Group work with other pupils.
- Involvement with familiar/unfamiliar communication partners in a variety of different situations.
- Assessment – (SLTs to follow assessment guidelines as outlined in CQ Live).
- Liaison by Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) to integrate AAC into a variety of settings (school, home, community, residencies) in order that the use of VOCA becomes an integral part of the user's life.
- Training of staff/parents.
- Specific teaching.
- Programming/ backup/ troubleshooting.
- Involvement of parents including specific training or support by phone.
- Use within the residential setting.
- Opportunities for use out of school – residencies, home and outside events.
- Regular review of the appropriacy of the device acknowledging and valuing the pupil's view, their awareness and responsibility towards their VOCA.

Liaison

Liaison between members of the core team is essential for promoting effective use of the VOCA. All planning, including Provision Plans, Care Plan etc, should indicate opportunities for developing the pupil's competence with the VOCA. Currently the SLT working with the pupil is responsible for the day to day operational aspects, e.g. vocabulary storage, but all staff are responsible for encouraging the student to use their VOCA.

Training

Staff awareness is promoted by access to training in house, at induction and by staff working with outside agencies. Specific training may be provided by external agencies when a pupil receives a new VOCA.

Procedure to access training (see training policy).

Funding

Any additional funding from Local Authorities will be individually negotiated and identified. Some VOCA's are provided on loan by the Local Authorities.

Funding from the school budget for AAC must be allocated.

- To ensure adequate training for all staff.
- To ensure there are sufficient computers/ tablets for additional AAC needs.
- To purchase peripheral equipment, e.g. battery chargers, computer linkages if necessary
- To insure, maintain and replace equipment owned by DHS and Sixth Form.
- To encourage staff to attend AAC Clinical Excellence Networks (CEN) and conferences.

AAC General Advice

Communicating Strategies/Differentiation

Staff need to provide enhanced opportunities for pupils to use and interact with their devices. Staff should be aware that:

- Asking open-ended questions rather than yes/no type questions promotes a communicative interaction.
- It is essential that the basic message that the AAC user gives is accepted whether this is done through speech, signing, writing, gesture or AAC device – aspects of grammar errors should only be addressed in contexts where this is the primary teaching point.
- Prompting the use of the AAC is preferable rather than insistence that it is used.
- Social skills such as turn taking should be actively encouraged for AAC users in order to emphasise to the pupils that communication is a two way process.
- Time management of the group will need to be considered bearing in mind that it can not be expected that pupils using AAC systems will be able to respond immediately - especially to difficult questions and given time to think about their answers and additional time to 'key in' their response.
- It may be useful for staff to phrase their questions in such a way that they may be answered with single words in the main unless time is not pressing and the objective is to encourage the pupils to create small phrases.
- The environment should be labelled to create a relationship between the concept and the icon/symbol that it represents. The labels should be:

Attractive binding – so that the icon/symbol used and the link with the concept that it expresses, is evident.

Clear and durable – so the label may be read

- Individual tutors should take responsibility in their own areas for specialist vocabulary as well as production of teaching aids to reinforce the link between chosen icon/symbol and the concept/word that it represents for their specialist vocabulary.
- Staff should be aware of the user's current vocabulary skills and competence in this area.
- It is particularly important for AAC users with high tech electronic devices to have access to computers that can be linked with their AAC device. This enables the user to present written work effectively and efficiently; read aloud and to access Information Communication Technology.