



# Total Communication Policy

Date: September 2025

Date to be Reviewed: September 2026

## Introduction

At Cribden House School, we believe that communication is at the heart of learning, wellbeing, and inclusion. For many of our pupils, communication difficulties are a significant barrier to accessing education and participating in everyday life. A Total Communication approach ensures that all pupils are supported to communicate using a range of methods, tailored to their individual strengths and needs.

Total Communication is not about replacing speech but about providing a variety of communication opportunities and resources—verbal, non-verbal, visual, and technological—so that every child has a voice.

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## Policy Intent

The intent of this policy is to:

- Promote functional, meaningful, and individualised communication for all pupils.
  - Create an inclusive learning environment where every mode of communication is valued equally.
  - Equip pupils with the tools they need to express themselves, build relationships, and access the curriculum.
  - Ensure staff, families, and external agencies work together to develop and support effective communication strategies.
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## Policy Aims

This policy aims to:

1. **Recognise and celebrate all forms of communication** including speech, gesture, sign, symbols, pictures, body language, facial expression and assistive technology.
2. **Develop a consistent school-wide approach** to communication so pupils experience continuity across school.
3. **Empower staff** through training and professional development to use a wide range of communication strategies confidently and effectively.
4. **Support families** to understand and use Total Communication approaches at home, strengthening home–school partnerships.
5. **Foster independence** by equipping pupils with the communication skills they need for learning and for life.

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## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Senior Leadership Team (SLT)**

- Provide strategic oversight and ensure communication is a school priority.
- Allocate resources (e.g. staff training, AAC devices, visual supports).
- Monitor consistency of practice across the school.

### **Communication Lead**

- Lead on the development, implementation, and review of the Total Communication approach.
- Make referrals to and liaise with external services to facilitate a range of Speech and Language Services
- Work with staff, SaLT, and families to create individualised communication plans.
- Maintain a central log of any advice, targets and targeted interventions implemented by SALT
- Set, monitor and assess communication progress via communication passports, termly PECs assessments and PIVATs.
- Organise staff training and support the dissemination of best practice.

### **Teachers**

- Embed communication strategies into all lessons, routines, and activities.
- Ensure classroom environments are visually supportive (e.g. symbols, timetables, signing prompts).
- Monitor pupil progress against communication targets and report outcomes.

### **Teaching Assistants**

- Implement communication strategies consistently within daily interactions.
- Model and reinforce the use of signing, symbols, visuals, and AAC.
- Provide feedback to teachers and therapists on pupil progress and communication needs.

## **Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT)**

- Assess pupils' communication needs and recommend appropriate strategies.
- Provide therapy sessions where required.
- Train and advise staff and families on communication methods.

## **Families and Carers**

- Engage with communication strategies at home, ensuring consistency across settings.
- Contribute to reviews of communication plans by sharing insights from home.
- Support their child's communication by attending training/workshops where available.

## **Pupils**

- Are encouraged to use their preferred and most effective means of communication.
- Are supported to develop independence in expressing choices, needs, and feelings.
- Are given opportunities to influence their school experience through adapted pupil voice activities.

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## **Implementation**

To achieve these aims, Cribden House will:

- Provide a communication-rich environment where signs, symbols, objects, visuals, and speech are consistently available.
- Incorporate communication strategies into daily routines, structured activities, and unstructured times (e.g. play, transitions, meal times).
- Work in collaboration with Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT), Occupational Therapists, and other professionals to design and review personalised communication plans.
- Ensure communication tools such as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), Makaton, AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) devices, and visual timetables are available and appropriately used.
- Embed communication targets within pupils' provision plans and the wider curriculum.

- Provide ongoing training and refreshers for all staff, ensuring consistent practice across the school.
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### **Assessment**

- Pupils' communication needs will be assessed at admission and reviewed regularly through formal and informal methods.
  - Progress in communication will be measured using a combination of individual targets and SaLT assessments.
  - Pupil progress will be tracked and shared with families and relevant professionals.
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### **Monitoring and Review**

- The Senior Leadership Team (SLT), in partnership with the school's Communication Lead and SaLT service, will monitor the implementation of this policy.
- Evidence of effective practice will be gathered through lesson observations, learning walks, staff feedback, and pupil progress reviews.
- The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required, to ensure it remains aligned with current best practice and statutory guidance.
- Families and staff will be consulted during the review process to ensure their views and experiences are reflected.



**Cribden House School**  
We will either find a way or make one

# Total Communication Approach Framework

- Repetitive speech patterns to encourage full sentences
- Supporting NHS Speech and Language Therapist input
- Colourful semantics
- Targeted Interventions for speech sound difficulties and delay
- Modelling correct and contextually appropriate use of speech
- School wide use of Widget symbols
- Visual time tables and use of now and next boards
- Sound buttons
- Audio Routine using rhyme and song

- PECS
- Attention Autism
- Intensive Interaction
- Communication Boards
- Makaton
- AAC
- Building up eye contact
- Objects of reference
- Facial expression and body language
- Gestures and pointing
- Create & wait opportunities
- Skilling up socially

## Appendix: Glossary of Total Communication Methods

- **AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication)** – A broad term covering communication tools such as communication boards, iPads with specialist apps, or speech-generating devices.
- **Attention Autism** - a learning approach that aims to develop natural and spontaneous communication skills in children with autism through the use of visually based and highly motivating activities.
- **Audio Routine** – songs and rhymes to help children to associate songs with key events of the day e.g. the snack time song.
- **Colourful Semantics** – a tool to help children build a sentence and extend their understanding of sentence structure.
- **Communication Boards** – a bespoke map of symbols and words to assist a person in building up a sentence or communication relating to a specific task, event or activity.
- **Create and Wait Opportunities** – using sabotage techniques to create an opportunity for communication e.g. placing a toy in full view but slightly out of reach to provide the opportunity for communication.
- **Facial Expression and Body Language** – Non-verbal cues that provide meaning, intent, and emotional context.
- **Gesture and Pointing** – Simple, universally understood movements that support expression and understanding.
- **Intensive Interaction** – a tool aimed at enhancing communication skills. It involves mirroring or copying a person’s actions, sounds and facial expressions to foster social communication.
- **Makaton** – A language programme using signs and symbols alongside speech to support understanding and expression.
- **Now and next boards** – pictorial indicators to assist children denote the immediate order of transition, e.g. now = maths, next = playtime.
- **Objects of Reference** – Real objects used as cues for activities or routines (e.g. a cup to indicate snack time).
- **PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)** – A structured approach using pictures to help children initiate communication.
- **Skilling Up Socially** – targeted interventions to bring together small workshops of 2-3 children to help social skills through games, activities and social stories.
- **Speech** – Spoken language used as the primary mode of communication when possible.
- **Symbols** – Visual representations (e.g. Wigit) used to support understanding of words and concepts.
- **Visual Timetables** – Pictorial schedules that help children understand and prepare for routines and transitions.
- **Sound Buttons** – implemented on the doors of all key areas in school. Children need only press the button to hear an audio corresponding with the symbol of the area i.e “Welcome to the hall”.