

AEM Sutherland House School | Braithwell

Communication at SHS Braithwell

1. Approach to communication

Sutherland House School (SHS) Braithwell is an Independent Special School, serving the needs of autistic pupils ranging from age 5-19. We recognise that our pupils have differences in social interaction, in speech, language and communication; in learning, thinking and processing; in experiencing feelings; in intensity of interests and sensory processing - and this knowledge shapes our approach to communication at SHS.

When considering communication we think about how a pupil expresses themselves, understands others, processes information, and interacts with others. We strive for communication support to be embedded in all parts of the day; with ongoing support from our school Speech and Language Therapy Team. This means that the responsibility for successful communication sits with everyone, and is central to all aspects of school life – curriculum, functional and social.

2. Key principles in supporting communication

We recognise that as pupils journey through school with us, their strengths and needs change, with many factors impacting their communication including the environment. Successful communication is therefore seen as a shared responsibility, with the pupil being one part of this, but staff communication (including considering the Double Empathy problem) and the environment being as, and at times more, important in successful communication occurring.

The Speech Therapy Team work with the education team to enable us to provide a communication environment which:

- Is a Total Communication Environment, valuing and encouraging all forms of communication, not just the spoken word (including but not limited to, signing (Makaton), symbols, photos, objects of reference)
- Provides structure and routine through consistent use of visual supports, including to support transitions
- Has staff that are trained and supported in the use of strategies to support the understanding and expression of pupils
- Is person centred; with particular emphasis on encouraging self advocacy in our pupils in a way that is appropriate and relevant for them. We consider each pupil as an individual and what their strengths, interests, abilities and functional needs are, and how we can best support them given their individual profile.
- Provides ongoing communication support (in a way that affirms an individual's neurodivergent identity) so that Speech Therapy support sits in all parts of the school day through their involvement at all levels of school (including in class and strategic/organisational).

3. Approaches used to support communication

Communication is supported through various strategies and approaches including:

- AAC: Low, medium and high tech (including but not limited to objects of reference, photos, symbols, signing (Makaton), electronic aids etc)
- Intensive interaction
- Social Stories
- Comic Strip Conversations
- Talking Mats
- Blank Level Questioning
- TEACCH (especially use of visual timetables and schedules)
- Colourful semantics
- Visual supports

All students have a communication profile which the Speech and Language Therapy team oversee and update. This provides a summary of the pupils presentation, and what staff can do to support them in being the best communicators they can be and/or what staff need to do in terms of adapting their own communication.

4. Staff training

The Speech and Language Therapy team provide training for staff in key areas pertaining to communication. Ongoing training is available from the team as needed, in response to both individual and whole school needs.