

# BLACKFRIARS ACADEMY AAC POLICY

*Developed:*

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# AAC POLICY

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“In this country we are justly proud of the freedom of speech, that we can say what we want. But I think there is an even more basic freedom than the freedom of speech and that is the freedom to speak.” (Professor Stephen Hawking)

## **What is AAC?**

The term 'AAC', an abbreviation of Augmentative and Alternative Communication, refers to any intervention which enhances a pupil's ability to express his or her needs and desires. As such it can encompass non-technical strategies such as the use of Makaton signing, low tech approaches such as the use of symbols and simple switches and high tech equipment which has a voice output.

## **Who needs to use the AAC service?**

Children whose verbal communication has not progressed sufficiently that they can convey their thoughts in a timely and effective manner require consideration for an AAC intervention. Such difficulties can come about for a wide variety of reasons including physical challenges impacting on the clear production of speech, learning difficulties resulting in language not being acquired in the typical fashion or a sensory loss such as hearing impairment. Blackfriars has a number of children with these challenges and sometimes several factors coexist in the same child.

## **How does AAC work within the context of Blackfriars?**

The ethos of Blackfriars is to create a safe and happy environment where students thrive and learn enthusiastically. We recognise that each student has a unique set of skills and learning styles. Our teaching aims to develop these competences to the maximum potential each young person has.

## **Whose responsibility is AAC?**

AAC is seen as everyone's responsibility in terms of any intervention being used throughout the school day.

Specifically there are staff members with particular responsibility for assessing student's AAC needs and identifying solutions to help them express their thoughts more effectively. These staff work in partnership with the class teachers and the teaching assistants.

## What does AAC look like in practice in the classroom?

- collaboration with parents / carers and other agencies

Parents/ carers are viewed as key collaborators in the AAC process and can help support the intervention at home

- expectations of students

Students are expected to explore and use AAC with support from the adults around them

- assessment, recording and reporting arrangements

Assessment and progress information is recorded to allow for effective monitoring.

- method of delivery within the context of the curriculum

- intervention strategies
- organisation of resources
- framework for training and support
- financial organisation

## AAC strategies

AAC policies should incorporate an awareness of the need to employ a number of strategies that will aid more successful communication with AAC users. Facilitative strategies<sup>[9]</sup> to develop positive communication include:

- WAIT – the AAC user takes longer than natural speakers to initiate a communication attempt - this is probably the most important thing we can do.
- Be aware that the AAC user may be using a wide range of different communication modalities. Look for the user's non-verbal clues, especially gesture.
- Make sure that the user has all the necessary vocabulary in his/her AAC system that he/she knows where this vocabulary is stored/displayed and that he/she knows how to use it.
- Make time to have informal chats without a fixed agenda.
- Don't always stick to safe topics. Ask questions about something you genuinely don't know about.
- Try to explore one topic fully before moving on to another – don't flit from one idea to the next.
- Check with the user that you have understood – don't assume that you have, and never pretend that you have.
- If a misunderstanding is occurring, give possible interpretations of what the user is trying to say rather than definitive ones.
- Using a communication aid is slow. Initially the user may only be able to use one or two words. As unaided speakers we use 150-200 words per minute. The equivalent for an aided speaker is between 5 and 20 words. This has obvious implications for developing equality of opportunity in communication particularly where the pupils are educated in groups of mixed ability or in integrated settings.

The following guidelines<sup>[25]</sup> were compiled at the Assistive Communication Aids Centre at Frenchay Hospital. They may be helpful in developing positive interaction strategies:

- Encourage use of the communication aid at all times with friends, relatives etc.
- Don't refer to the aid as a toy or use any other comments which may belittle the user.
- Remember that using an aid requires skill and commitment.
- Professionals should use the aid to appreciate how it feels.

- Don't talk over the top of the person or attempt to complete their sentences unless they prefer this type of anticipation to speed things up.
- Don't ask and answer your own questions, eg "did you go out last night? Yes I'm sure you did."
- Don't ask several questions at one time, eg "would you like tea, coffee or chocolate?"
- Try not to use closed questions, ie questions that only require an answer 'yes' or 'no'.
- Remember the focus is functional communication – don't be pedantic. "please give me my bloo jumpr" is OK.
- Short cuts are acceptable especially when they speed things up, eg "R U OK".