



## Total Communication Overview

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| Author              | Stephen Crawford                | Date: January 2022 |
| Last reviewed on:   | 10 <sup>th</sup> September 2025 |                    |
| Next review due by: | July 2026                       |                    |

## **Statement of Intent**

At Cann Bridge School, we serve a diverse population of learners with a wide range of communication needs. Many of our pupils require significant adaptations to support their communication development, and we are committed to ensuring that every learner has the tools, strategies, and opportunities to express themselves, be understood, and engage meaningfully with the world around them.

Total Communication is a whole-school approach that underpins all teaching, learning, and interaction. It ensures that learners can access their education, build relationships, and make maximum progress. We recognise communication as a fundamental life skill—central to learning, independence, and wellbeing. Our approach acknowledges that communication is multi-modal, and that every pupil has the right to communicate in ways that are meaningful and effective for them. This policy outlines how Total Communication is delivered across the curriculum, with particular emphasis on its integration into the English Curriculum Overview, specifically within the Speaking and Listening (Communication) strand.

## **What is Total Communication?**

Total Communication refers to a comprehensive set of strategies and tools designed to create a Communication-Friendly Environment. This environment empowers all learners—regardless of ability or need—with the means to develop both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. It also encompasses the physical and sensory characteristics of the learning space that encourage and facilitate communication.

Total Communication includes:

- Speech and vocalisation
- Sign-supported communication (e.g. Makaton)
- Symbols and visuals (e.g. Widgit, Communicate in Print)
- Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) systems
- Gestures, facial expressions, and body language
- Technology-based communication tools

The term Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to any device, system, or method that enhances the ability of learners with communication difficulties to express themselves effectively. AAC is used when a learner does not develop communication in line with neurotypical peers or experiences significant delays.

At Cann Bridge School, we are deeply committed to promoting AAC systems for learners with severe and complex communication challenges. This commitment does not exclusively involve high-tech devices; in fact, it often begins with developing proficiency in low-tech strategies. High-tech solutions are considered only when appropriate to the learner's individual needs, and always following careful assessment.

## **Our Aims**

Through our Total Communication approach, we aim to:

- Create a communication-rich environment that motivates and supports learners to interact and develop their skills.
- Ensure all learners' receptive and expressive communication needs are met, enabling them to communicate as effectively and independently as possible.
- Integrate AAC, Makaton, and other communication methods consistently across the curriculum to maximise access to learning.
- Build confidence and competence in Total Communication for both learners and staff, promoting its use in school and the wider community.
- Work in partnership with families and professionals to support each learner's communication journey and extend skills beyond the classroom.
- Recognise, celebrate, and build upon learners' communication achievements, fostering self-expression, creativity, and engagement.

## Curriculum Integration

This policy should be read alongside the English Curriculum Overview, where Speaking and Listening is reframed as Communication to reflect the diverse ways our pupils interact and engage. While the English curriculum focuses on developing literacy skills, Total Communication ensures that pupils have the means to access, participate in, and contribute to learning through individualised communication pathways.

## Implementation

Total Communication is embedded in:

- Classroom practice
- Curriculum planning
- Assessment and progress tracking

It supports pupils in:

- Developing expressive and receptive communication skills
- Building confidence and independence in interactions
- Accessing learning through adapted and inclusive methods
- Making progress in speaking, listening, reading, and writing through multimodal support

By prioritising Total Communication, we ensure that every learner at Cann Bridge School can develop meaningful, functional communication, empowering them to connect with others, participate fully in learning, and navigate the world with confidence.

## Understanding Communication Development

Communication involves developing learners' abilities to listen, understand, respond, and express themselves appropriately in a range of contexts and for a variety of purposes.

Through communication, learners develop listening and attention skills, which are essential for understanding and using language. This begins with recognising objects, events, and routines, and progresses to understanding gestures and increasingly complex spoken language.

Learners also develop the ability to express needs, ideas, and opinions, starting with early vocalisations and gestures and progressing to more complex grammatical structures used in varied situations and for different audiences.

For pupils functioning at a pre-linguistic or early communication level, foundational skills are prioritised. These may continue to be taught throughout their education, with ongoing access to appropriate language development opportunities.

## Typical Progression in Speaking and Listening (Communication)

For neurotypical learners, communication development may follow a broadly sequential pathway:

1. **Developing attention skills** – focusing on and maintaining attention to sounds or visuals.
2. **Auditory discrimination** – recognising and differentiating between sounds.
3. **Object discrimination** – identifying differences between objects.
4. **Object handling** – associating objects with sounds or words.
5. **Imitation of actions** – mimicking observed physical actions.
6. **Sound imitation** – reproducing environmental or speech sounds.
7. **Word imitation** – mimicking spoken words.
8. **Production of meaningful speech** – using purposeful words to represent ideas.
9. **Formation of single words** – independently using words to communicate.
10. **Formulation of multi-word utterances** – creating simple phrases or sentences.
11. **Creation of full sentences** – constructing complete, coherent sentences.
12. **Construction of complex sentences** – expressing nuanced thoughts using advanced language structures.

## Neurodiverse Communication Pathways

At Cann Bridge School, we recognise that communication development varies significantly among neurodiverse learners. Progression may not follow a linear path and can differ in pace, sequence, and modality. For example, some learners may use Gestalt language processing, where language is acquired in chunks rather than individual words.

Therefore, communication development must be individualised, with flexible approaches that reflect each learner's unique profile. Our commitment is to ensure that all pupils—regardless of their communication style—are supported to develop their voice, agency, and ability to connect meaningfully with others.

## Implementation

### Modelling Language

Staff modelling—the demonstration of communication systems, Makaton signing, and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices—is a vital component of the Total Communication strategy at Cann Bridge School. This practice not only teaches learners how to use these tools effectively but also fosters an inclusive, communication-rich environment.

Research consistently shows that the most critical factor in language acquisition is immersion in an environment where communication is continuously modelled. Learners who use AAC systems require modelling just as much—if not more—than those learning through verbal language alone. As Jane Korsten's research highlights:

*“The average 18-month-old has been exposed to 4,380 hours of spoken language. A child who uses a communication system and receives speech-language therapy twice a week for 20–30 minutes has only been exposed to 20 hours of AAC modelling in a year. At this rate, it would take 84 years to have the same exposure to AAC as a typically developing 18-month-old has had to spoken language.”*

### Intent of Language Modelling

- **Exposure:** Evidence shows that exposure to a learner's preferred mode of communication in meaningful contexts helps them understand language structure, vocabulary, and semantics. Interaction in the target form of communication provides opportunities for practical use and consolidation. Exposure should be **comprehensible, repetitive, and contextual**.
- **Teaching by Example:** Staff modelling provides clear, hands-on demonstrations of how to use communication tools effectively. This approach offers more sustainable and positive outcomes than hand-over-hand strategies often associated with ABA-based methods (see PECS section for further detail).
- **Promoting Consistency:** Consistent modelling across the school ensures that learners can use their communication systems with different people and in various settings, both within and beyond the classroom.
- **Encouraging Use:** When learners observe adults using communication systems, they are more likely to engage with and use these tools themselves, helping to build a culture of communication.

### Impact of Language Modelling

- **Makaton:** Staff modelling of Makaton enhances learners' understanding and use of signs and symbols. Used alongside spoken language, it also supports speech development.
- **AAC Devices:** Demonstrating AAC use helps learners navigate devices, construct messages, and interact with others. This builds confidence and promotes independent use.
- **PECS:** Although PECS is an AAC system, Cann Bridge School staff prioritise modelling its use rather than relying on hand-over-hand prompting, in line with current research and ethical considerations around ABA practices.

- **Communication Systems:** Modelling tools such as transitional photographs and objects of reference helps learners understand how to express themselves, anticipate transitions, and engage with new experiences.

Staff modelling reinforces the principle that **all forms of communication are valued**. By actively using these tools, staff create an inclusive environment where every learner—regardless of verbal ability—can express themselves and be understood. This also supports the **generalisation of communication skills** across different settings and contexts.

### Meeting the Needs of All Learners

It is essential that communication systems are available throughout the day, with staff modelling, encouraging, and providing opportunities for learners to use their individual systems.

Communication delivery at Cann Bridge School varies significantly depending on each learner's needs. For example, some pupils may require visual aids to support auditory processing, while others benefit from a multi-sensory approach to grasp concepts and skills.

Learners with more advanced communication skills are supported to refine their ability to address different audiences and adapt their language accordingly. The **Speaking and Listening** strand of our English curriculum promotes **reciprocal communication** within our Total Communication framework.

Effective communication is not only a key aspect of learning—it is essential for life. As such, it is embedded in all aspects of school life. Enhancing learners' communication skills is a central objective of lessons and a fundamental feature of the daily experience at Cann Bridge School.

Pupils are supported through one or more of the following communication pathways:

- **Pre-intentional communication:** using eye gaze, movement, or facial expression to respond or indicate preference.
- **Intentional communication:** developing purposeful actions or vocalisations to communicate with others.
- **Symbolic communication:** using signs, symbols, photos, or words to represent ideas.
- **Verbal communication:** using spoken language to express and exchange meaning.

Each pathway is equally valued and supported with consistent staff modelling and reinforcement.

### Total Communication in Practice

At Cann Bridge School, we adopt a **Total Communication approach** to ensure that every learner can understand and express themselves using the most effective and meaningful combination of methods. Our approach values and integrates all forms of communication — verbal, non-verbal, symbolic, and technological — to promote understanding, interaction, and independence.

Within our environment, we use:

*(Items in bold are expanded upon in subsequent sections of the policy.)*

### Communication Systems and Approaches

#### Aided Language Stimulation (ALS)

- **Makaton signing** – used alongside speech to support expressive and receptive communication
- **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)**
- **Low- and high-tech AAC devices** – including **core boards**, **communication books**, **tablets**, **Grid**, **TouchChat**, and **Proloquo2Go**
- **Picture communication symbols with written words** (Widgit InPrint)
- **Objects of reference and transitional photographs**

- **Pictorial timetables and menu boards**
- **Colourful Semantics**
- **Social Stories**
- **Bag Books** – for shared sensory storytelling

#### **Verbal and Pre-Verbal Communication**

- **Developing verbal skills** – speaking and listening activities to encourage speech and understanding
- **Vocalisation, intonation, and verbalisation** – encouraging the use of sound and tone for communication
- **Reduced language** – simplifying verbal input by using fewer information-carrying words
- **Intensive Interaction** – a nurturing, responsive approach for learners with early communication needs
- **Cued Articulation** – hand cues used alongside speech to support the development and differentiation of speech sounds

#### **Sensory and Physical Communication Cues**

- **Body Signing** – Including touch cues, gestures, and body language to support expressive and receptive communication.
- **Sensory Cues** – Auditory, visual, tactile, and olfactory prompts used to reinforce meaning and support comprehension.
- **Eye Pointing and Visual Tracking** – Including the use of eye gaze technology to support choice-making and interaction for learners with physical or verbal limitations.
- **Visual Development and Attention-Building Activities** – Such as *Attention Autism*, designed to enhance focus, engagement, and shared attention.
- **Sensory Diets and Integration Activities** – Tailored sensory input to support regulation, readiness to learn, and communication participation.

#### **Written and Symbolic Communication**

- **Written text and key words in displays or worksheets**, symbolised where appropriate
- **Phonics** – promoting early sound awareness and literacy
- **TEACCH tray work** – structured, visual systems to support independent communication and task completion
- **Braille** - tactile writing system used to support literacy and communication for learners with visual impairments

#### **Technology and Assistive Tools**

- **Switches and Voice Operated Communication Aids (VOCAs)** – enabling independent interaction and choice-making
- **High- and low-tech AAC systems** – consistently accessible throughout the school environment

#### **Learning Environment and Consistency**

- **Communication-Friendly Environment Minimum Expectations** – ensuring consistent visual supports, symbol use, and opportunities for communication across all classrooms

## Makaton signing

### Makaton Intent

Makaton is a sign-supported communication system used at Cann Bridge School to support learners with varying levels of speech and language development. It enhances expressive and receptive communication by combining speech, signs, and symbols, promoting understanding, encouraging participation, reducing frustration, and building confidence and self-esteem. Flexible and adaptable, Makaton can be used across classrooms, playgrounds, and home environments, forming a central part of our Total Communication approach, which values all forms of communication.

### Makaton Implementation

Makaton is embedded consistently across the school to provide meaningful, contextualised communication support:

- **Sign-supported communication:** Learners use signs alongside spoken language to reinforce meaning and understanding.
- **Symbols:** Visual symbols support comprehension and prompt expression.
- **Embedded practice:** Makaton is integrated into daily routines, structured lessons, and spontaneous interactions to model functional communication.
- **Staff modelling:** All staff use Makaton signs and symbols to demonstrate correct usage, promote generalisation, and support learners' expressive skills.
- **Individualisation:** Signs and symbols are tailored to each learner's developmental stage, communication profile, and goals.
- **Integration with other strategies:** Makaton complements PECS, AAC devices, Intensive Interaction, and sensory supports as part of a multi-modal Total Communication framework.
- **Structured progression:** Makaton is taught in stages, allowing learners to progress from simple concepts to more complex vocabulary. Key vocabulary is embedded in lessons, topic/theme learning, and stories.
- **Enrichment opportunities:** Learners can explore new vocabulary through initiatives such as the Signing Choir and weekly "Sign of the Week," which is introduced during assemblies and reinforced in class activities.

### Makaton Impact

Makaton strengthens learners' ability to understand and express meaning, supporting both receptive and expressive communication. By combining signs, symbols, and speech, learners can participate more fully in lessons, social interactions, and daily routines. Consistent use of Makaton reduces communication-related frustration, fosters independence, and encourages learners to initiate interactions confidently with peers and adults. When integrated into the wider Total Communication framework, Makaton helps learners generalise skills across settings, build self-esteem, and develop functional communication abilities that underpin lifelong learning, social inclusion, and preparation for life beyond school.

## Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

### Intent

The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) at Cann Bridge School is used to enhance learners' ability to communicate effectively, particularly for those with limited or no speech. PECS is a form of AAC and aims to facilitate spontaneous communication, encourage learners to initiate interactions, reduce frustration, and build confidence and self-esteem. It is a versatile tool, supporting communication across multiple settings—including classrooms, playgrounds, and home environments—while forming part of a broader, balanced Total Communication approach that values all forms of expression.

### Implementation

PECS uses images and pictograms to represent objects, activities, and concepts, enabling non-verbal or minimally verbal learners to communicate their wants and needs. Learners are taught to exchange a picture for the item or activity it represents, thus initiating communication.

PECS is taught in distinct, progressive phases, beginning with simple requests and progressing to more complex sentences:

- **Phase I – How to communicate:** Learners exchange single pictures for items or activities they really want.
- **Phase II – Distance and persistence:** Learners generalise this skill by using single pictures in different places, with different people, and across distances. They are also encouraged to be persistent communicators.
- **Phase IIIa – Simple discrimination:** Learners select from two or more pictures to ask for something they like while ignoring items they dislike. Pictures are stored in a PECS communication book—a ringed binder with self-adhesive strips for easy removal.
- **Phase IIIb – Conditional discrimination:** Learners select from multiple desirable pictures to request specific items from a range of preferred options.
- **Phase IV – Sentence structure:** Learners construct simple sentences on a detachable sentence strip using an “I want” picture followed by a picture of the requested item.
- **Attributes – Language expansion:** Learners expand sentences by adding adjectives, verbs, and prepositions.
- **Phase V – Responsive requesting:** Learners answer questions such as “What do you want?” using PECS.
- **Phase VI – Commenting:** Learners comment in response to questions such as “What do you see?”, “What do you hear?”, or “What is it?” They construct sentences beginning with “I see”, “I hear”, “I feel”, “It is a”, etc.

Staff model PECS alongside other communication strategies, including Makaton, Intensive Interaction, and sensory supports. All interventions are delivered within meaningful, naturalistic contexts to promote skill generalisation and intrinsic motivation. The approach is regularly reviewed and individualised to meet each learner's developmental profile and evolving communication needs.

Cann Bridge School is committed to staying at the forefront of communication and AAC research while remaining mindful of concerns around the ABA-based origins of PECS (Applied Behaviour Analysis). Critics highlight potential issues, including overemphasis on compliance, limited generalisation, reliance on external rewards, and a narrow focus on requesting rather than broader communication.

In response, Cann Bridge School adopts a balanced, learner-centred approach. PECS is used as part of a wider Total Communication strategy that values all forms of communication. It is implemented flexibly, within meaningful contexts, alongside modelling, intrinsic motivation, and regular individualised review. This ensures learners develop spontaneous, functional communication, generalise skills across settings, and progress according to their own needs and abilities.

## Impact

PECS has a proven record of quickly improving communication skills and reducing communication-based anxiety and undesirable behaviours. When used within the Total Communication framework, it enables learners to express needs, thoughts, and feelings effectively, supporting progress in both expressive and receptive communication. PECS reduces frustration, fosters independence, and encourages social interaction and engagement. By integrating PECS with other multimodal communication strategies, learners generalise skills across settings, build confidence in communicating with peers and adults, and develop functional communication abilities that support lifelong learning, community participation, and preparation for life beyond school.

## Low- and high-tech AAC devices

### Intent

Low- and high-tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems, including Aided Language Stimulation (ALS) boards, are essential tools in supporting learners' communication development at Cann Bridge School. These systems provide accessible, personalised pathways for learners who experience barriers to verbal communication, enabling them to express themselves, engage socially, and participate meaningfully in learning.

The intent is to:

- Increase expressive and receptive communication for learners with limited or no speech.
- Promote independence, autonomy, and self-advocacy.
- Support cognitive, academic, and social development.
- Ensure every learner has a reliable and consistent method of communication across all settings.

### Implementation

AAC systems are implemented through a combination of low-tech and high-tech tools, tailored to each learner's needs and communication profile.

### Low-Tech AAC Systems

These do not require power and are widely used across the school. They include:

- **Core boards and communication books** (e.g. Proloquo2Go core board, Super Core from ThinkSmartBox).
- **Picture cards and symbols** to represent words, phrases, or concepts.
- **Object symbols** to represent specific activities or items.
- **ALS boards** to support aided language stimulation through consistent modelling.

Low-tech systems are simple, durable, and accessible, and serve as essential backups to high-tech systems to ensure continuity of communication.

### High-Tech AAC Systems

These electronic tools offer dynamic and flexible communication options. They include:

- **Speech-generating devices** that convert text or symbols into spoken language.
- **Dedicated AAC devices** customised to the learner's needs.
- **AAC apps** such as Grid, TouchChat, and Proloquo2Go, installed on tablets and other devices.

Cann Bridge School maintains a range of high-tech devices for learners to trial and for staff to model. Learners are typically introduced to low-tech systems first, with progression to high-tech tools considered collaboratively by the class teacher, parents/carers, the Communication, Language and Literacy Lead, and external speech and language professionals where appropriate.

To ensure reliability, learners using high-tech AAC always have an equivalent low-tech system available to prevent communication breakdowns due to technical issues. High-tech AAC is not assumed to be the most appropriate option for all learners; decisions are based on individual readiness and communication needs.

Staff consistently model AAC use to reinforce meaning and encourage engagement. Devices and systems follow the learner across classes and key stages to ensure continuity. Staff receive ongoing training to ensure effective use and maintenance of AAC systems.

### **Impact**

AAC systems have a transformative impact on learners at Cann Bridge School by:

- Enhancing communication—enabling learners to express needs, make choices, and share thoughts.
- Promoting independence and reducing reliance on adult prompting.
- Increasing access to learning and enabling learners to demonstrate understanding.
- Strengthening social connections and improving interaction with peers and adults.
- Building confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of ownership over communication.

AAC is a core element of our Total Communication approach, ensuring every learner has a voice and the means to be heard—consistently, reliably, and in a way that reflects their individual strengths and needs.

## **Picture communication symbols with written words (Widgit InPrint)**

### **Intent**

At Cann Bridge School, Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) paired with written words—created using Widgit InPrint—are used to support learners in accessing language, understanding routines, and expressing themselves. These symbol-supported materials provide a consistent and visually accessible way to reinforce spoken and written language, particularly for learners with limited literacy or verbal communication.

The intent is to:

- Enhance comprehension by pairing symbols with text.
- Support both expressive and receptive communication.
- Provide consistent visual language across the school environment.
- Enable learners to access curriculum content, instructions, and social communication.

### **Implementation**

Widgit InPrint is used to create symbol-supported resources tailored to individual learner needs and classroom contexts. These include:

- **Visual timetables and schedules** to support routine and transitions.
- **Teaching and learning materials** such as worksheets, displays, and task instructions.
- **Communication boards and choice cards** to support expressive communication.
- **Social stories and behaviour support tools** to aid emotional understanding and regulation.
- **Environmental labelling** to promote independence in locating and organising resources.

Symbols are selected for clarity and relevance, and are always paired with written words to support literacy development. Staff consistently use and model these resources across learning environments to reinforce meaning and ensure familiarity.

### **Impact**

The use of Widgit InPrint symbols with written words has a positive impact on learners by:

- Improving understanding of language, routines, and expectations.
- Supporting communication for learners with limited verbal or reading skills.
- Increasing independence and reducing reliance on adult prompting.
- Enhancing engagement with learning materials and classroom activities.

- Promoting consistency and accessibility across the school.

This approach is a key part of Cann Bridge School's Total Communication strategy, ensuring that all learners have access to meaningful, multimodal communication tools that support their development and participation.

## Objects of reference and transitional photographs

### Intent

Objects of Reference (OOR) and Transitional Photographs are integral elements of Cann Bridge School's Total Communication strategy. They are used to support learners in understanding routines, anticipating transitions, and making sense of their environment. These tools provide concrete, visual, and tactile cues that bridge the gap between abstract language and real-world experiences—particularly beneficial for learners with limited verbal communication or those at a pre-symbolic stage of development.

Objects and photographs act as symbolic representations, helping learners attach meaning to activities, people, and places. For example, a learner may associate collecting their coat with going outside, creating understanding and anticipation.

The intent of using OOR and Transitional Photographs is to:

- Support comprehension and reduce anxiety during transitions.
- Promote independence and confidence in navigating daily routines.
- Provide consistent, meaningful cues that reinforce understanding and communication.

### Implementation

#### Objects of Reference

Physical items are used to represent specific activities, people, or places (e.g. a spoon for lunch, a swimming cap for swimming). These are introduced consistently and paired with spoken language, Makaton signs, or other communication systems. Over time, learners develop associations between the object, the word, and the corresponding activity.

OOR support learners to:

- Enhance awareness, memory, and recall.
- Anticipate upcoming events and reduce uncertainty.
- Understand sequencing—what is happening now and what will happen next.
- Recognise when an activity has finished.
- Make simple choices.

Progression through OOR typically precedes a change in **POLE** (Person, Object, Location, or Event):

- Stage 1: Awareness. At this initial stage, learners might not acknowledge the OOR. They may disregard it, refuse to hold it, or throw it. Their awareness of the OOR may be limited, and they are wholly reliant on others while working with OOR.
  - Objectives: Foster awareness, encourage response, enhance notice, increase tolerance, and promote exploration.
- Stage 2: Acceptance. At this stage, learners will accept and tolerate a presented OOR, though they may have little to no comprehension of its representational purpose.
  - Objectives: Increase acceptance, awareness, and tolerance; promote holding and exploration of the OOR.

- Stage 3: Recognition. Learners begin to respond to OOR at this stage. While their understanding might not be comprehensive, they may exhibit some level of awareness regarding impending changes. They start to recognise a few OOR and may move towards the POLE when the OOR is presented.
  - Objectives: Facilitate recognition of the change in a POLE when an OOR is presented; encourage holding the OOR on the way to the POLE; promote independent movement to the POLE upon presentation.
- Stage 4: Discrimination. At this stage, the learner can discern the appropriate OOR from a selection of two, beginning with the incorrect object held behind the correct one to guide the learner's choice. The learner independently forms a connection between the OOR and POLE.
  - Objectives: Encourage independent movement to the POLE upon presentation.
- Stage 5: Expression. In the final stage, the learner starts to independently choose from an array of OOR to express their needs or requests.
  - Objectives: Initiate communication using OOR, express needs using OOR.

#### Objects of reference list:

| Object                              | Transitional Meaning |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Silver foil blanket square          | 1Cann                |
| Green tinsel                        | 2Cann                |
| Purple tinsel                       | 3Cann                |
| 2 cotton reels on a clear cable tie | Bus                  |
| Shammy car sponge                   | Soft play            |
| Plastic spiral                      | Immersive room       |
| Glitter baton                       | Sensory room         |
| Perforated plastic ball             | 1Cann playground     |
| Plastic spoon                       | Food                 |
| Spiky soft rubber ball              | Rebound              |
| Woolly pom pom                      | Group                |
| Spiral ring dog toy                 | Primary playground   |
| Green scourer                       | Senior playground    |
| Shower puff                         | Soft play            |
| Red foam golf ball                  | Asda field           |
| Swimming bag/clothes                | Warm water pool      |

#### Transitional Photographs

Transitional Photographs use real-life images to represent upcoming activities, locations, or people. They are displayed on timetables or transition boards and used interactively to help learners anticipate and prepare for changes. Learners typically move on to Transitional Photographs after reaching at least Stage 3 of OOR understanding.

#### Benefits include:

- **Enhanced comprehension:** Real images are often easier to interpret than abstract symbols.
- **Reduced anxiety:** Predictable visuals help prepare learners for change.
- **Promoted independence:** Visual schedules support self-management and routine navigation.
- **Encouraged communication:** Photos serve as visual prompts for expressive and receptive language.

Initially, photographs are introduced alongside familiar OOR. Learners begin by holding or placing a photo on a transition board or handing it to an adult. As understanding develops, learners progress to using photo

strips or timetables showing several upcoming activities. They learn to locate and select the photograph representing their next activity, gradually fostering autonomy and anticipation.

Transitional Photographs are used to:

- Visualise and prepare for change between activities or environments.
- Support understanding of new people, places, or routines.
- Reinforce predictable sequences throughout the day.

These cues are highly individualised, aligned to each learner's sensory profile, developmental level, and communication system. Consistency across classrooms and staff ensures continuity and reliability. Staff receive ongoing training to model and implement these tools effectively within daily routines.

### Impact

The use of Objects of Reference and Transitional Photographs at Cann Bridge School has a significant impact on learners' communication, independence, and emotional wellbeing. These tools:

- Increase understanding of routines and expectations.
- Reduce anxiety and behavioural distress during transitions.
- Strengthen expressive and receptive communication.
- Support anticipation, memory, and sequencing skills.
- Enhance independence and engagement in daily activities.
- Provide accessible and reliable communication methods for learners with complex needs.

As part of the Total Communication framework, these approaches ensure that every learner can interpret, anticipate, and respond meaningfully to their environment—supporting confidence, consistency, and readiness for lifelong communication.

## Pictorial timetables and menu boards

### Intent

Pictorial timetables and menu boards are used at Cann Bridge School to support learners in understanding daily routines, transitions, and choices. These visual tools provide accessible, symbol-supported information that helps reduce anxiety, promote independence, and enhance communication—particularly for learners who benefit from structured, visual input.

The intent is to:

- Support comprehension of daily schedules and routines.
- Reduce uncertainty and prepare learners for transitions.
- Promote autonomy by enabling informed choices.
- Reinforce consistency and predictability across the school day.

### Implementation

- **Pictorial timetables** are displayed in classrooms and individual workspaces using symbol-supported visuals (e.g. Widgeit) to represent lessons, activities, and transitions. These are updated daily and personalised to each learner's needs and level of understanding.
- Different formats are used depending on the learner's stage and profile, including:
  - *'First and Then'* boards.
  - *Timetable strips* showing a sequence of upcoming events – with an increasing number used.
  - *Full-day or weekly timetables* for learners who benefit from broader visual planning.
- **Menu boards** use pictures and symbols to represent meal options, enabling learners to make informed choices during snack and lunch times. These are presented in a consistent format and used interactively with staff support.

- Staff model the use of timetables and menu boards throughout the day, pairing symbols with spoken language to reinforce understanding and support both receptive and expressive communication.
- These tools are embedded into classroom routines and used consistently across key stages to ensure continuity and familiarity.

### **Impact**

The use of pictorial timetables and menu boards has a positive impact on learners by:

- Increasing understanding of daily routines and expectations.
- Reducing anxiety and behavioural distress during transitions.
- Supporting decision-making and independence.
- Enhancing engagement and participation in school life.
- Providing a reliable and accessible communication method for all learners.

These visual tools are a key part of Cann Bridge School's Total Communication approach, ensuring every learner can navigate their day with confidence, clarity, and independence.

## **Colourful Semantics**

### **Intent**

Colourful Semantics is used at Cann Bridge School to support the development of sentence structure, grammar, and expressive language. By breaking down sentences into colour-coded components (e.g. who, what doing, what, where), learners are supported to build meaningful and grammatically correct sentences. This approach is particularly effective for pupils with speech, language, and communication needs, helping them to organise their thoughts and express themselves more clearly.

The intent is to:

- Develop learners' understanding of sentence structure and grammar.
- Support expressive language and verbal communication.
- Provide a visual and structured method for building sentences.
- Enable learners to communicate more effectively across contexts.

### **Implementation**

- Colourful Semantics is introduced through structured teaching sessions and embedded into everyday classroom practice.
- Sentence components are colour-coded and presented using symbols, visuals, and written words to support comprehension and engagement.
- Learners are supported to construct sentences using physical resources (e.g. colour-coded cards) and digital tools where appropriate.
- Staff model the use of Colourful Semantics during interactions, lessons, and communication activities to reinforce learning.
- The approach is adapted to suit individual learner needs, including simplified structures or extended sentence building for more advanced users.

### **Impact**

The use of Colourful Semantics has a positive impact on learners by:

- Improving sentence construction and grammatical awareness.
- Enhancing expressive communication and confidence in speaking.
- Supporting literacy development and written language skills.
- Increasing independence in forming and expressing ideas.
- Providing a consistent and accessible framework for communication across the school.

Colourful Semantics is a valuable component of Cann Bridge School's Total Communication approach, helping learners to develop structured, meaningful language in a way that is visual, engaging, and inclusive.

## **Social Stories**

### **Intent**

Social Stories are used at Cann Bridge School to help learners understand social situations, expectations, and appropriate responses. These personalised, structured narratives are designed to support emotional regulation, reduce anxiety, and promote positive behaviour by clearly explaining what to expect in specific scenarios. They are particularly effective for learners with autism and other communication needs who benefit from explicit, visual, and predictable guidance.

The intent is to:

- Support understanding of social norms, routines, and changes.
- Reduce anxiety by preparing learners for unfamiliar or challenging situations.
- Promote emotional regulation and appropriate behaviour.
- Encourage independence and confidence in social interactions.

### **Implementation**

- Social Stories are created using simple language, clear visuals, and a positive tone, tailored to the individual learner's needs and comprehension level.
- Stories are used proactively to prepare learners for upcoming events (e.g. school trips, changes in routine) and reactively to support reflection and behaviour management.
- Staff read and discuss Social Stories with learners regularly, often pairing them with symbol-supported text (e.g. Widgit) to aid understanding.
- Stories are embedded into daily routines and revisited as needed to reinforce key messages and support generalisation.
- Collaboration with families and external professionals ensures consistency and relevance across home and school environments.

We store all non-personalised social stories on our Intranet page so that this can be edited and reused in the future.

### **Impact**

The use of Social Stories has a positive impact on learners by:

- Increasing understanding of social expectations and reducing uncertainty.
- Supporting emotional regulation and reducing behavioural incidents.
- Enhancing communication and self-expression.
- Promoting independence and confidence in navigating social situations.
- Strengthening consistency between home and school approaches.

Social Stories are a valuable component of Cann Bridge School's Total Communication approach, helping learners to interpret and respond to the world around them in a way that is structured, supportive, and meaningful.

## **Bag Books**

### **Intent**

The use of Bag Books is designed to ensure that all learners, particularly those with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD), have equitable access to meaningful literacy and communication

experiences. Bag Books offer a multisensory storytelling approach that enhances engagement, comprehension, and expression for pupils who may not be able to access traditional text-based materials.

### Implementation

- **Curriculum Integration:** Bag Books are embedded across all key stages, particularly within literacy, communication, and personal development sessions, to enrich the curriculum and support diverse learning needs.
- **Staff Training:** All staff receive training in the effective delivery of Bag Book sessions, including the use of tactile resources, expressive voice modulation, and interactive storytelling techniques.
- **Supportive Environments:** Sessions are conducted in calm, sensory-friendly spaces to maximise pupil engagement and minimise sensory overload.
- **Personalisation:** Stories are carefully selected and adapted to reflect the individual needs, interests, and communication profiles of each pupil, ensuring accessibility and relevance.
- **Collaborative Practice:** Teachers, speech and language therapists, and support staff work collaboratively to align Bag Book sessions with pupils' communication targets and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) outcomes.

The school library holds a wide range of Bag Books and multisensory story boxes, which are available for staff to borrow. Staff are also encouraged to create bespoke story resources to support and adapt the planned curriculum, particularly for learners on the informal pathway.

### Impact

- **Increased Engagement:** Pupils demonstrate heightened levels of attention, anticipation, and active participation during storytelling sessions.
- **Enhanced Communication:** Learners utilise a broader range of communicative behaviours—such as eye gaze, vocalisations, gestures, and symbol use—in response to multisensory stimuli.
- **Improved Wellbeing:** The inclusive and interactive nature of Bag Books promotes enjoyment, builds confidence, and fosters a sense of achievement and belonging.
- **Informed Planning:** Staff use structured observations and assessment tools to monitor progress in communication, which informs future planning and targeted interventions.

## Developing verbal skills – speaking and listening activities to encourage speech and understanding

### Intent

The development of verbal communication is a key component of our Total Communication approach. For learners with emerging or developing speech, targeted speaking and listening activities are designed to build confidence, support expressive and receptive language skills, and promote meaningful interaction. These activities aim to create a language-rich environment where every pupil is encouraged to use their voice, however emerging, to communicate effectively.

### Implementation

- **Language-Rich Environments:** Classrooms are designed to immerse pupils in spoken language through songs, stories, routines, and conversations, providing consistent models of functional communication.
- **Targeted Interventions:** Pupils receive individualised support through speech and language therapy programmes, small group work, and one-to-one sessions focused on developing articulation, vocabulary, sentence structure, and comprehension.
- **Interactive Activities:** A wide range of speaking and listening activities are embedded into daily routines, including turn-taking games, role play, storytelling, and question-and-answer sessions.

- **Visual and Gestural Support:** Verbal communication is supported with visual aids, Makaton signing, symbols, and gestures to reinforce understanding and reduce cognitive load.
- **Modelling and Repetition:** Staff consistently model clear, simplified language and provide repeated opportunities for pupils to hear and practise key vocabulary and phrases.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Teachers and speech and language therapists work together to embed communication targets into the curriculum and daily interactions.

#### Impact

- **Improved Expressive Language:** Pupils demonstrate increased use of spoken words, phrases, and sentences to express needs, thoughts, and feelings.
- **Enhanced Listening and Understanding:** Learners show improved attention, comprehension, and ability to follow instructions and engage in conversations.
- **Increased Confidence:** Pupils become more confident communicators, initiating interactions and participating more fully in classroom and social activities.
- **Progress Towards EHCP Outcomes:** Targeted speaking and listening activities contribute directly to progress in communication-related outcomes identified in pupils' Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

## Vocalisation, intonation, and verbalisation – encouraging the use of sound and tone for communication

#### Intent

The development of vocalisation, intonation, and verbalisation is important for learners at the earliest stages of communication. These strategies aim to encourage the use of sounds, vocal play, and tone as meaningful forms of expression. By recognising and responding to all vocal attempts—whether intentional or emerging—we foster the foundations of speech, support emotional expression, and promote interaction.

#### Implementation

- **Creating Opportunities for Vocal Play:** Staff provide regular opportunities for pupils to explore and experiment with sounds in a safe, responsive environment through singing, sound-making games, and echo activities.
- **Modelling and Mirroring:** Adults model a wide range of vocalisations and intonations, and mirror pupils' sounds to reinforce turn-taking, shared attention, and the communicative value of vocal behaviour.
- **Responsive Interaction:** Staff are trained to recognise and respond to all vocal attempts, treating them as meaningful communication and encouraging further interaction.
- **Use of Music and Rhythm:** Songs, rhymes, and rhythmic activities are used to support the development of pitch, tone, and prosody, helping pupils to explore the expressive qualities of their voice.
- **Integration with Other Modalities:** Vocalisation is supported alongside other communication methods such as Makaton, symbols, and gesture, ensuring a holistic and inclusive approach.
- **Therapeutic Input:** Speech and language therapists provide targeted programmes to support the development of early vocal behaviours and emerging speech.

#### Impact

- **Increased Vocal Output:** Pupils demonstrate greater use of vocalisations, including a wider range of sounds, tones, and volumes, as part of their communication repertoire.
- **Enhanced Interaction:** Learners engage more frequently in vocal turn-taking, joint attention, and social exchanges with adults and peers.

- **Progression Towards Speech:** For some pupils, increased vocalisation and intonation lead to the development of early words and verbal communication.
- **Recognition of All Communication:** By valuing every vocal attempt, pupils experience increased confidence, motivation, and a sense of being heard and understood.

## Reduced language – simplifying verbal input by using fewer information-carrying words

### Intent

The use of reduced language is designed to support learners with communication and language processing difficulties. By simplifying verbal input and reducing the number of information-carrying words, we aim to make spoken language more accessible, reduce cognitive load, and enhance understanding. This approach ensures that all pupils, particularly those with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN), can process and respond to verbal communication more effectively.

### Implementation

- **Simplified Language Use:** Staff are trained to use clear, concise language, focusing on key words that carry meaning, rather than full sentences or complex instructions.
- **Modelling and Repetition:** Key vocabulary is modelled consistently and repeated in meaningful contexts to support understanding and retention.
- **Pacing and Pausing:** Staff use slower speech and intentional pauses to give pupils time to process and respond to verbal input.
- **Visual and Contextual Support:** Reduced language is paired with visual supports such as symbols, gestures, and objects of reference to reinforce meaning and aid comprehension.
- **Contextual Relevance:** Language is tailored to the learner's current activity, interests, and level of understanding, ensuring that communication is functional and purposeful.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Teachers and speech and language therapists work together to identify appropriate vocabulary and strategies for individual pupils, embedding them into daily routines and learning activities.

### Impact

- **Improved Comprehension:** Pupils demonstrate increased understanding of spoken language, responding more accurately to instructions, questions, and interactions.
- **Enhanced Communication Confidence:** Learners are more willing to engage in verbal exchanges when language is accessible and manageable.
- **Progress in Expressive Language:** Simplified input supports the development of expressive language by providing clear models for pupils to imitate and build upon.
- **Consistency Across Settings:** The use of reduced language across the school day ensures a consistent communication environment, supporting generalisation and reducing frustration.

## Intensive Interaction

### Intent

Intensive Interaction at Cann Bridge School is a learner-centred approach that focuses on teaching the pre-speech fundamentals of communication to learners at the earliest stages of their communication development. It plays a crucial role in our Total Communication strategy, supporting informal and semi-formal learners in developing foundational communication skills, while also remaining highly effective for formal learners at any stage of their communication journey. Intensive Interaction promotes deeper social connections, validates learners' actions, and enhances their understanding of their impact on the world around them.

The approach aims to:

- **Promote fundamental communication skills:** Develop joint attention, turn-taking, and non-verbal communication, which underpin more advanced communication and social interaction.
- **Support emotional development:** Foster a sense of connection and engagement, supporting learners' social and emotional wellbeing.
- **Provide an inclusive approach:** Tailor communication development to each learner's current level, making it accessible to learners with diverse abilities and needs.
- **Offer flexibility:** Integrate into a variety of activities and settings across the school day to promote communication in multiple contexts.

### Implementation

Intensive Interaction is delivered through personalised, responsive, and motivating interactions, adapted to each learner's developmental profile:

- **Meeting the learner at their level:** Staff tune into learners' behaviours, interests, and activities, using these as the basis for communication development.
- **Responsive interaction:** Adults respond to and build on learners' attempts at communication, rather than directing interactions, fostering genuine two-way exchanges.
- **Shared attention and engagement:** Staff focus on establishing joint attention and engaging learners meaningfully in the interaction.
- **Turn-taking and reciprocity:** Learners are supported to participate in back-and-forth exchanges, promoting essential social communication skills.
- **Multi-modal communication:** Gestures, facial expressions, vocalisations, eye contact, and positive touch are used alongside AAC systems, Makaton, and other communication tools to model meaningful interaction.
- **Embedded practice and enjoyment:** Activities are motivating, fun, and integrated into both dedicated sessions and everyday routines, ensuring engagement and generalisation across settings.
- **Individualisation and staff modelling:** Sessions are adapted to attention span, sensory profile, and communication preferences, with staff modelling appropriate interactive behaviours for learners to imitate, respond, and initiate communication.

### Impact

Intensive Interaction enhances learners' ability to engage socially, communicate effectively, and develop foundational communication skills essential for both verbal and non-verbal interaction. It fosters shared attention, reciprocity, and responsiveness, increasing learners' confidence, motivation, and capacity for emotional regulation. Within the Total Communication framework, Intensive Interaction supports multimodal communication, encourages spontaneous interactions, and promotes generalisation of skills across classrooms, social contexts, and the wider community. This approach contributes to learners' independence, wellbeing, and lifelong learning, providing a strong foundation for progression in all areas of communication and social development.

## Cued Articulation

### Intent

Cued Articulation is a visual and kinaesthetic support strategy used to develop accurate speech sound production and phonological awareness. As part of our Total Communication approach, it supports learners who experience speech sound difficulties by providing visual cues that represent how and where sounds are made in the mouth. The aim is to enhance learners' understanding of speech sounds, support their articulation, and build the foundations for clearer verbal communication.

### Implementation

- **Targeted Use:** Cued Articulation is used primarily with learners who are developing speech but require additional support to discriminate, produce, or sequence specific phonemes.
- **Visual and Kinaesthetic Cues:** Each speech sound is paired with a specific hand gesture that visually represents the place and manner of articulation, helping learners to internalise and reproduce sounds more accurately.
- **Integration with Phonics:** Cued Articulation is embedded into phonics teaching to support sound-letter correspondence and early reading skills.
- **Staff Training:** Staff are trained in the correct use of Cued Articulation to ensure consistency and accuracy across the school day.
- **Therapeutic Support:** Speech and language therapists may provide individualised programmes incorporating Cued Articulation, which are then reinforced by teaching and support staff in the classroom.
- **Multimodal Support:** Cued Articulation is used alongside other communication strategies such as Makaton, symbols, and visual supports to ensure a holistic approach tailored to each learner's needs.

### Impact

- **Improved Speech Sound Production:** Pupils demonstrate increased accuracy in producing individual phonemes and sound sequences.
- **Enhanced Phonological Awareness:** Learners show improved ability to discriminate between sounds, supporting both speech and early literacy development.
- **Increased Confidence in Speaking:** As clarity improves, pupils become more confident in using their voice to communicate with others.
- **Consistency Across Settings:** The use of Cued Articulation by all staff ensures a consistent approach, reinforcing learning and supporting generalisation of skills.

## Body signing

### Intent

Body signing is particularly useful for learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), sensory impairments, or limited access to visual or auditory information. It involves the use of touch cues, gestures, and body-based signs to support expressive and receptive communication. The intent is to provide an accessible, respectful, and meaningful way for pupils to understand and express themselves, fostering connection, autonomy, and inclusion.

### Implementation

- **Personalised Communication:** Body signing is tailored to each learner's sensory profile, physical abilities, and communication needs, ensuring it is meaningful and appropriate.
- **Consistent Use Across Settings:** Staff use body signing consistently throughout the day, particularly during routines such as transitions, personal care, and greetings, to reinforce understanding and predictability.
- **Staff Training:** All staff receive training in body signing techniques, including the use of touch cues, hand-under-hand support, and coactive signing, to ensure safe and effective communication.
- **Integration with Other Modalities:** Body signing is used alongside other communication methods such as vocalisation, objects of reference, and visual supports, ensuring a holistic and multimodal approach.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Teachers, therapists, and families work together to develop and review individualised communication plans that incorporate body signing strategies.

### Impact

- **Increased Understanding:** Pupils demonstrate improved comprehension of daily routines, transitions, and expectations through consistent use of body-based cues.

- **Enhanced Expressive Communication:** Learners begin to use body signs, gestures, or movements to express needs, preferences, and emotions.
- **Strengthened Relationships:** Body signing fosters trust and connection between pupils and staff, supporting emotional wellbeing and social interaction.
- **Inclusive Communication:** By recognising and responding to body-based communication, all pupils are empowered to participate meaningfully in their learning and community.

## Sensory Cues

### Intent

Sensory cues are used to support learners' understanding, engagement, and regulation by providing accessible, non-verbal prompts that reinforce meaning. These cues—auditory, visual, tactile, and olfactory—are particularly valuable for pupils who experience barriers to verbal communication or benefit from multi-sensory input to process information.

The intent of sensory cues is to:

- Enhance comprehension through concrete, sensory-based signals.
- Reduce anxiety by establishing predictable and recognisable routines.
- Support transitions, emotional regulation, and readiness to learn.
- Provide alternative pathways for communication and interaction.

Sensory cues are not supplementary—they are essential tools for many learners, helping them interpret their environment and respond appropriately.

### Implementation

Sensory cues are embedded throughout the school day and across learning environments. Examples include:

- **Auditory cues:** Music signifiers, sound effects, or consistent verbal prompts used to indicate transitions, activities, or emotional states.
- **Visual cues:** Lights, colours, symbols, or visual timetables that signal changes or expectations.
- **Tactile cues:** Touch cues or textured objects used to guide attention or signal the start of an activity.
- **Olfactory cues:** Familiar scents used to support emotional regulation or indicate specific routines (e.g. lavender for calming, citrus for alertness).

Staff use these cues intentionally and consistently, often alongside other communication methods such as body signing, Makaton, or AAC. Cues are personalised to each learner's sensory profile and communication needs, and integrated into routines, transitions, and learning activities.

In practice, classes may use specific sensory cues tailored to individual learners. While these may vary, it is expected that learning sessions begin with a consistent auditory and visual opener—typically a musical video linked to the subject.

Some learners may require bespoke tactile cues to signal the start of a session. These cues must remain consistent across classes and key stages. For example, if a learner associates a wet sponge with the start of a maths session, this cue must be maintained throughout their time at school.

Olfactory cues, being shared sensory experiences, are standardised across the school. Currently, essential oils are used to represent days of the week, supported by colour cues:

| Day     | Olfactory Cue          | Colour Cue |
|---------|------------------------|------------|
| Monday  | Orange (essential oil) | Red        |
| Tuesday | Cinnamon               | Orange     |

| Day       | Olfactory Cue | Colour Cue |
|-----------|---------------|------------|
| Wednesday | Lavender      | Yellow     |
| Thursday  | Peppermint    | Green      |
| Friday    | Ylang Ylang   | Blue       |

### Impact

Sensory cues have a positive impact on learners at Cann Bridge School by improving understanding, reducing anxiety, and enhancing engagement. For some pupils, these cues become a primary mode of communication, supporting greater independence and readiness to learn. As part of our Total Communication approach, they help ensure every learner can connect, comprehend, and express themselves meaningfully.

## Eye pointing and visual tracking

### Intent

The use of eye pointing and visual tracking strategies within our Total Communication approach ensures that learners with limited or no verbal communication, particularly those with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), have access to meaningful ways of expressing themselves. These strategies recognise and value the subtle, often pre-intentional, communicative behaviours of our learners, promoting autonomy, interaction, and inclusion.

### Implementation

- **Observation and Assessment:** Staff are trained to observe and interpret eye gaze and visual tracking behaviours as intentional communication.
- **Environment and Resources:** Classrooms are arranged to support visual access, with clear, uncluttered displays and consistent positioning of communication materials. High-contrast visuals, low-tech eye gaze boards, and symbol-based resources are used to support tracking and choice-making.
- **Targeted Interventions:** Pupils with emerging or established eye pointing skills are supported through structured activities, including cause-and-effect games, partner-assisted scanning, and early eye gaze technology where appropriate.
- **Technology Integration:** Where appropriate, eye gaze technology is introduced to support access to communication software, learning activities, and environmental control systems.
- **Collaborative Practice:** Teachers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and support staff work together to develop and implement personalised strategies that promote the use of eye pointing and visual tracking in everyday contexts.

### Stages of Developing Eye Gaze Skills with a Low-Tech Eye Gaze Board

#### 1. Awareness and Engagement

- **Goal:** Help the learner become aware that their eyes can be used to interact with others.
- **Activities:**
  - Use high-contrast, engaging visuals.
  - Present single, motivating items to encourage visual attention.
  - Use light-up or moving objects to attract gaze.

#### 2. Choice Making with Two Options

- **Goal:** Introduce the concept of making a choice using eye gaze.
- **Activities:**
  - Present two contrasting items (e.g., a favourite toy vs. a neutral item).
  - Observe for consistent, intentional gaze toward one item.

- Reinforce choices immediately with praise or access to the chosen item.

### 3. Increasing Number of Choices

- **Goal:** Gradually increase the number of options to build discrimination and scanning skills.
- **Activities:**
  - Move from 2 to 3, then 4+ options on the board.
  - Arrange items in a grid or arc to support visual scanning.
  - Vary positions to ensure the learner is not relying on location memory.

### 4. Introducing Symbolic Representation

- **Goal:** Transition from real objects to photos, then to symbols.
- **Activities:**
  - Pair objects with corresponding photos or symbols.
  - Fade the object while increasing reliance on the visual representation.
  - Use consistent symbols (e.g., Widgit or PCS) for familiar items or actions.

### 5. Functional Communication

- **Goal:** Use eye gaze to communicate needs, wants, and ideas across settings.
- **Activities:**
  - Embed eye gaze boards into daily routines (e.g., snack time, play, toileting).
  - Use partner-assisted scanning if needed.
  - Encourage spontaneous initiation of communication.

### 6. Expanding Vocabulary and Complexity

- **Goal:** Support the learner to use more complex language structures.
- **Activities:**
  - Introduce core vocabulary boards.
  - Use Colourful Semantics with eye gaze boards to build sentence structure.
  - Encourage combining symbols for more detailed communication.

### 7. Transition to High-Tech Eye Gaze (if appropriate)

- **Goal:** Move to dynamic eye gaze technology for increased independence.
- **Activities:**
  - Trial eye gaze devices with communication software (e.g., Grid, Tobii Dynavox).
  - Continue to support low-tech options as a backup or in specific contexts.

### Impact

- **Recognition of Intentional Communication:** Staff are increasingly confident in identifying and responding to subtle communicative behaviours, leading to more frequent and meaningful interactions.
- **Increased Participation:** Pupils demonstrate greater engagement in learning and social activities by using eye pointing and visual tracking to make choices, respond to questions, and express preferences.
- **Enhanced Communication Development:** Learners show measurable progress in using eye gaze and visual attention as consistent and purposeful communication methods.
- **Empowerment and Inclusion:** By recognising and responding to all forms of communication, pupils experience increased autonomy, self-worth, and a stronger sense of inclusion within the school community.

**Visual development sessions and attention-building activities (e.g. *Attention Autism/Activities*)**

## Intent

Visual development sessions and attention-building activities at Cann Bridge School are designed to enhance learners' ability to attend to, process, and respond to visual and auditory stimuli, which are foundational skills for effective communication. These activities aim to improve visual tracking, focus, and engagement, supporting both receptive and expressive communication. By strengthening attention and sensory processing, learners are better able to access the curriculum, interact meaningfully with others, and develop independence in learning and social contexts.

## Implementation

These activities are embedded across the school in both structured and spontaneous learning opportunities:

- **Visual tracking and attention exercises:** Activities such as following objects, tracking facial expressions, and engaging with visual cues develop sustained attention and eye contact.
- **Attention-building programs:** Techniques from Attention Autism and other structured attention activities help learners maintain focus, shift attention appropriately, and respond to instructions or social cues.
- **Sensory integration:** Sessions are often combined with sensory supports—tactile, auditory, and visual stimuli—to strengthen engagement and reinforce learning.
- **Contextual application:** Visual and attention skills are practised across multiple settings, including classrooms, small group activities, and play, to ensure generalisation.
- **Staff modelling and reinforcement:** Adults model attentive behaviours and provide prompts to encourage learners' participation, helping them apply skills to functional communication situations.
- **Individualisation:** Activities are tailored to each learner's developmental stage, attention span, and sensory profile, ensuring that sessions are accessible and appropriately challenging.

## Attention Activities

Attention Autism, developed by speech and language therapist Gina Davies, is an innovative and practical approach designed to address the attention and communication challenges faced by many learners with autism. At Cann Bridge School, we recognise that attention-building skills are highly effective in supporting positive learning behaviours and form the foundation for group-based learning across a wide range of learners with diverse needs and diagnoses. These skills are not exclusive to learners with an autism diagnosis; therefore, we refer to the program as Attention Activities and use it with any learner who would benefit from developing their attention skills.

The program's aim is to spark learners' interest, capture their attention, and create a shared focus. Davies emphasises the principle of "Attention First, Language Second," designing activities that prioritise engagement and focus as a precursor to developing communication skills. At Cann Bridge School, we embed Attention Activities across the curriculum for learners at all levels ensuring that attention and engagement are developed for informal, semi-formal, and formal learning pathways.

Attention Activities intends to:

- **Boost attention skills:** Enhance learners' ability to focus, sustain, and shift attention, forming the basis for social and communication skills.
- **Increase spontaneous communication:** Engaged and motivated learners are more likely to initiate communication.
- **Encourage group participation:** Shared activities promote collaborative learning and interaction.
- **Provide structure:** Clear, predictable activity frameworks reduce anxiety and support consistent engagement.

Attention Activities is implemented and structured around four stages, each introducing a different level of challenge:

- **Stage 1 - Focus on attention:** In this stage, engaging, visually stimulating activities are used to capture and sustain the learner's attention. These activities are short, fun, and designed to be motivating.
- **Stage 2 - Focus on sustaining attention:** Here, the aim is to develop longer sustained attention. Learners are still watching and focusing on a specific adult; however, the adult's activity is slightly longer and more varied in each session.
- **Stage 3 - Turn-taking and re-engaging attention:** This stage introduces simple turn-taking games. The idea is to encourage learners to maintain their attention when it's not their turn and re-engage when it is. Once learners are familiar with this stage, they will also learn that they will not always have a turn, and sometimes some learners may have more than one turn.
- **Stage 4 - Shifting and re-engaging attention:** The final stage involves activities that require learners to shift their attention from one task to another, promoting cognitive flexibility. These are typically completed by having learners individually leave the group to perform a task, then return to look at everyone's work one by one. Over time, Stage 4 is extended by increasing complexity, including an introduction to utilising shared resources, and then exploring a need to find resources independently.

### Impact

Visual development sessions and Attention Activities significantly enhance learners' ability to attend, process, and respond to sensory and communication cues, underpinning progress in both expressive and receptive communication. Improved attention and visual processing increase engagement with lessons, collaborative tasks, and social interactions, while reducing frustration and promoting self-regulation. Learners develop the skills to initiate communication, participate confidently in group settings, and generalise attention and processing skills across environments. Within the Total Communication framework, these activities foster independence, functional communication, confidence, and readiness for lifelong learning and social inclusion.

## Sensory diets and integration activities

### Intent

Sensory diets and integration activities are essential for learners with sensory processing differences. These strategies aim to support pupils in achieving and maintaining an optimal state of alertness and regulation, enabling them to engage more effectively in communication, learning, and social interaction. By addressing sensory needs proactively, we create the conditions necessary for meaningful communication to occur.

### Implementation

- **Individualised Sensory Profiles:** Each pupil's sensory preferences and needs are assessed in collaboration with occupational therapists, leading to the development of personalised sensory profiles and plans.
- **Daily Sensory Diets:** Structured sensory activities are embedded throughout the school day to support regulation. These may include movement breaks, deep pressure input, tactile exploration, oral-motor activities, and calming strategies.
- **Integration into Routines:** Sensory strategies are integrated into classroom routines and transitions to support readiness to learn and reduce anxiety or dysregulation.
- **Environmental Adaptations:** Classrooms are designed with sensory-friendly features such as quiet zones and bespoke designed Breakout Rooms, soft lighting, and access to sensory tools (e.g., fidget items, weighted blankets, noise-cancelling headphones).
- **Staff Training:** All staff receive training in recognising sensory needs and implementing appropriate strategies to support regulation and communication.
- **Collaborative Practice:** Teachers, therapists, and families work together to ensure consistency of sensory support across school and home environments.

## Impact

- **Improved Regulation:** Pupils demonstrate increased ability to self-regulate, leading to improved focus, reduced anxiety, and greater participation in learning and communication activities.
- **Enhanced Communication Opportunities:** By supporting sensory needs, pupils are more available for interaction, enabling more frequent and meaningful communication exchanges.
- **Increased Engagement:** Learners show higher levels of attention, motivation, and involvement in classroom activities.
- **Holistic Development:** Sensory integration supports not only communication but also emotional wellbeing, motor development, and social interaction, contributing to overall progress and quality of life.

## Written text and key words in displays or worksheets

### Intent

The use of written text and key words, supported by symbols where appropriate ensures that all learners, including those with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN), have access to consistent, accessible, and meaningful written information. By combining text with symbols, we aim to enhance comprehension, support literacy development, and promote independence across the curriculum.

### Implementation

- **Consistent Use of Key Vocabulary:** Key words are identified and used consistently across classrooms, displays, and learning materials to reinforce understanding and support language acquisition.
- **Symbol Support:** Where appropriate, symbols (e.g., Widgit or PCS) are used alongside written words to provide visual cues that aid comprehension, particularly for learners with limited literacy or language skills.
- **Accessible Displays:** Classroom displays, labels, and signage include both text and symbols to support navigation, routine understanding, and environmental print awareness.
- **Differentiated Worksheets:** Learning materials are adapted to include simplified text and symbol support, ensuring all pupils can access and engage with the content.
- **Staff Training:** Staff are trained in the use of symbol software and the principles of symbol-supported communication to ensure consistency and accuracy.
- **Integration with Other Communication Strategies:** Written and symbol-supported text is used in conjunction with other communication methods such as Makaton, objects of reference, and verbal prompts to reinforce meaning.

### Impact

- **Improved Comprehension:** Pupils demonstrate increased understanding of instructions, routines, and learning content through the use of symbol-supported text.
- **Enhanced Literacy Development:** Learners develop early reading and writing skills through repeated exposure to consistent key words and symbols.
- **Increased Independence:** Access to symbol-supported written materials enables pupils to navigate their environment, follow routines, and complete tasks with greater autonomy.
- **Inclusive Learning Environment:** The consistent use of accessible written and visual supports ensures that all pupils, regardless of their communication needs, can participate meaningfully in school life.

## Phonics

Our Phonics programme and delivery is outlined within our English Curriculum Overview.

## TEACCH Traywork

The TEACCH approach—Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication-Handicapped Children—was developed in the early 1970s at the University of North Carolina, USA. It is a structured teaching methodology designed to support learners with autism and other communication-related difficulties. Over time, it has been widely adopted in various educational settings, including those supporting pupils with severe learning disabilities.

### Intent

TEACCH traywork provides a structured framework for learners to complete tasks independently. It aims to:

- Break tasks into manageable steps with clear visual instructions.
- Promote independence, confidence, and autonomy.
- Reduce reliance on adult prompting.
- Support academic, vocational, and self-care skill development.
- Improve focus, attention, and task completion.
- Reinforce and generalise skills across contexts.

This approach is particularly effective for learners who benefit from routine, clarity, and visual structure.

### Implementation

TEACCH traywork is delivered through a carefully designed and consistent process:

- **Workstation Setup:** A dedicated, distraction-free workspace is established. Clear visual boundaries are used—typically green to indicate where work begins and red to show where completed work should be placed.
- **Task Organisation:** Tasks are presented in individual trays or boxes, arranged from left to right to mirror the natural reading direction. Each tray contains a single, clearly defined activity.
- **Visual Supports:** Instructions are provided using symbols, photographs, pictures, or written text, depending on the learner's comprehension level. At Cann Bridge School, most learners use vertical symbol timetables to guide task sequencing.
- **Independent Work:** Learners are encouraged to complete tasks independently, starting with the first tray and progressing through the sequence. Finished work is placed in a designated area (red tray or box).
- **Clear Routine:** The process follows a predictable and consistent routine—approach the workstation, complete the tasks, and tidy away—helping to reduce anxiety and increase engagement.
- **Individualisation:** Tasks are tailored to each learner's ability and developmental stage. As skills progress, tasks may become more complex, but always remain achievable to maintain independence and motivation.
- **Review and Feedback:** Upon completion, staff review the work with the learner, offering praise, reinforcement, and constructive feedback to support ongoing development.

### Impact

The TEACCH traywork approach has a significant positive impact on learners at Cann Bridge School. By providing a structured, visually clear, and predictable framework, it enables pupils to engage with tasks independently, reducing anxiety and increasing confidence. As learners become more familiar with the routine and expectations, they begin to rely less on rigid structures and adult prompting.

Over time, this leads to:

- Improved task fluency, with learners able to complete multiple-step activities with minimal support.
- Greater independence, as pupils internalise routines and develop problem-solving skills.
- Enhanced adaptability, with learners transferring skills across different contexts and settings.
- Increased engagement and motivation, as success and autonomy build self-esteem.

Ultimately, TEACCH traywork supports learners in progressing from highly structured, supported tasks to more flexible, self-directed learning—laying the foundation for lifelong functional skills and independence.

## Braille

### Intent

The inclusion of Braille within our Total Communication approach ensures that learners with visual impairments have equitable access to literacy, communication, and the curriculum. Braille provides a tactile method of reading and writing, enabling learners to develop independence, express themselves meaningfully, and engage fully in learning and social experiences.

### Implementation

- **Assessment and Identification:** Learners with visual impairments are assessed by specialist teachers and sensory support services to determine the appropriateness of Braille as a communication and literacy tool.
- **Curriculum Access:** Braille is used to support access to the curriculum, including reading materials, timetables, labels, and personalised learning resources.
- **Skill Development:** Learners are supported to develop pre-Braille and Braille literacy skills through structured teaching, including tactile discrimination, tracking, and letter recognition.
- **Staff Training:** Staff receive training and ongoing support to develop their confidence and competence in using Braille and supporting learners who use it.
- **Resource Provision:** The school ensures access to appropriate Braille resources and equipment, such as Perkins Braille writers, Braille books, and tactile graphics.
- **Collaboration:** Teachers work closely with Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired (QTVIs), families, and external agencies to ensure a consistent and individualised approach.

### Impact

- **Increased Independence:** Learners using Braille demonstrate greater autonomy in accessing information, expressing themselves, and participating in classroom activities.
- **Enhanced Literacy and Communication:** Pupils develop functional literacy skills through Braille, enabling them to read, write, and communicate effectively.
- **Inclusive Learning:** Braille supports full inclusion in the curriculum and school life, ensuring that visual impairment is not a barrier to communication or achievement.
- **Empowerment and Confidence:** Access to Braille fosters a sense of identity, confidence, and self-advocacy in learners with visual impairments.

## Switches and Voice Operated Communication Aids (VOCAs)

### Intent

The use of Switches and Voice Operated Communication Aids (VOCAs) is integral to our Total Communication approach, ensuring that all learners—particularly those with complex communication needs—have access to meaningful, functional, and personalised methods of expression. These tools empower pupils to communicate choices, express preferences, and engage with their environment, promoting autonomy, inclusion, and participation in all aspects of school life.

### Implementation

- **Assessment and Identification:** Pupils are assessed by the multidisciplinary team, including speech and language therapists and occupational therapists, to determine the most appropriate access methods and communication aids.

- **Access to Technology:** A range of switches and VOCAs are available across the school, including single-message devices, multi-message devices, and dynamic display communication aids. These are integrated into daily routines, lessons, and social interactions.
- **Staff Training and Support:** Staff receive ongoing training in the use of assistive technology, including programming VOCAs, facilitating switch access, and supporting pupils in developing operational and strategic competence.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Communication aids are embedded into all areas of the curriculum, ensuring that pupils can access learning and demonstrate understanding using their preferred method of communication.
- **Maintenance and Review:** Devices are regularly maintained, updated, and reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate and effective. Staff work closely with families and external professionals to ensure consistency across settings.

### Impact

- **Increased Independence:** Pupils demonstrate greater autonomy in expressing needs, making choices, and participating in learning and social activities.
- **Enhanced Communication:** Learners show progress in their ability to initiate, maintain, and respond in communicative interactions using their chosen aids.
- **Improved Engagement:** The use of switches and VOCAs supports active participation in classroom activities, fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging.

## Communication-Friendly Environment Minimum Expectations

### Intent

Learning environments at Cann Bridge School are designed to be learner-focused and aligned with Total Communication principles. The intent of establishing minimum expectations is to ensure that every classroom and learning space is calm, organised, and optimised to support engagement, communication, and learning. By creating environments that reduce sensory overload and distractions while promoting structure and predictability, we enable learners to access the curriculum, interact meaningfully, and develop independence, confidence, and functional communication skills.

### Implementation

Learning Environment minimum expectations are embedded across the school, encompassing both physical and pedagogical elements:

- **Calm environments:** Classrooms are organised to minimise overstimulation, with controlled noise and lighting levels, reducing sensory overload and associated stress or disruptive behaviours. Calm surroundings support attention, focus, and emotional and behavioural regulation, creating a conducive atmosphere for learning and communication.
- **Clutter-free environments:** Spaces are kept organised and free of unnecessary items to reduce distractions, enhance safety, and provide predictability. Clearly designated resources support learner autonomy and independence, allowing learners to locate and use materials confidently.
- **Total Communication integration:** All environments consistently embed multi-modal communication supports, including speech, Makaton signs, symbols, visual cues, AAC devices, and gestures. Staff model these strategies across lessons, routines, and interactions, ensuring learners can generalise skills across settings.
- **Structured routines and visual supports:** Predictable classroom routines, visual timetables, labels, and prompts reinforce understanding, reduce anxiety, and support learner engagement.
- **Monitoring and continuous improvement:** Teachers collaborate with senior leaders to complete learning environment minimum expectation checklists, assessing both physical and pedagogical aspects. Checklists are regularly reviewed and updated to drive ongoing enhancement of learning spaces.

**Impact**

Communication-friendly, calm, and clutter-free environments have a measurable impact on learners' engagement, communication, and learning. By reducing sensory overload and distractions, learners can focus more effectively, sustain attention, and participate fully in lessons and social interactions. Organised, predictable spaces foster independence, self-confidence, and emotional regulation, enabling learners to apply communication strategies consistently across contexts. When integrated within the Total Communication framework, these environments support functional communication, collaboration, and lifelong learning, ensuring every learner can thrive academically, socially, and personally.

**Staff Training and Continued Professional Development (CPD)**

Covered within the English Curriculum Overview.

**Impact**

The Total Communication Policy at Cann Bridge School has a profound impact on learners' engagement, development, and outcomes. By creating a communication-rich environment that values verbal, non-verbal, symbolic, and technological forms of expression, every learner is empowered to access the curriculum, participate fully in lessons, and develop meaningful relationships. Personalised communication pathways, alongside the consistent use of AAC systems, Makaton signing, visual supports, and sensory cues, enable pupils to make measurable progress in both expressive and receptive skills, fostering confidence, independence, and self-advocacy.

This approach recognises that learners progress at different rates through pre-intentional, intentional, symbolic, and verbal communication modes, with staff modelling and embedded strategies promoting consistency and skill generalisation across settings. Total Communication enhances social interaction, collaboration, and engagement while preparing learners for life beyond school. By equipping pupils with functional communication skills, the policy supports lifelong learning, participation in the community, and the development of independence, ensuring that every learner can actively communicate, achieve their potential, and transition successfully to further education, employment, or bespoke opportunities.

**Monitoring, Evaluation, and Review**

Total Communication is monitored in line with the English Curriculum Overview informing ongoing improvements and refinements to the Total Communication provision.

**This policy links to the following policies and procedures:**

- 14-19 Curriculum Policy
- Accreditation Policy
- EYFS Curriculum Booklet
- EYFS Policy
- Pathways to Independence Policy
- Planning, Assessment, Marking, Reporting & Recording Policy
- Curriculum Long-Term Rolling Programme
- English Communication Overview
- Reading at Home Policy