

What is Total Communication?

Every child and young person is unique, communicating and interacting differently. To support individuals to connect with others, a Total Communication approach is used. This approach empowers individuals to express themselves and interact with others. Communication can be through speech, vocalisations, sign, touch, gesture, movement, art, or using other Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods. Some of these methods can be used in isolation or together to identify the preferred communication and learning methods for each child or young person. When modelling its use, signing should always be used with speech, however a child or young person may choose to use an individual sign without speech. Combining more than one communication method helps with reinforcement and understanding of the message being conveyed. It supports individuals to make connections, have successful interactions and communicate their wants, needs and other information.

Individuals may need to or want to use different communication methods for their expressive communication (information they are giving out) and their receptive communication (information they are taking in). Some children and young people may verbalise or use sign to express themselves but require the addition of symbols when receiving information to reinforce meaning and support understanding. Total Communication also encompasses ensuring the environment in which a pupil is exploring and experiencing provides the best opportunities for communication and interaction.

Total Communication at The Dales School

The Dales School aim to develop skills for life, supporting our pupils to become effective communicators. This will enable pupils of all ages and stages of development to have a voice and make positive choices. To do this The Dales School uses a range of communication methods, using multiple methods together, to provide exposure and experience to encourage children and young people to develop communication methods that are effective for them.

Communication skills and Total Communication are taught and used implicitly throughout the day during free flow play and exploration provision, transitions, personal care times, snack times etc. Skills can also be taught explicitly in structured lessons but should be used intrinsically in all lessons to support learning opportunities. Pupils at The Dales School often present with 'spikey' learning profiles and this guidance should be personalised to meet specific pupil need.

Here are some key communication strategies used at The Dales School to support communication and interaction:

Non-verbal Communication

Many of the children and young people at The Dales School use non-verbal communication to interact with the people and environments around them. Non-verbal communication includes movements, facial and body gestures, breathing patterns, sounds and eye-pointing. Intensive Interaction is used a lot at The Dales School and focuses on early interaction skills promoting an awareness and enjoyment of being with others. It encourages us to relate, interact, understand and explore communication. Intensive Interaction can involve sound making, movement and turn taking to support early communication skills e.g., recognition of someone to communicate with. Objects of Reference, Olfactory smells of reference and routines are used to support communication for complex learners to understand, anticipate and realise aspects of their school day. Further information about the Objects of Reference used within school can be found in the 'Overview of Objects of Reference at The Dales School' guidance.

Language-based Communication

Signing methods are used across The Dales School to support communication. Children and young people are exposed to Makaton and some are encouraged to co-actively or independently sign to develop their communication methods. Some pupils with complex PMLD access TaSSeLs and on-body signing method to support their understanding of what is happening now and next. Signing should be used in conjunction with

Overview of Total Communication at The Dales School

verbal communication and objects may also be used to support understanding of the signs. Signs, objects and symbols should be used in the appropriate context to support learning. Presenting objects or symbols alongside signs may not always be appropriate for the context and when used, should be presented at the same time or immediately after the sign to reinforce learning. Some children and young people use verbal communication either in isolation or in combination with other communication methods.

Symbol Based Systems and High Tech AAC

Many of the children use and are exposed to symbol-based communication methods. Most pupils access Widgeo symbols and these are used consistently across school. Further information about written texts (e.g., for reading) can be found in the 'Overview of Reading at The Dales School' guidance, the library of Widgeo Symbols prescribed for routines, lessons and transitions can be found in the 'Overview of Objects of Reference at The Dales School' documentation.

Some children and young people use high tech communication devices. At The Dales School we use Clicker Communicator with Widgeo symbols, to support understanding and offers pupils the opportunity to use a voice output communication method. Clicker Communicator is available in all classrooms and provides opportunities for exploration and reinforcement to learning. Some pupils have their own personal communication device and will use it to communicate with those around them. Class teams liaise with Speech and Language Therapists to support obtaining, using and maintaining these devices to promote pupil voice.

Modelling and Practice

Providing a literacy and communication rich environment models good practice and encourages an interest in using different ways to express choices, feelings, opinions and more. It is important to consider how text on display boards, in annotated pupils' workbooks and labels are presented - we can use symbols and switches to make displays interactive and provide a voice output. These offer further exposure to communication strategies and tools and support pupils to attend, identify, recognise and begin to use different communication methods in functional ways. Resources to support communication should be considered as part of the differentiated approach to personalised learning e.g., symbolised texts, switches, Clicker pages, Makaton, multisensory props and resources. Consistent modelling use of signs, symbols, high tech AAC etc. is an essential aspect in the delivery of the Total Communication approach; providing pupils with the opportunity to explore different ways to communicate with the people and world around them.

All AAC and communication methods are important and all attempts for a child or young person to communicate should be acknowledged and responded to respectfully and in the appropriate way for the individual and situation.

Impact will be evidenced through:

- Tapestry, WOWs, pupil work, practitioner discussions.
- Progress of MAPP personalised learning intentions on the CSD.
- Cherry Garden Framework, EYFS Prime and Specific Areas Tracker, Functional Skills NCFE, Little Wandle Placement Assessments.