Cambridgeshire Sensory Support Team

Communication Policy for the support of D/deaf children and young people

Background information

All children and young people have the right to a developed communication system which enables them to communicate effectively in a variety of settings and for a variety of purposes. (Entitlement – British Association of Teachers of the Deaf)

Hearing aid technology and surgical intervention in the treatment of deafness continues to advance. Bilateral cochlear implantation from 1 year for children with severe and profound deafness is now routinely offered. Digital hearing aids provide high quality amplification. Radio aids help to minimise the negative effects of noise and distance. The NHSP (Newborn Hearing Screening Programme) gives parents access to specialist support and early amplification within a few months of birth.

Most deaf children still have delays or difficulties with language development and communication, ranging from mild to severe, despite the audiological advances. However, these advances enable most children, even with severe and profound deafness, to access spoken language. In Cambridgeshire the focus has shifted more towards optimising use of the technology which gives access to speech, with use of sign as outlined below, and away from providing a full signing environment.

Development of language and communication are essential for the educational, emotional and social development and well-being of all children. A child who is born deaf does not hear some or all of the frequencies of speech and this has a significant impact on the development of their language and communication.

Parents of deaf children have important decisions to make about the communication approach to use with their child and this may change over time.

Development of good listening skills is the essential precursor to spoken language development. Cochlear implants, digital hearing aids and new technology have enabled parents and carers to consider increased communication options for children with a diverse range of hearing impairments. The Hearing Support Team aims to support optimal hearing aid use and development of aided listening skills for every child.

In Cambridgeshire, the home language of the majority of children is English but there are a number of families where English is their second language. For a small number of families, British Sign Language is their home language.
The educational language for most deaf children is English. Sign Supported English (which is based on British Sign Language) and Visual Phonics are used in the Hearing Support Centres and to support some children in their mainstream school.

**Aims of the Hearing Support Team with regard to language and communication**

- To enable deaf children and young people to develop age-appropriate language and communication skills to maximise their educational attainment, and social and emotional development.
- To make sure parents/carers have clear and unbiased information to help them make informed decisions about their child, and to make sure they understand the effects of deafness.
- To provide practical advice and support to parents, carers and schools on all aspects of language and communication.
- To help children use and look after hearing aids, cochlear implants and radio aids.
- To support parents’ chosen mode of communication with their child.
- To promote child-centred multi-agency working.

**Communication approaches**

The Hearing Support Team has knowledge of and expertise in a range of communication approaches. These include natural and structured oral/auditory approaches, Total Communication and Sign Supported English.

British Sign Language, Sign Support English and an auditory/oral are used in the Hearing Support Centres at the primary and secondary provisions depending on the individual needs of the child. Signing support is also used in some mainstream schools and pre-school settings.

- Sign Supported English is used to facilitate access to the curriculum.
- Signed English and Visual Phonics are used as appropriate to support reading and writing.
- BSL and Sign Supported English is used in the Hearing Support provisions and in some school and pre-school settings in a social context and hearing peers and siblings are included in the activities.

At the Early Years stage, families have access to information about all communication approaches. Where appropriate, emphasis is placed on the effective use of hearing aids and cochlear implants to develop listening skills in order to develop speech and language. Some families may wish to use Sign Supported English in the early and transitional stages of language development as an aid to communication and some families may choose to use natural gesture. Other families may choose a purely auditory/oral approach. Language development is dynamic and families may choose different approaches according to their child’s development.

Auditory Verbal Therapy strategies, to optimise listening, and language development, will continue to be incorporated into policy and practice and all staff will be competent in using them.
The Hearing Support Team does not have expertise in the Sign Bi-lingual approach.

Cued Speech is not used but it would be sign posted for parents who were interested.

The Team does not include Makaton in its approaches; support is provided for the deaf pupils in developing aided listening skills where possible.

**Methods and practice**

As a service we will:

- Support parents and carers in their choice of communication options, acknowledging that this may change over time.
- Provide information on all communication approaches and direct families to other sources of information, eg National Deaf Childrens Society
- Provide information and support to schools, pre-school settings and homes on effective ways of developing language and enabling access to the language of the curriculum
- Work jointly with Audiology clinics, Cochlear Implant centres, Speech and Language Therapy and other services in providing the best support possible for the child and family
- Work with the children, families and schools to ensure that the best possible use is made of hearing aids, cochlear implants and radio aids.
- Ensure equality of access to the Team for all families by providing interpreters as necessary where English is not the home language.
- Ensure that Service staff are appropriately trained and have up to date knowledge on communication and language development.
- Ensure teachers and teaching assistants have the opportunity to train to BSL Level 2.
- Ensure that all staff are able to use skills to promote listening with children in the early stages of language acquisition.
- Review the Communication Policy and practice arising from it to ensure that the Team is up to date in its knowledge and expertise

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