

Speech, Language and Communication Toolkit

Information and guidance for mainstream primary schools






Universal Support




Part of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Change Partnership
Programme across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

A communication friendly environment is key to supporting all children at the universal level. It enables children to develop their social, emotional and academic potential by reducing or removing barriers to communication; and providing opportunities for everyone to take part.

There are key components to a communication friendly environment:

	Physical Environment		Vocabulary Rich Environment
	Visual Supports		Opportunities for Communication
	Language Strategies and High-Quality Classroom Talk		



Hear from Rutland families about school life, and how children can feel included and welcomed at school.

Physical Environment

Lighting - Think about good ambient lighting. Reduce glare from the sun and check that work areas are well-lit. Make sure the teacher’s face is visible, so children can see their facial expression, lip movements and other non-verbal cues

Space and Positioning - The classroom should be arranged so that all pupils can see the teacher, board, displays etc. Pay particular attention to seating arrangements for children who need the greatest access. For example, children with attention and listening difficulties should sit at the front of class or away from distractions. Children with hearing loss should be able to see the teacher’s face, particularly if they use lip pattern to support understanding. Children with anxiety may engage best, sat at the back. Consider how pupils are seated to support group work and discussions.

Noise - Be aware of background noise, including noise coming from equipment or from outside the classroom, as this can be distracting. Use soft furnishings and avoid open plan layouts to keep echoing to a minimum. An echoey environment is more challenging for a child to listen in.

Storage and Layout - Have defined learning areas in the classroom, and be consistent with where equipment is kept. Ensure learning areas and equipment are all clearly labelled. Make sure that the environment is not too ‘busy’ in terms of colour and displays to avoid sensory overload.

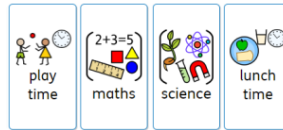
Resources - Use resources such as digital voice recorders, or whiteboards to help children access their learning.

Equipment - Ensure that communication devices (e.g. AAC devices/talkers, hearing aids) are always available.

Visual Supports



Labels with symbols/photos - Help children navigate the classroom.



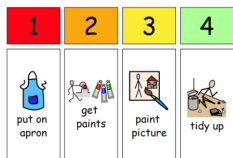
Visual timetables - Show the day's structure. Remember to remove the symbols as activities are completed, so children know where they are in the day.



Colour coding and demonstrations - Reinforce structure in learning.



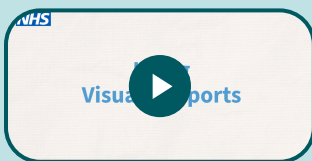
Prompt cards - Reinforce rules and classroom expectations.



Task plans - Break activities into clear steps to support independence.

Audit your classroom using this resource from Speech and Language UK:

[Communication-Friendly Environments](#)



NHS Chat Health - [Watch our animation](#) for more ideas on how you can use visual supports in the classroom.

Opportunities for Communication

Children need means, reasons and opportunities to communicate. Adults in school can create opportunities to communicate through planning:

Small Group Work



Talking Partners



Structured Conversations with Adults



Vocabulary Rich Environment

Vocabulary is fundamental to learning; it is linked to reading comprehension and academic attainment. In addition to strategies (i.e. labelling and modelling vocabulary, encouraging children to use the words in their own talking etc.), children also need direct approaches (e.g., selecting and teaching specific words) in order to learn vocabulary effectively.

- Identify useful vocabulary. These might be words that are essential to understanding the topic or words the children encounter in literacy. They are likely to be encountered again but are not too easy and not too hard. You may wish to sort and select words based on the Word Aware system of: anchor words, goldilocks words and step on words
- Discuss definitions of new vocabulary and use a word web/ word wizard to teach the phonological (sound), semantic (meaning) and syntactic (grammar) features. Do not forget to include diagrams or pictures
- Reinforce words in class
- Review vocabulary at the end of the lesson, day, week, or term. Consider having a central vocabulary wall in class or pupils creating their own glossary for each topic
- Be aware of cross-curricular vocabulary used in exam questions such as 'compare', 'discuss' or 'summarise'

Reinforce

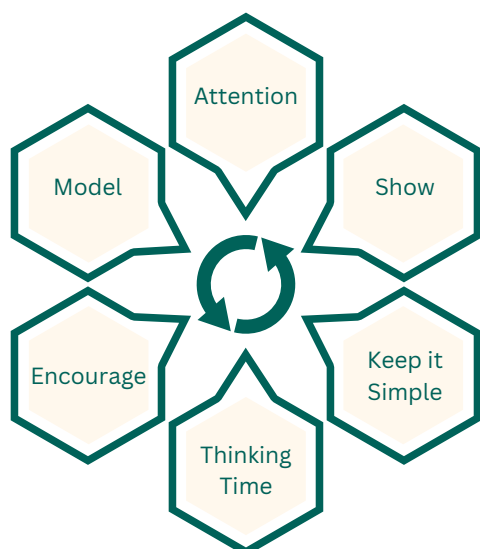
- Write vocabulary on the board and refer to it explicitly during the lesson
- Link vocabulary to activities in class. Vocabulary is best taught in context and with real experiences
- Arrange frequent encounters in multiple contexts (at least six exposures per new word)



It is recommended schools access Word Aware training and resources to learn more about this approach - [Word Aware](#)

Language Strategies and High-Quality Classroom Talk

Adults can use strategies when they're interacting with the children, to support their language development. These strategies will also support an inclusive, positive environment as well as enabling children to access the curriculum and classroom language more easily.



Attention and Listening:

- Manage distractions
- Use children's name, draw attention of children
- Get down to the child's level when interacting with them

Show them:

- Use natural gestures and some key word signing in interactions with children
- Use symbols, pictures, and props (real objects) to reinforce language
- Demonstrate activities

Keep it Simple:

- Use short, simple sentences
- Adult provides children with choices (for example: 'Would you like to read a story or play on the computer?')
- Consider your questions- ensure they're not too abstract for the child

Thinking Time:

- Pacing: Adult uses a slow pace during conversation
- Pausing: Adult pauses expectantly and frequently during interactions with children to encourage their turn-taking and active participation
- Waiting: Allow time for the child to respond

Encourage:

- Acknowledging: Adult responds to the majority of child utterances by confirming understanding of the child's intentions and/ or acknowledging their attempts to communicate. Adult does not ignore child's communicative bids
- Turn-taking and listening skills are encouraged and praised

Model:

- Imitating: Adult imitates and repeats what child says more or less exactly.
- Commenting: Adult comments on what is happening or what children are doing.
- Extending: Adult repeats what child says and adds an extra word or two
- Scripting: Adult provides a routine to the child for representing an activity (e.g., First, you go up to the counter. Then you say, 'I want milk.') and engages the child in known routines (e.g., 'Now it is time for circle time. What do we do first?')
- Recasting: Adult repeats back what the child says to them in a sentence using the right words and sentence structure
- Adult models language that the children are not producing yet