



Communication and language policy

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Amendments and Reviews.

- **Ratified by the Board on 12/12/2023**

This is a living document and may be reviewed and amended to take into account new guidance or agreements with education partners as appropriate for primary and special school

Communication is a vital element of the education of students with moderate general learning disabilities as it permeates the entire curriculum and is central to all learning, enabling the student to make sense of his or her environment. The ability to gain control over the environment opens up a world of opportunity for the student. Central to such development is an interactive approach that stimulates a desire in the student to communicate, acknowledges that every effort to communicate is valuable and demands that we modify our own communicative behaviors and modify the environment of the child.

The term 'communication' embraces both verbal and non-verbal methods of receiving and giving information and social interactions. Communication may take the form of listening and responding through speech or listening and responding using augmentative communication systems, for example, sign language (LAMH) and picture/photo systems such as coreboards. Children with moderate to severe communication impairments frequently need methods to assist them in their communication interactions with others. The emphasis is on enhancing the means, the desire and the opportunity for all students to communicate with others. These students may use speech, word approximations, Lámh sign, answering yes/no questions, using gesture and/or facial expression in order to interact with others. Creating opportunity means that staff 'reduce' their language to take account of the comprehension abilities of the students. The school and classroom environments may be modified through the use of sign and PCS symbols (Picture Communication Symbols from Mayer-Johnson). Early language experiences will focus on developing receptiveness to language and developing competence in the use of verbal, non-verbal and social means of communication.

In OLGC we use Aistear in the junior school to aid the development of communication and Language. Aistear is the early childhood curriculum framework for all children from birth to 6 years in Ireland. The framework uses four interconnected themes to describe children's learning and development: Well-being; Identity and Belonging; Communicating; and Exploring and Thinking. We use a whole school topic based approach to develop and extend language skills throughout the school. The junior classes use Aistear as a means to explore these topics in a fun and experiential manner.

Play activities have an important role in the development of communication and language. Exploratory play, physical play, constructive play, storytelling, music and drama stimulate interest in oral and written communication. These early experiences give students the motivation to communicate and write and bring relevance to what they read. Social Stories are used to teach particular concepts or social skills using a format that is meaningful for the student.

Pupils in the senior side of the school use the Junior Cycle programs to continue to make progress in all areas of communication and language through age appropriate activities.

GENERAL AIM OF THE COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE POLICY

1. To enable students to make the greatest possible use of their senses to develop awareness, interest and concentration so that functional and enjoyable interaction with people and objects occurs.

2. To endeavor to provide the necessary supports to provide each child with the means and opportunity to learn that their positive communicative interactions are valued and encouraged.
3. To assist students to lead as independent a life as possible.

LINKAGE AND INTERACTION

Communication and language plays a central role throughout the student's day. In school, every subject and every extra-curricular activity will have a communication element. Since communication and language plays such an essential role in all learning, curriculum planning across all subject areas must take account of the communication abilities of each student. Every subject should be examined for opportunities to foster receptive, expressive and social language and many will offer meaningful material for early reading and writing.

The creation of an ethos in the school which regards all staff and students as communicators is essential. It is essential that the school is an environment where

- *Students are seen as communicators with a purpose*
- *Talk and the use of compensatory strategies like sign and picture communication is valued and respected*
- *Interaction with others is enjoyable*
- *Feedback given to students is positive and explicit*
- *Opportunities are created for all students regardless of abilities to contribute to talk and discussion.*

SKILLS

The communication and language programme develops certain fundamental skills.

These include:

- Sensory skills – the ability to see, hear, touch, feel, taste and smell.
- Perceptual skills- the process whereby meaning is given to the above sensory input
- Auditory skills – the ability to attend, listen, maintain concentration, discriminate between sounds, sequence, associate memorise, etc.

- Visual skills – focusing, tracking, discriminate, distinguish, re-create pattern etc.
- Sensory-Motor Integration - the ability to hear each sound and figure out how to manipulate the lips, tongue etc to make those sounds
- Articulation – the ability to move and control the lips, tongue, jaw and palate to form sounds correctly and clearly. It also applies to resonance and quality of speech sounds.
- Language – the ability to receive, process, interpret and express using symbols in the form of spoken words, phrases, sentences, conversation, printed words, pictures and gesture to interact with their environment and with others in that environment.
- Social Language Skills – the ability to discriminate and use language and non-verbal behaviors in context with others. This includes a variety of communicative functions such as greeting, requesting, giving information, answering and asking questions, taking conversational turns, maintaining eye contact, observing proximity to the other person and using appropriate facial expressions.

RESOURCES

It is important that plenty of appropriate, attractive and safe materials are available to the student. Each classroom has a range of materials that are used to deliver the communication and language programme on offer. Materials vary from commercially available products to ‘home-made’ equipment specifically designed and made by classroom staff for a particular purpose. A designated library is also provided that offers a range of suitable books. Each class has a designated time to use this facility for reading and storytelling and other library skills such as locating books, respecting the rule of sit quietly in the library etc.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

Pupils are provided this service through the Children’s Disability Network Team (CDNT). Our school is part of CDNT 12. However, as this is a family led service, some pupils belong to a different CDNT, from whom they received services prior to attending our school. We apply to the CDNT attached to each pupil to receive services necessary for them. Owing to their moderate GLD, all pupils require access to speech and language therapy to ensure they participate to the best of their ability in all areas of school life. Teachers are very open to receive support from the CDNT to ensure this happens. For further information regarding the role of the speech and language therapist, please see the section in the school plan relating to the CDNT.

OVERVIEW OF CURRICULUM CONTENT

The Communication and Language curriculum is divided into three strands.

STRAND 1: RECEPTIVE & EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

Particular attention is paid to receptive and expressive language through the guidance of the “Communication and Language Curriculum: Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Moderate General Learning Disability” which we use throughout OLGC. Teachers have been trained in the Primary Language Curriculum which presents the intended learning and development for all children by providing the Rationale, Aims, Strands, Elements and Learning Outcomes. We use the progression continuum provided here to assess where children are individually with each learning goal.

The senior side of the school uses the Junior Cycle Levels 1 & 2 programs. This area is covered under the PLU Communication, Language & Literacy for Level 1 and the PLU Communication and Literacy for Level 2. Teachers use the Elements and Learning Outcomes to create personalized Indicative Content for each pupil. Evidence is gathered through a range of strategies, including, observations, photographs, videos, activity sheets and seesaw. A folder of this evidence is gathered. Pupils are very proud to look at the work achieved throughout this 3 year program.

Receptive language skills involve the ability to receive, process and retain incoming information. Examples of receptive language skills include attending to speech, processing directions, decoding words in a spoken sentence and comprehending instructions.

Expressive language encompasses all forms of communicative responses – the use of gestures, signing, vocalization, speech and communication aids and devises. Expressive language includes expressing choices, wants, needs and/or displeasure. It also includes using words, phrases, sentences, pictures, gestures, sign and facial expression to give information.

Social language involves the nuances of social interaction. It can include using social greetings and closings, listening, knowing to respond to a question or comment, using an appropriate tone of voice, using an appropriate facial expression, taking turns in a conversation and keeping an appropriate distance between oneself and one’s conversational partner.

STRAND 2: READING

Reading for students with moderate general learning disabilities is far broader than the interpretation of text. For students who may not be able to interpret text, the focus will be making sense and deriving pleasure from all types of visual and tactile representations, i.e. looking at, listening to and touching objects, pictures, symbols, text and books in an effort to gain meaning and enjoyment from them. For students with a particular strength in this area, reading may provide a visual support to extending and developing their language and their ability to think and reason. For many of our students the emphasis may be on the development of functional reading skills and the recognition of social sight vocabulary.

OLGC school uses the Edmark Reading Program, starting from reception class. The program combines a highly repetitive word recognition method with errorless learning. It applies the principles of behavioral psychology to the education of children with mild and moderate levels of intellectual disability. The vocabulary in the Edmark Reading Program was found to include those 200 words most frequently encountered by beginning readers. After the student has worked on word recognition and vocabulary activities, the teacher presents various activities to teach comprehension. The Stories then help students make the transition from manipulative materials to more typical reading materials. They have a theme and provide a systematic review of learned words.

Communication, Language & Literacy are part of the Junior Cycle 1 and 2 program which is completed in the senior side of the school. Teachers use the Elements and Learning Outcomes to create personalized Indicative Content for each pupil. Evidence is gathered through a range of strategies, including, observations, photographs, videos, activity sheets and seesaw. A folder of this evidence is gathered. Pupils are very proud to look at the work achieved throughout this 3 year program.

STRAND 3: WRITING

Activities in this section of the curriculum focus on enabling the student to make visual recordings to communicate events, experiences, interests, information, thoughts and feelings.

Handwriting Without Tears program is the core handwriting program in OLGC school. All pupils have the opportunity to engage in this program. HWT is a program that was designed by an occupational therapist to teach children how to write without frustrating them. It uses hands-on, multisensory materials and was designed in such a way that it introduces shapes, numbers, and letters in an order

that matches the progression of children's developmental abilities so that it is easier for them to practice, learn, and remember.

Initially writing activities centre around making marks in a variety of ways with as wide a range of exciting materials as possible. Some students will progress to recording information for a functional purpose and will reinforce reading activities. Other students may be involved in making personal books that are highly motivating and stimulating.

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BREAKDOWN OF CONTENT

The student will be enabled to:

STRAND 1: RECEPTIVE & EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

1. Develop his or her listening and attention skills.
2. Recognize and re-create sounds.
3. Develop imitation
4. Experience, recognize and observe simple commands.
5. Relate to others in his/her environment.
6. Learn to adopt appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviour to secure and maintain the attention of a partner.
7. Develop turn-taking skills
8. Use language to perform common social functions.
9. Express feelings/emotions.
10. Have opportunities to listen to stories/rhymes.
11. Choose appropriate words to label people, objects and activities.

12. Use descriptive words.
13. Use action words/show understanding of verbs.
14. Show understanding of prepositions.
15. Construct phrases and sentences through the use of nouns, verbs and connecting/questioning words.
16. Communicate about past, present and future activities.
17. Make choices and express personal preferences.

STRAND 2: READING

1. Recognise some symbolic representations.
2. Symbolically represent objects.
3. Develop an awareness of books.
4. Understand that pictures can tell a story.
5. Handle books appropriately.
6. Demonstrate understanding and enjoyment of stories.
7. Understand that text in a book relates to pictures and has meaning.
8. Differentiate between print and pictures
9. Develop an awareness of how books work: left to right, top to bottom.
10. Retell a story.
11. Develop an awareness of story structure.
12. Use some language related to reading.
13. Talk about significant events and details in stories.
14. Recognise that print is used to convey meaning.
15. Recognise that print is found in his/her environment.
16. Build up a sight vocabulary – own name, family names, days of the week, weather words, colour words, school rules, etc.
17. Show recognition of familiar letters
18. Differentiate between letters and words.

19. Recognise the letters of the alphabet.

19. Develop awareness of some letter-sound relationships.

Some pupils with moderate learning will progress beyond the above and become skilled enough to read text books and library books - though comprehension levels of what is read will vary from child to child. Each child with a particular strength in the area of reading will be supported to achieve his/her optimum potential using a variety of teaching methodologies and strategies suited to his/her needs. The skills of matching and basic sight reading are introduced as soon as the child demonstrates readiness for these concepts. The following reading schemes/books are currently in use in the school.

1. EDMARK reading scheme.
2. PM Reading scheme to be used as a supplementary scheme.
3. Short, commercially available novels and other books available in the school library.
4. Personalised Reading Books.

Throughout the school, pupils use books and folders containing words and sentences designed for each individual according to his/her interests and abilities. These books are a very important element of the reading programme in the school as they are highly motivating for the students who can relate instantly to their content. The books often interlink with the SPHE programme containing social stories which seek to teach a particular life skill.

5. Social Sight Vocabulary.
6. Paired Reading.

Some classes use the paired reading technique for those pupils who would benefit from this form of one-to-one experience.

7. Jolly Phonics

8. See and Learn
9. Dolch Word Lists
10. Fry Word Lists
11. Mayer-Johnson symbols – Boardmaker
12. PAT spelling program
13. Junior Cycle Level 1: Communication, Language & Literacy
14. Junior Cycle Level 2: Language & Literacy

STRAND 3: WRITING

1. Experience and enjoy a print rich environment.
2. Use symbols to represent real objects.
3. Develop hand-eye co-ordination.
4. Develop a satisfactory grip of writing implements.
5. Recognise when someone is writing.
6. Attribute meaning to own marks, drawing or scribbles.
7. Understand that pictures, symbols and words communicate meaning.
8. Develop an awareness of letters.
9. Learn to form and name letters using various materials.
10. Understand the left-right, top-bottom orientation of writing.
11. Write name to label pictures.
12. Copy words from signs in the environment.

13. See personal writing displayed.
14. Become aware of lower-case and capital letters.
15. Use word cards or word bank folders to construct and then copy out simple sentences.
16. Write a simple sentence.
17. Draw and write about an everyday experience or something just learned.
18. Develop his/her ability to write using information technology.
19. Begin to develop conventional spelling of simple words.
20. Explore different genres.
21. Choose subjects for writing