

A day in the life of a teenager at the Royal School for the Deaf Derby

Helen Starczewski and Caroline Mitchell aim to illustrate how the school's communication policy works in practice in the Secondary School Department throughout the day through the eyes of a pupil

The development of language and communication is at the core of the curriculum at RSDD (www.rsdd.org.uk).

In 2016, RSDD reviewed and updated the communication policy of the school.

This was done by a multi-disciplinary team made up of the Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher, Literacy Lead, BSL Lead, the school Audiologist and Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs). The aims of the communication policy can be summarised as follows:

- To provide an environment where everyone can communicate in their preferred mode of communication – BSL, Sign Supporting English (SSE) and spoken English
- To ensure that the curriculum and information are accessible in all modes of communication
- To provide formal and informal social opportunities for the development of English and BSL
- To enable each pupil to achieve their full potential in both English and BSL
- To develop pupil literacy skills through using both BSL and English.

Pupils

The secondary department currently has 42 pupils aged from 11 to 16. Common to other specialist provision, a large proportion of pupils present with additional language and communication difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, disproportional language difficulties as well as social-emotional difficulties. The school's small

class sizes, good ratio of deaf and hearing staff, and staff commitment to meeting pupil needs ensures that individual needs are accommodated.

67% pupils use BSL as their preferred language, whilst 24% prefer to use SSE. 9% of pupils use spoken English as their preferred mode. This is based on pupil report and staff observation.

19% of pupils in the secondary department have a language at home other than spoken English or BSL, eg Czech, Urdu, Punjabi. 26% of pupils have BSL as their primary language at home.

Most pupils are able to switch to use a communication mode to meet their conversational partner's needs eg BSL users can use SSE with hearing staff and pupils who prefer spoken English can use BSL with their deaf peers.

Pupil X is involved in a range of language and communication activities during his day. A Key Stage 4 pupil, he is very sociable with strong friendships in school. His preferred mode of communication is SSE; however, he is very skilled at switching to use BSL with people who prefer this.

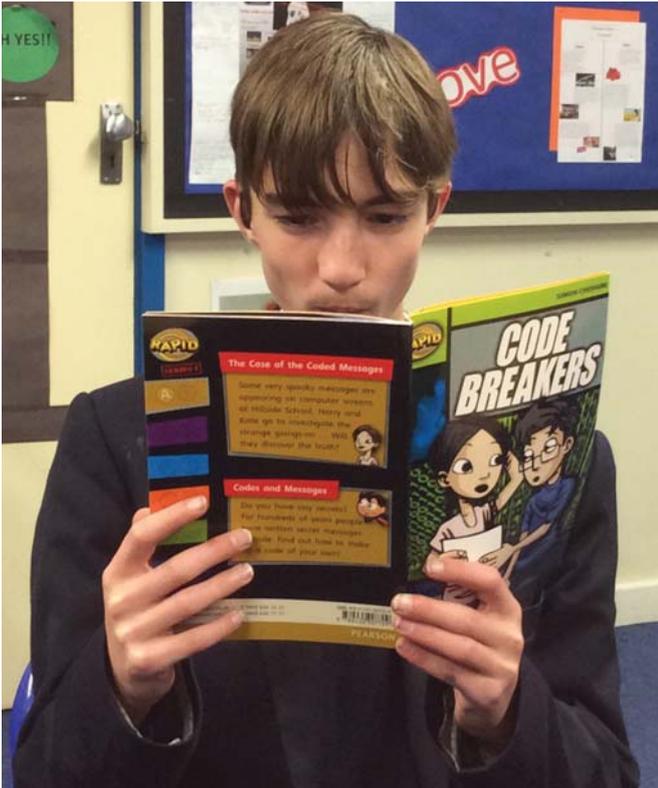
Assembly

Pupils in the secondary department attend assembly twice a week. The topics for assemblies are wide-ranging and varied, engaging pupils in annual national and international events such as Deaf Awareness Week, Anti-Bullying Week and World Book Day, encouraging skills such as resilience and teamwork, and introducing them to famous figures from history – both deaf and hearing. Visiting speakers in assembly include the fire service, police and ex-students presenting about their achievements having left the school.

To ensure that Pupil X has full access to the concepts and language introduced in assemblies, every assembly is led by a teacher or visiting speaker who presents using either spoken English or BSL, is supported by a second adult who provides either a BSL interpretation or voice over in spoken English. The adult communicating in spoken English also uses a Soundfield system (FrontRow Juno) installed in the school hall, where assemblies take place, to provide Pupil X with a more optimal listening environment. This allows him to practise his listening skills during assembly



Assembly



Reading

and therefore access new language introduced in both BSL and spoken English. The Soundfield system is also compatible with pupils' personal FM systems, enabling all auditory media used in assembly to be fully accessible to those pupils with the appropriate personal listening devices.

Reading

During registration times, Pupil X takes part in a guided reading group within his tutor group. In his guided reading group are three pupils from different year groups in the secondary department with a similar reading age to himself, reading the same book and led by a hearing teacher and deaf education assistant. Their current book contains a fiction story and non-fiction text on communicating using coded messages.

Reading the same book as his peers ensures that Pupil X is given the opportunity to discuss new language with his group and explore the topic with an adult present to guide and focus the discussion. Any new vocabulary can be contextualised, practised and reinforced by the adult leading the group with

the aim that Pupil X is able not only to read the text but also to fully comprehend it. The impact of this scheme on a group of primary and secondary age pupil premium students at RSDD in the academic year 2016-2017 found that, over a 3-month trial period, pupils' comprehension ages increased by an average of 11 months. Pupil X is encouraged to develop his meta-comprehension skills during this session by questioning his understanding, re-reading to find textual detail and being guided to make inferences about what he has read.

SmiLE (Strategies and Measurable Interaction in Live English)

SmiLE is a structured programme of work aimed at developing communication skills with hearing people or people who are not familiar with a pupil's communication style (Schamroth and Lawlor, 2015). It is an integral part of the Secondary Department's curriculum, starting with simple modules at Year 7 and progressing through to more complex themes.

These modules examine communication challenges that may range from taking a written message to the school office to preparing for a work experience interview and beyond. We match the challenge to the stage of the student rather than a chronological point. Within each module, there is a consistent sequence of related activities. This supports the student's learning as the challenge changes in each module.

Pupil X has just embarked on the module "Buy a drink in a cafe". In the previous week he completed a baseline assessment where he was filmed buying a drink at McDonalds. The aim of the module is to work on skills needed to be successful and then return to McDonald's for a final assessment.

This week, he and his peers are directing staff in a role play through all the steps involved including both language and social skills eg standing in the right place, using a greeting,



Role play

making the request using an appropriate mode and using confusion strategies to repair breakdown in understanding.

Staff involved in the lesson include the speech and language therapist, hearing teacher and a deaf educational assistant, who adds invaluable personal insights. Two members of staff play the roles of McDonald's worker and deaf pupil, while the third member of staff facilitates the group. The pupils direct the role play, supported by the facilitator, and together generate the skills needed for the task at McDonald's to create a visual checklist.

The main communication mode used is SSE and pupils in this group have agreed to use SSE or BSL in group discussions. Staff ensure that all members of the group are watching and understanding each other.

Pupil X has great ideas on social skills needed and remembers previous work on using confusion strategies. He finds it hard to remember some of the phrases he needs to use to ask for clarification, but another pupil helps out and Pupil X then has a go. This is reinforced with written English. Part of SmiLE is to empower pupils with their own ideas and to support each other. By the end of the lesson Pupil X is clear about all the steps involved and will be ready to try them out in a supported role play himself next time.

By the end of the module pupils are ready to attempt their initial challenge again; buying a drink at McDonald's, but now with enhanced confidence and clarity of communication. The structure of the module allows the students to understand and embed methods of functional communication and, crucially, see benefit for themselves and other as they do so. They are filmed again, they self-assess their progress, and this is celebrated. This is also shared with parents and carers as we seek opportunities for

reinforcing these skills outside the school environment and generalising them to a range of situations. This supports emerging and developing independence, readying our students for the world beyond the school gates.

Word of the Week Competition

As part of his weekly reading lesson, Pupil X takes part in a competition called 'Word of the Week', an initiative organised by the literacy team and SaLT. Each week he is challenged to explore the meaning of a new word chosen to develop the vocabulary of Key Stage 4 pupils. Having different target language each week for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 provides the opportunity to target language being delivered in different subject areas across the curriculum and encourage pupils to transfer their language skills into different contexts. Previous vocabulary used in the Word of the Week competition has been drawn from subject areas such as science, geography and maths, focused on terminology used in exam questions and, more recently, has consisted of synonyms for emotions. A 'challenge word' element of the competition uses common areas of weakness, identified from language testing, to encourage pupils to practise a specific language point, such as comparatives and superlatives or prepositions, whilst an 'idiom of the week' offers pupils a guided opportunity to explore idiomatic language or more challenging phrasal verb.

This term's theme has been using synonyms for 'excited'. This week's target word is 'elated' and the idiom is 'keep your cool'. For participating in the competition, or using the language for the week in the most creative way, Pupil X achieved literacy points that feed into the school's reward system (Pupil Reward Points). The prize for achieving the most points at the end of the academic year is an e-reader.



Word of the week

In addition to a visual display of the competition vocabulary for each week, Pupil X has access to a BSL interpretation and explanation of the language on a television next to the display. This is produced by the BSL lead teacher and signed by secondary pupils, who model the language. Pupils are encouraged to engage in the language through the use of the school's mascots Roe – named after the school's founder Dr Roe – and Lydia, Dr Roe's wife. The mascots, toy mice, are photographed undertaking activities around school which demonstrate the

appropriate language focus in a fun and light-hearted way.

1:1 Speech and Language Therapy session

Pupil X is receiving a 1:1 block of speech and language therapy. This is set up so that his targets dovetail with the SmiLE module and word of the week. Targets are discussed and agreed with Pupil X and email contact is set up with home.

In this block Pupil X has chosen to work on three areas:

- Phrases needed for clarification strategies, eg "Can you say it slower?", "What do you mean?", "Can you write that please?". X remembers that he learned these earlier in the SmiLE lesson. He practises sequencing of words in the phrases with and without written English and then uses them in role play activities.
- Lipreading practice with the McDonald's topic: things the McDonald's worker might say eg "Hello; welcome to McDonalds, how can I help you?", "Anything else?", "Is that to eat in or take away?" Once Pupil X can anticipate what might come up and lipread phrases with confidence, he will practise in a short role play activity and use his clarification phrases if necessary. He will bring his ideas to the next SmiLE lesson.
- Word of the week: additional activation and reinforcement of the word "elated". (Parsons and Branagan 2014). Pupil X will explain to the speech and language therapist what the word means and look at picture/video scenarios where a person might feel "elated". He creates a speech bubble or thought bubble to show what the person might be thinking or feeling. Applying this independently will earn him further literacy reward points.

Specialist topic: Geography

Pupil X is encouraged to develop his use of language and communication across the curriculum, including other curriculum subjects, such as GCSE Geography. Today, Pupil X's class are studying the topic of landscape in the UK, with a focus on coasts. He works in a pair with another pupil to discuss key words and match them with their definitions for a vocabulary test later in the week. Following their pair work, he and his partner present their understanding of the definitions to the rest of the class by applying the meanings to photos of coasts. He is keen to participate in class discussion of new concepts and ideas before moving on to his written work.

All key words for the topic are displayed on the classroom wall where Pupil X knows he can access them at any time. He will soon also be able to access an online store of BSL vocabulary for his geography topics, produced by his class (YouTeachMe). Pupil X enjoys regular discussions about geography in the local, national and international press. He is able to contribute to a display board outside the geography classroom featuring online and print news about geographical events.

Enrichment Session – Drama

In the final session of the day, pupils take part in a variety of activities designed to enrich the curriculum. These range from taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award to

cycling and craft activities. Pupil X takes part in a weekly drama club, run by a deaf teacher and deaf education assistant, where he participates in drama games and rehearses for the school's annual summer production, which in 2017 was Peter Pan, written by the BSL lead teacher and performed in BSL with spoken English voice-over.

Teamwork is essential in preparing for a production and therefore Pupil X must use his communication strategies to participate in the activities successfully. Drama games challenge Pupil X to use his imagination, understand and empathise with a range of characters, and develop a more creative use of BSL. He has lines to learn from the script and then must practise his delivery to ensure that his signing is clear to the audience, consisting of members of the school community, parents and carers and pupils invited from other schools, as well as other actors on the stage.

Summary

We have endeavoured to describe a day in the life of a pupil at RSDD to illustrate how the communication policy runs through the heart of the school. We aim to show how the communication environment creates opportunities and challenges for pupils so that they can achieve their full potential in both BSL and English. ■

Please feel free to contact us for further information via our website www.rsdd.org.uk

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Soundfield system: www.gofrontrow.com/uk-en
YouTeachMe: www.youteachme.co.uk



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