LITERACY

Plan

Literacy Policy Jonah Special School

Introduction

Communication is essential to every student in Jonah Special School. It is a continuous thread which runs through the entire school day and is the student's route to achievement and independence. The staff involved in the formation of this plan include Principal Teacher Caitríona Barry, Deputy Principal Carol Deane, the school Clinical Director Niamh McEvoy and the teaching staff who were also consulted during the development stages. Opportunities were then given for suggestions from other staff and parents and the document was then presented to the Board for ratification.

This document should be read in consultation with: The Junior Cycle Level One and Level Two Programmes and the Primary Language Curriculum.

Rationale

- o The need for a whole school approach.
- o Consistency and agreement on basic approaches and strategies.
- o Professional development received at the many conferences, training courses and studying undertaken by staff members.
- o The desire to reduce students' frustrations/inability to communicate which may in turn reduce challenging behaviour.
- o The centrality of communication to each individual student and its priority in the development of Individual Education Plans.
- o The collaborative effort and support which determines our school ethos.
- o Ensuring that all adults working in our school have the information and skills to communicate consistently and effectively with all of the students.

Vision and Aims

Our school's mission statement emphasises the holistic development of the child and communication is the key to that development. As the curriculum documents state: "The ability to gain control over the environment opens up a world of opportunity for the student."

Our aim in Jonah Special School is to create a positive environment in which students get responses to their communications, give responses to the communications of others and have an opportunity to take the lead in communications.

All staff wish to engage the students, at whatever level, in interaction with another and aim to promote positive attitudes and develop an appreciation of the value of communication, verbal and non-verbal, reading and writing. Reading and writing in the context of our school includes fostering and interpreting gesture, eye movement, vocalisation, sensory engagement, as well as development of the more conventional understandings.

The student's interest in a world outside him/herself should be created, fostered and maintained, as should the child's ability to engage in sensory, perceptual, physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Our aim is to develop confidence and competence in listening, gesturing, initiating, signing, speaking, reading and writing depending on the ability of the student who will be enabled to communicate by whatever means possible.

Whole School Approach – A Communication Friendly School Environment

In all communications with students, staff should ensure that they are aware of the variety of communication methods being used in the school, and appreciate that some of our students communicate in more than one modality i.e. verbal supported by sign.

Staff should look for opportunities which encourage the student to communicate – enable instead of doing. Staff should be sensitive and responsive to students' attempts to communicate.

In individual interactions with students, adults should ensure that –

- The student's name is used.
- Students are informed of where they are going and what they are doing.
- He/she listens to the student.
- They give time for student to respond.
- The student is not bombarded with questions/statements.
- Personal/confidential conversations are not held in the presence of the student.
- Adult language is slow, consistent and in an appropriate tone.
- They are aware of the position and visual perspective of the student.
- They talk to and not about the student.

Curricula and Syllabi in our School

In Jonah Special School we cover the *Primary School Curriculum* in the primary classes that is differentiated for each student. We accommodate the alternative needs of the students as assessed. In the post-primary section of the school we complete Junior Cycle Level 1 & 2. Specific aims/objectives/outcomes are outlined for each curricula/syllabi that we teach in our school. Please see the relevant links where these are outlined in detail –

- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Level-1-LearningProgrammes
- https://curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Level-2-LPs
- https://www.ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/programmes-and-keyskills/leaving-certificate-applied

Signage around the School

In order to include all students in literacy targets, all signs written in text throughout the school should be accompanied by visual and tactile symbols so that children in the early stages of reading will understand.

Communication Approaches

In our school as well as spoken language the following methods of communication are used –

- Set Routines in a structured environment.

- Objects of reference.
- Photographs/Boardmaker symbols.
- Lámh signing environment.
- ICT – Augmentative Communication Systems.
- Digital technology to communicate and learn.
- A hierarchy of prompts.

Set Routines In a Structured Environment

This is an environment which –

- Enables each student to access information about what is happening next.
- Allows students to make decisions.
- Enables each student to ask for an activity or object.
- Daily school life is structured to enable routines to be established – use of photos or icons and visual/tactile timetables is encouraged.
- Cues are easily accessible to children.
- Systems in use include PECS and TEACCH Schedules.

Objects of Reference

These are objects that have a special meaning assigned to them, they stand for something in the same way that words do. Just like words objects of reference can mean anything we want them to e.g. a cup can be used to represent drinking. However again it is important to ensure consistency – where possible, the objects of reference will be agreed with the Speech and Language Therapist and the student's family in order that the same objects can be used at home and at school.

Objects of reference are very often found by the child, relevant to them and not what we choose or desire. Each student in a class may have different objects of reference for the same activity. A record of the objects of reference should be displayed near the child's workstation.

Photographs and Boardmaker/Widgit Symbols

Photographs provide an important conceptual step between objects of reference and symbols. They can be used to provide a visual cue for the student once s/he has begun to anticipate events and make their choices and needs known. Photographs should be used before and as an introduction to symbols and spoken language. A photograph vocabulary needs to be devised in accordance with the needs of the individual student. Photographs should be used along with normal speech.

Digital Technology

Digital technology such as AAC Devices, Communication Apps and touch screen devices are utilised to assist and improve students communication and learning at both individual and classroom level. Easy to use communication apps and devices that use photographs and Widgit symbols can help aid a student to communicate and learn more effectively. Digital assistive devices are tailored for each student's level where possible. The use of these devices assists students to develop communication and language skills and offers an opportunity to expand student's technological skills on a functional level.

Old V.E.C Building, Slieverue   **T: 051 – 833269**   **Roll Number – 20380B**
Kilkenny via Waterford   **E: thejonahproject@hotmail.com**   **RCN – 20204520**
X91 D6DY   **Website: www.jonahschool.ie**   **Principal – Caitriona Barry**
     Clinical Director – Niamh McEvoy

Guidelines for Using Photographs

- The photograph must be clear with as little information in the photo as possible.
- A matt finish is preferred and size will vary according to the needs of the student.
- Staff should be aware of light refraction on the surface of the photo.
- The symbol systems we use primarily in school are Google images

Lámh

The Lámh vocabulary of signs provide a basic mean of communication and encourages language development in our students. We use Lámh in a communicative environment. When using Lámh, key words are signed within normal grammatical speech. We give basic information in a visual way to aid the student's understanding. Students are not expected to use Lámh in return unless specific to child IEP goals. We continue to use the sign systematically and correctly as we use the words. The signs should only be used in real and relevant situations. Lámh signs are to be used consistently at school.

Assessment and Record Keeping

Individual IEP's/Student Support Files are a record of assessment and are kept in student files. Please see out Assessment and Reporting Policy for further information.

Inclusion

Children with additional needs, learning difficulties, and speech and language difficulties encounter specific difficulties which the teacher will endeavour to meet with the help of parents and the multidisciplinary team.

Teachers support and ensure the participation of all students in language activities through curriculum differentiation, repetition and working to the students' strengths. All students are enabled to make an important contribution through whatever means of communication they use.

Special Needs Assistants work with the teacher to enable each student benefit from the curriculum. SNA's are involved in training and using Lámh, reading stories, working with the students at all times.

Specific resource materials, ICT hardware and software, used by children with learning difficulties are purchased as required. There is a large supply of books and language materials available for use.

Timetable

Communication and Language is an integral part of the school day and will be taught during 1:1 sessions with the teacher, and reinforced by the non-teaching staff. Opportunities for language will be fostered and maintained during the regular routines of the school day.

Old V.E.C Building, Slieverue
Kilkenny via Waterford
X91 D6DY

T: 051 – 833269
E: thejonahproject@hotmail.com
Website: www.jonahschool.ie

Roll Number – 20380B
RCN – 20204520
Principal – Caitriona Barry
Clinical Director – Niamh McEvoy

Library

- Each class has a selection of books, both fiction and non-fiction, for children to access.
- The children can visit the local library regularly.
- Use of multisensory artefacts – e.g. cans of drink, boxes of cards.
- A wide range of books is available from the class and school libraries which covers a variety of fiction, non- fiction and poetry.
- Big books, books with graded levels of difficulty, books covering a wide range of interests, audio books, books based on favourite television programmes, poetry books, supplementary readers, audio books and interactive touchscreen books are used.
- Children will be encouraged to write their own books and display them in the library where appropriate.

Individual Teachers' Planning and Reporting

The whole school plan, whole school schemes and the curriculum documents for Primary Langauge provide information and guidance to individual teachers for their long and short-term planning. All long and short term planning is now standardised and school templates are available. Teachers leave all long-term planning on principal's desk in advance as agreed during staff meetings in September and short term planning and evaluation is handed up at the end of each month. Collaboration and discussion on planning matters is encouraged at staff meetings and planning days.

Staff Development

- All teachers have access to current research, reference books, resource materials and websites dealing with language learning on class computers. The Principal takes responsibility for monitoring developments.
- Teachers are encouraged to attend relevant courses and where possible the Board of Management will provide substitute cover if not attached to the course.
- The expertise acquired at these courses is shared with all teachers at Croke Park meetings.
- Time is allocated at staff meetings to discuss communication, language and literacy development.
- Staff are informed on how to use digital technology to aid communication and assist learning.

Parental Involvement

- Parents are aware of the central importance of language and communication in the learning process.
- IEP goals are developed in conjunction with the class teacher, parents, the student and Clinical Director.
- Teachers inform parents of successful activities each day in the home/school communication books.
- Information is shared with parents through induction meetings for new students, open days, Home School Communication Books, multidisciplinary meetings, discussion at IEP meetings, the school's information booklet, newsletter, Facebook page and website.
- The school further supports parents by encouraging use of Lámh signs.
- Staff inform and send home 'How to use' videos to implement and promote the use of AAC devices or communication apps across the wider environment.

Old V.E.C Building, Slieverue　　　　**T: 051 – 833269**　　　　**Roll Number – 20380B**
Kilkenny via Waterford　　　　　　　**E: thejonahproject@hotmail.com**　**RCN – 20204520**
X91 D6DY　　　　　　　　　　　　**Website: www.jonahschool.ie**　　**Principal – Caitriona Barry**
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Clinical Director – Niamh McEvoy

Community Links

- Students work is displayed at intervals in the community.
- The school liaises with groups such as Transition Year Students, community development initiatives and Integrated Projects to develop the communication skills of our students.
- Work placements are facilitated for older students where possible.

Success Criteria

- Teachers' preparation based on this plan.
- Procedures outlined in this plan consistently followed.
- Feedback from parents/guardians.

How will we know that the plan has achieved its aims? What are the indicators?

- Feedback from teachers/parents/students/community.
- Inspectors' suggestions/report.
- Have we provided a realistic, concrete literacy programme that enables students to read the world that surrounds them, to make their mark on that world and to communicate with that world?

Jonah Special School

Literacy Policy

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management of Jonah Special School at its meeting held on:

Ratified by the Jonah Board of Management on: _____

Date

Signed: _____

Principal

Signed: _____

Chairperson, Board of Management

Next Review Period: September 2028

Old V.E.C Building, Slieverue   T: 051 – 833269   Roll Number – 20380B
Kilkenny via Waterford   E: thejonahproject@hotmail.com   RCN – 20204520
X91 D6DY   Website: www.jonahschool.ie   Principal – Caitriona Barry
                                                                              Clinical Director – Niamh McEvoy

Appendix 1

Receptive and Expressive Language

Attending, Responding and Initiating	Cognitive Abilities
Needs and desires	Following and giving instructions
Use of stimuli	Answering and asking questions
Movement	Explicit direction
Touch	Explain cause/effects
People in the environment	Problem solving
Objects in the environment	Explaining/defining concepts/ideas
Play	**Social Communication**
Imitation	Name, address, phone number
Visual focusing and tracking	Greetings/compliments/offering sympathy
Aural focusing and tracking	Courtesy/requests/complaint
Experimenting with sound	Feelings/body language
Contingency Awareness	Using the telephone
Cause and Effect	Simple commercial transaction
Body Awareness	**Emotional and Imaginative**
Use of Objects of reference	Poem/songs
Cues	Riddles/jokes
Turn Taking	Drama/mine
Object Permanence	Guided play
Choice	Discussions and Debates
Guided pretend/imaginative play	One to one, small group, full class
Communication/Presentation Skills	Engage in conversation
Opportunities to communication/present	Future/imaginary/everyday events
Verbal/nonverbal communication	Logical sequence
Sentence structure	Summarise and prioritise ideas
Keeping listeners attention	Explain and argue point of view
Clarity, audibility	**Listening Skills**
Tone of voice/gestures	Opportunities to listen – adults, children, on a 1:1 basis, in a group – large/small
Recording of a video	
Real life situations	
Past, present and future experiences	Range of media e.g. radio, iPad, computer, Alexa's
Vocabulary	Listening for verbal and non-verbal cues
Naming/descriptions/meanings	Content: sounds/stories, poems etc.
Function of words e.g. nouns, verbs	Sustaining concentration and focus
Local accents, expressions and words E.g. jargon, slang	

Appendix 2

Reading

Attending, Responding and Initiating	Availability and Range of Books/Texts
Manipulation of objects 2-D and 3-D	Library
Signs and Symbols	Picture books
Awareness of books	Personal books
Pictures tell stories	Large format books
Print	Stories/Novels
Visual Discriminations Skills	Interactive/sensory books
Left-right orientation	Environmental print
Attention to similarities and differences	High frequency words in reading context
Matching letters and words	Non – Fiction
Scanning for target words	Newspapers, comics
Word Identification Strategies	Encyclopaedias, dictionaries, thesaurus
Conventions and Terminology of print/books	Internet and ICT
Alphabet	Comics, newspapers, magazines
Basic sight vocabulary	Maps, shopping catalogues
Phonics	
Contextual clues	Flow charts, diagrams, lists, web, survey
Predicting and checking	Forms, menus, timetables, recipes
Responding to Text	Listening to others read e.g. adults, children, TV
Rhymes, poems and songs	
Reading aloud/silently/with help	Opportunities to read – alone with others
Shared reading activities	
Personal opinions on reading materials	
Understanding/discuss characters, outcomes, situations	
Reading style: browsing, scanning and skimming, information retrieval, study skills	
Compression	
Understanding text read aloud by teacher	
Basic information retrieval skills using a range of texts	
Reading for meaning – sequencing ideas and understanding plot/content	
Forms of text – expository, narrative and diagrammatic or representational	
Scanning or skimming text	
Search – reading and reflective reading (pg. 63 English Curriculum, Teacher Guidelines	

Appendix 3

Writing

Attending, Responding and Initiating	Process of Writing
Development of postural control	Print rich environment
Engage in painting and drawing activities, scribbling and colouring	Write/draw
Finger and hand painting	Use of programmes such as Handwriting without Tears
Using implements	Displays of writing
Sensory writing in seeds, foam, etc.	Read/hear personal writing
Recording activities through pictures/photographs, compiling booklets	Social writing – name, address
Tactile – finger tracing shapes/pre writing patterns	Conventions of writing – left – right, top – bottom, capitals and full stops
	Personal reactions
Audiences e.g. teacher, personal, family	Cards, forms (paper and on line)
Drafting and editing	Email, phone texts
Valuing and correcting writing	Story structure
Writing with help, alone, with other children	Initiations, letters
Sentence structure – simple, compound, complex	Diaries, poetry, charts
	Menus, reports, recipes
Writing Genres (Page 81 English Curriculum, Teachers Guidelines)	Projects, presentations
	Re-telling a story, descriptions, summaries
Feelings	Directions, explanations, arguments
Experiences	Common spelling rules, strings and patterns
Approaches to Spelling	ICT
Method of learning spellings	**Physical Activity**
Link to phonological and phonemic awareness	Gross and fine motor skills necessary for writing
Link to 'onset and rime'	
Use of dictionaries and thesauruses	Writing tools
IT (Spell check and word processing programmes)	Penmanship
	Use of word processing and presentation
Correction of Spellings	