

# Tiffield Academy



## A Guide to communication at Tiffield Academy

[A Guide to Communication at Tiffield Academy.](#)

Version 1: September 2025

“Every word, sign, gesture, or symbol is a victory — because communication is courage in action.”

### Our Vision, Learning Intent

At Tiffield Academy, we celebrate every learner’s unique way of communicating and encourage them to grow with curiosity, confidence, and the ambition to keep moving forward. Our learners communicate in many different ways, and every one of those ways is valued. Total Communication means embracing speech, Makaton, symbols, pictures, written words, gestures, facial expressions, body language, Gestalt Language Processing, and assistive technology — because every learner deserves a voice that works for them.

We are building a communication-rich environment where every learner can explore, express, and connect throughout their school day. By celebrating all forms of communication, we make sure every learner is understood, every message is heard, and every interaction becomes a chance to grow with confidence and joy.

To achieve this, we work collaboratively as a team and are guided by the principles within our school:

- Communication is everyone’s responsibility.
- All communication should be functional, motivating, and personalised.
- A multi-modal approach will be used (speech, signing, symbols, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, objects).
- Staff will be confident and consistent communicators.

We work closely with each learner (and their family and therapists) to identify their preferred methods of communication and how to maximise understanding and expression.

When looking at communication it is important to understand the two different types of language skills, expressive and receptive. How somebody expresses themselves can form a foundation for learning and offer a starting point on which to build communication development.

**Expressive communication** is when you are sending a message, this may be in response to another person or to initiate communication. **Receptive communication** is when you receive a message from another person. An individual’s expressive and receptive communication skills may not be the same. People will use a combination of the communication methods listed above, both expressively and receptively. For example, a person may receive and understand information in sign language and need symbols to help reinforce the meaning but will use sign language and speech to express themselves.

Our total communication approach values and uses all methods of communication so that every learner can communicate, understand and be understood. Communication is the ‘**golden thread**’ that underpins our whole school curriculum.

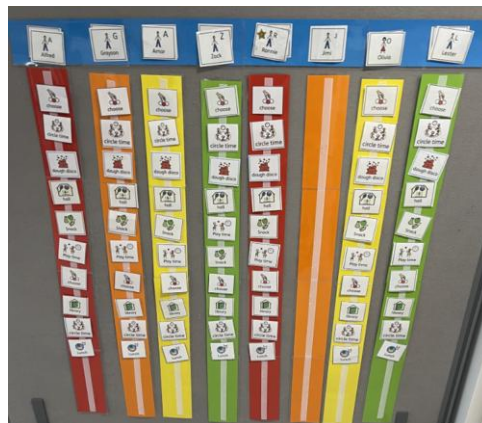
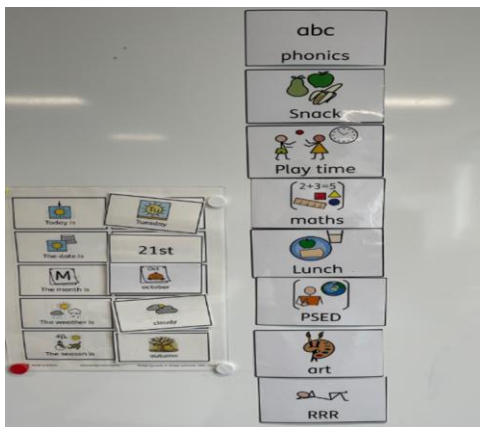
### Implementation

Version 1: September 2025

Our classroom environments are populated with a range of visuals to support teaching and learning, enabling our learners to access the curriculum, these include:

- Visual schedules (individual micro and whole class timetables)
- Now and next boards, symbols for routine
- Communication boards
- Communication books
- Phrase boards
- Visual timers
- Objects of reference
- Song cues- (starting / finishing activity) & video cues- (transitioning from class environment to subject lessons)
- Makaton
- Social stories
- Visual Lanyards

Examples of our whole class timetable and individual learner micro schedules:



To create our school visuals, we use the wigit software InPrint.



We recognise that throughout the school day, there are several transitions that take place and therefore helping our learners to understand, anticipate and cope with transition is extremely important. At Tiffield we use a range of schedules to support anxieties around transition, like 'now and next' lanyards, micro-schedules, travelling schedules and objects of reference to help learners understand what is happening now, next and in the future.

We value the importance of language within our school environment and believe it is essential for all staff to model clear consistent spoken language to our learners, talking at a slow pace, signing key words, using simple language and given our learners time to respond and not overloading them with information.

Other factors that we consider is being consistent with language which includes referring to our community as “**learners**” and using the term “**alternative communicator**” for our learners who have minimal verbal communication. Any attempt at communication is communication, and we hold this in the highest regard.

Creating a total communication approach at Tiffield Academy also involves working with external stakeholders to provide the very best opportunities for learners to develop their daily communication skills.

#### These include:

- Powerful Voices, who play a pivotal role in creating learner communication profiles and targets from Education Health Care Plans (EHCP). In addition, they provide training to upskill our staff team and use their expertise to support with creating class communication boards and books.
- The NHS Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) team at West Northamptonshire Council (EHP team section F). They deliver individual SALT within learners EHCP's and where applicable, authorise learners Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) high tech devices.

Lastly, we embed a range of specialist strategies and interventions through our school curriculum that further support our learner's communication needs:

#### Intensive Interaction

An approach designed to help learners at early levels of development, autistic learners and learners with complex additional needs. Intensive Interaction works on early interaction abilities - how to enjoy being with other people - to relate, interact, know, understand and practice communication routines.

#### Attention Autism

An intervention model designed by Gina Davies, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist. It aims to develop natural and spontaneous communication using visually based and highly motivating activities. The programme progresses through a series of stages, building on each skill level. Each new stage is introduced when the group is ready to expand attention skills.

#### Signing (Makaton)

A unique language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate. It supports the development of essential communication skills such as

attention and listening, comprehension, memory, recall and organisation of language and expression.

## TEACCH

Research confirms that autistic learners tend to have a visually based learning style. The TEACCH Autism Programme aims to facilitate learning through a visual and structured teaching approach. The key idea is to teach learners in a way that makes the most of their strengths and works around their areas of difficulty. The teaching approach is very structured and uses clear schedules that learners can understand.

## Colourful Semantics

Colourful semantics is an approach created by Alison Bryan. It is aimed at helping learners to develop their grammar, but it is rooted in the meaning of words (semantics).

Colourful semantics reassembles sentences by cutting them up into their thematic roles and then colour codes them. The approach has 4 key colour coded stages. There are further stages for adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions and negatives.

## Social Stories

Social stories are short descriptions of a particular situation, event, or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why. Social stories present information in a literal, 'concrete' way, which may improve understanding of a previously difficult or ambiguous situation or activity. The presentation and content can be adapted to meet different learners needs. They can help with sequencing (what comes next in a series of activities) and 'executive functioning' (planning and organising).

## Oracy

Oracy is a key part of our literacy curriculum for Pathway 3 & 4 learners, giving them structured, meaningful opportunities to develop spoken language, vocabulary, and expressive confidence. Through purposeful talk, discussion, modelling, and supported dialogue, learners practise how to communicate clearly, listen actively, and share their ideas with others. Oracy strengthens social interaction, deepens understanding across subjects, and helps learners grow into confident speakers who can express themselves with kindness, curiosity, and ambition.

## Assessment

Learners are assessed through the Tiffield levels 1-6 for Communication and Interaction and from Tiffield level 7 onwards, oracy is embedded in our Literacy Curriculum.

They will also be assessed through Communication and Interaction targets specific to each learners EHCP and tracked through Personalised Learning Goals on our Evidence for Learning System. These will be reviewed termly and then annually via the annual review process.

