

## Old Park School

# Makaton as part of 'Total Communication'



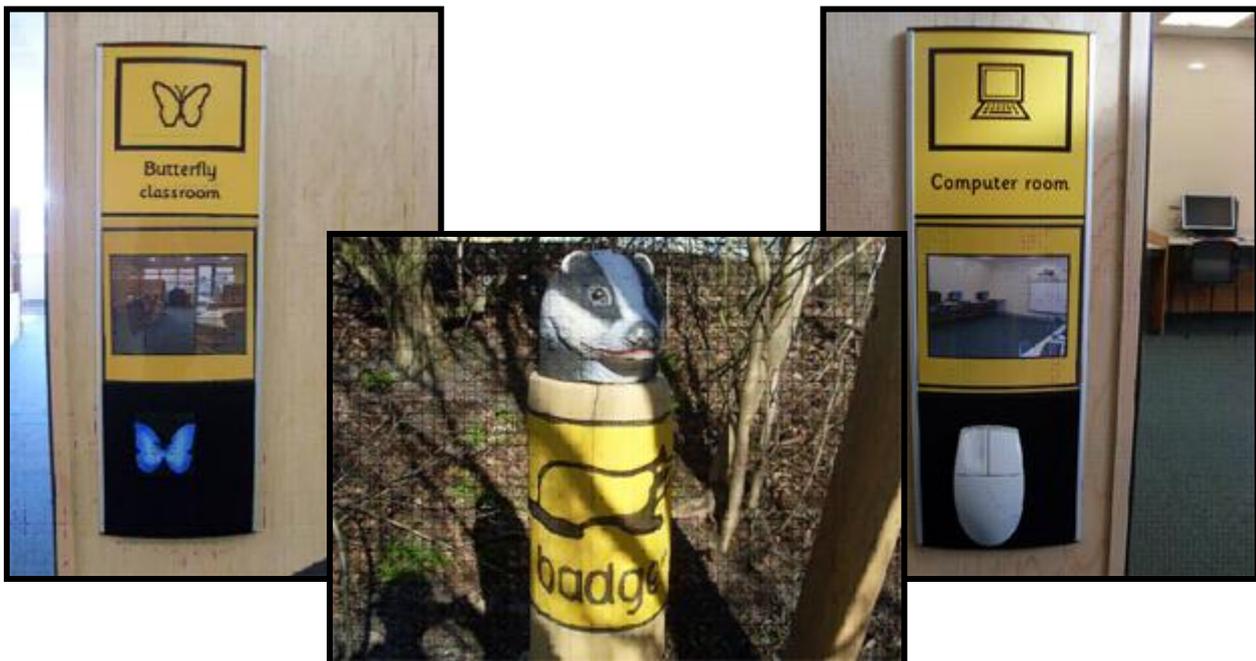
### What we mean by 'Total Communication'

The pupils at Old Park Special School have severe and complex learning difficulties. Communication is therefore central to all that we do and our Total Communication approach led to our being awarded specialist status in 'Communication and Interaction' in 2008. In line with Every Child Matters, it enables our pupils to:

- make choices
- be informed about what is happening to and around them
- express their likes and dislikes
- exert their human rights
- make a positive contribution to their community.

We developed the concept of Total Communication to describe the environment and approach towards communicating with all pupils which we wanted to achieve. The environment, both inside and in outdoor learning areas, reflects our commitment to it.

Throughout the school we have Makaton signage showing objects of reference, pictures and symbols.



All displays are labelled with Makaton signage and within the classroom we are symbol, photograph and object rich to support the communication needs of all our students.

Total Communication runs throughout the curriculum and through the school day. Every pupil has a communication plan detailing their receptive and expressive communication, motivators for communication, learning styles and preferred communication routes during the academic year. Communication plans are evaluated and kept in pupil files. Termly tracking of these personalised plans ensures that prior learning and skills in communication are developed.

Total Communication involves a multi-modal approach in line with the Makaton language programme. Staff members communicate with pupils in a variety of ways including objects of reference, real objects, photographs, symbols, speech, Makaton signs and the written word.

### Why we chose Makaton

During the spring term of 2009, all members of staff were consulted about the possibility of moving towards Makaton as the language programme to underpin our Total Communication approach. We were already using Makaton signs, but were using a variety of symbol systems such as PECs, Widgit, PCS, Rebus, Mayer Johnson and Makaton. We thought Makaton was the right choice because the symbols available in many cases were a visual representation of the signs. We also had a regional tutor on our staff who could drive the project. Staff members agreed with this choice because they could see the benefit of one system. Previously pupils were learning a whole new set.

From September 2009 Makaton has been used around school as the chosen symbol system. It is now a fundamental part of our Total Communication approach and is set out in our Makaton Communication Policy.

### Our communication resource base

We have developed a specialist Resource Base, including a training room, for Makaton training and outreach, providing displays of communication aids and specialist interaction for pupils using 'Optimistic' light beams. More examples of our use of technology are available to view on our [school website](#).





We also use on-body signing with pupils who have sensory impairments. Raised and textured symbols may be appropriate for pupils who find tactile exploration to be motivating.

Staff members continue to use Makaton after pupils develop speech as it aids their comprehension and gives them a structure for their developing literacy skills.

### **Makaton in the wider community**

Makaton provides a communication link between school and the wider community. This is important because Makaton is used at school and home and short break settings. It is a human right that everyone they meet can understand their signing and communicate with them in a meaningful way. The programme provides a multi-modal way of communicating.

Ways in which we take Makaton into the community include:

- Encouraging parents, carers, short-break staff, escorts, drivers, dinner staff, administration staff and cleaners to attend workshops and signing practice sessions and giving symbol packs and signing practice have been given to drivers and escorts.
- Staff members using Makaton with pupils during educational trips and residential activity weeks.
- Offering outreach in the area of Communication and Interaction to a number of schools across Dudley.
- Training external professionals such as the Children's Disability Team (Social Services) and the Dudley Special Schools Extended Services Team.
- The school nurse using Makaton symbols as a visual timetable during pupils' medical appointments.

### **How our pupils benefit**

Development of our expertise has enabled us to focus on how every pupil communicates: a real example of 'personalisation'.

The impact of the new technology we have introduced has been demonstrated through lesson observations: pupils are more engaged in their learning as it enables a totally inclusive environment and a curriculum can be appropriately differentiated.

The majority of our pupils require support to communicate and are now able to make real choices about their learning. Examples of this include:

- Pupils making choices in their best mode of communication - signing, symbols, pictures, objects or the spoken word.
- [Intensive interaction](#) sessions where pupils take the lead.
- Non-verbal pupils who have extra swimming because their vocalisations tell us they enjoy it.
- 14-19 pupils who make choices about ASDAN modules when they select and learn about what they really enjoy.
- Intensive interaction sessions where pupils take the lead.

Staff members' ability to communicate more easily with pupils who have severe and profound learning difficulties is of great help in relation to child protection, well-being and safe-guarding.

The range of people attending Makaton workshops at Old Park School demonstrates the impact it has on the local community. Our pupils are able to communicate more easily with a growing number of people who can understand signs and symbol use. So Makaton plays an important part in community cohesion and integration.

### **Want to know more?**

To find out more about our approach visit our [school website](#) or contact Gill Cartwright, Headteacher, at [office1@dudley.sch.uk](mailto:office1@dudley.sch.uk) or phone 01384 818905.