

Old Park School

Makaton Policy



Introduction

Makaton is a fundamental part of our Total Communication policy at Old Park School. Old Park School has held Specialist Status in Communication and Interaction since September 2008. The school has a specialist Resource Base which is used for Makaton training, outreach, providing displays of communication aids and specialist interaction for pupils using "Optimusic" light beams. Old Park Schools offers outreach in the area of Communication and Interaction to five mainstream partner schools: 3 primary and 2 secondary.

Old Park School currently has a Regional Makaton tutor. Route 1 (Professionals) and Route 2 (Parents/Carers) workshops are held regularly. Waiting lists for workshops, attendance records and evaluations of training workshops are kept.

Makaton plays an important part in community cohesion and integration. 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. See annual impact reports.

Makaton training is embedded as part of the annual CPD cycle within Old Park School. Detailed records are kept of staff attending workshops. Signing practice and advice on symbol use are offered regularly. Currently over 70% of staff have been trained in either Beginners or Foundation Makaton workshops. Since September 2009 Makaton has been the chosen AAC multi-modal language programme used at Old Park (see Total Communication Policy). When there has been a need to select an alternative sign or symbol, this is recorded clearly in the Makaton policy. Makaton symbols are used throughout the school environment, both indoor and outdoor. Old Park School is due to relocate to a purpose-built school in 2011. The signage in the new school will be Makaton. The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the whole staff.

Every Child Matters

This policy is in line with all five areas of the Every Child Matters agenda (ECM). In particular, our Makaton policy addresses ECM3 “achieve and enjoy” and ECM4 “make a positive contribution”. Old Park School aims to achieve the “Excellence in Makaton” award and to develop new initiatives with the Makaton Charity. External professionals such as the Children’s Disability Team (Social Services) and the Dudley Special Schools Extended Services Team have been trained by Old Park School. The school nurse has been trained in Makaton signing and uses Makaton symbols as a visual timetable during pupils’ medical appointments. Colleagues are able to communicate more easily with pupils who have severe and profound learning difficulties. This is crucial to issues of child protection, well-being and safe-guarding.

Safe-guarding and child protection

It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure that all DVDs, audio material, any images and written material used alongside the Makaton language programme is age-appropriate and suitable. Pupils using the Internet or other technologies must be supervised and only access sites appropriate to the study of Makaton.

Equal opportunities

Old Park School’s Equal Opportunities Policy applies to the Makaton policy. Where appropriate, teaching materials and activities should reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of society. Stereotyping, in terms of ethnicity, race, SEN or gender should be avoided and pupil progress should be monitored to ensure that no child is disadvantaged. Equally, a child’s religious beliefs and cultural differences will always be respected.

Health and safety

Provision for communication and Makaton in the curriculum needs to be consistent with school and L.A. policies on guidance and care of children, behaviour, discipline and health and safety. Additional guidance is available about off-site educational activities and risk assessments.

Makaton as Old Park School's first choice, multi-modal language programme

At Old Park School it has been policy since September 2009 to use Makaton as the first choice language programme for signs and symbols. See the rationale for using Makaton – January 2009. A rolling programme of staff Continuing Professional Development aims to ensure that training is given to all members of teaching, support and administration staff. During the summer term 2009 all school visual timetable symbols, signs and spoken word were standardised on Makaton. See Old Park School Makaton standardisation booklets. Wherever possible the Makaton black line symbols are shown on a yellow background in order to ensure a good contrast for Makaton users with visual impairments. This includes visual timetables within classes, signage around school and symbol wallets carried by all staff. Exceptions to the use of a yellow background may occur when printing colour photographs and symbols together. This is best achieved on a white background.

Exceptions to Makaton signs and symbols

Exceptions to using Makaton signs and symbols are documented eg. appendix 1 – standardised signs and symbols for daily visual timetables.

Example of a symbol change:

Symbols for the days of the week– Old Park School uses the Makaton signs for the days of the week but a Rebus symbol similar to “day” with a capital letter in the centre of the sun. At Old Park we have many pupils with complex needs and visual impairments. They cannot see the difference between the Makaton ruler-type symbol for days of the week. Observation has shown that pupils understand better when using a clearer symbol.

Example of sign change:

National Curriculum signs which are finger spelt: in Makaton the subjects P.E., R.E, and P.S.H.E.(personal, social and health education) are finger spelt. Some of our pupils are able to access these signs at a cognitive level. Some have the fine-motor skills needed to form these signs. However, we have a growing number of pupils working at the early P levels and for them an alternative sign is more appropriate and concrete.

Many of these pupils cannot access alphabetical order or the sequence of letters required to spell the subject. Many may also not have the fine motor skills to form the sign. However, they can make and understand a simple sign e.g. moving arms ("to exercise" is easier than finger-spelling "P.E.") Wherever possible we choose an alternative Makaton sign and/or symbol.

What happens when Makaton does not have a sign or symbol needed in school?

If no sign and/or symbol is available our policy is to:

1. consider using an alternative Makaton sign/symbol and consult the Makaton thesaurus
2. contact Makaton for advice
3. use a local BSL sign if Makaton does not have a sign
4. select the most appropriate symbol from another symbol system

Teaching of Makaton within school

Old Park School Makaton Policy is to use all opportunities to teach Makaton throughout the school day, both in formal and informal situations.

Formal:

formal teaching opportunities in lessons, while watching the "Something Special" DVDs, dinner and snack times, singing and signing, dinnertime Makaton clubs, visual timetables displayed in each classroom, outdoor learning in our Forest Schools area.

Informal:

informal opportunities around school e.g. during transfers around the school site, going to the toilet, getting changed, assemblies, watching staff signing to other staff and pupils.

It is policy that staff sign to pupils to help their comprehension of what is being said. Signing also slows down the speed with which staff speak and this aids comprehension. Staff are trained to personalise the Makaton core vocabulary in line with each pupil's needs. All pupils are included in Makaton at the appropriate level for their development and learning style. Makaton is used with PMLD pupils who may not sign back. The language

programme may help their understanding of the spoken word. In addition to sign, speech and symbol use, touch-signing can be used where appropriate. Old Park School is currently working with the Speech and Language service to pilot touch-signing with pupils who have sensory impairments. Raised and textured symbols may be appropriate for pupils who find tactile exploration to be motivating. It is policy for staff to continue to use Makaton after pupils develop speech as it aids their comprehension and gives them a structure for their developing literacy skills.

Use of Makaton outside school

Parents, carers, short-break staff, escorts, drivers, dinner staff, administration staff and cleaners are encouraged to attend workshops and signing practice sessions. Symbol packs and signing practice have been given to drivers and escorts. Makaton is a vehicle for the Every Child Matters agenda as it provides a communication link between school and the wider community. Staff use Makaton with pupils during educational trips and residential activity weeks.

Jonathan Wiggin, Makaton Regional tutor
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Old Park School