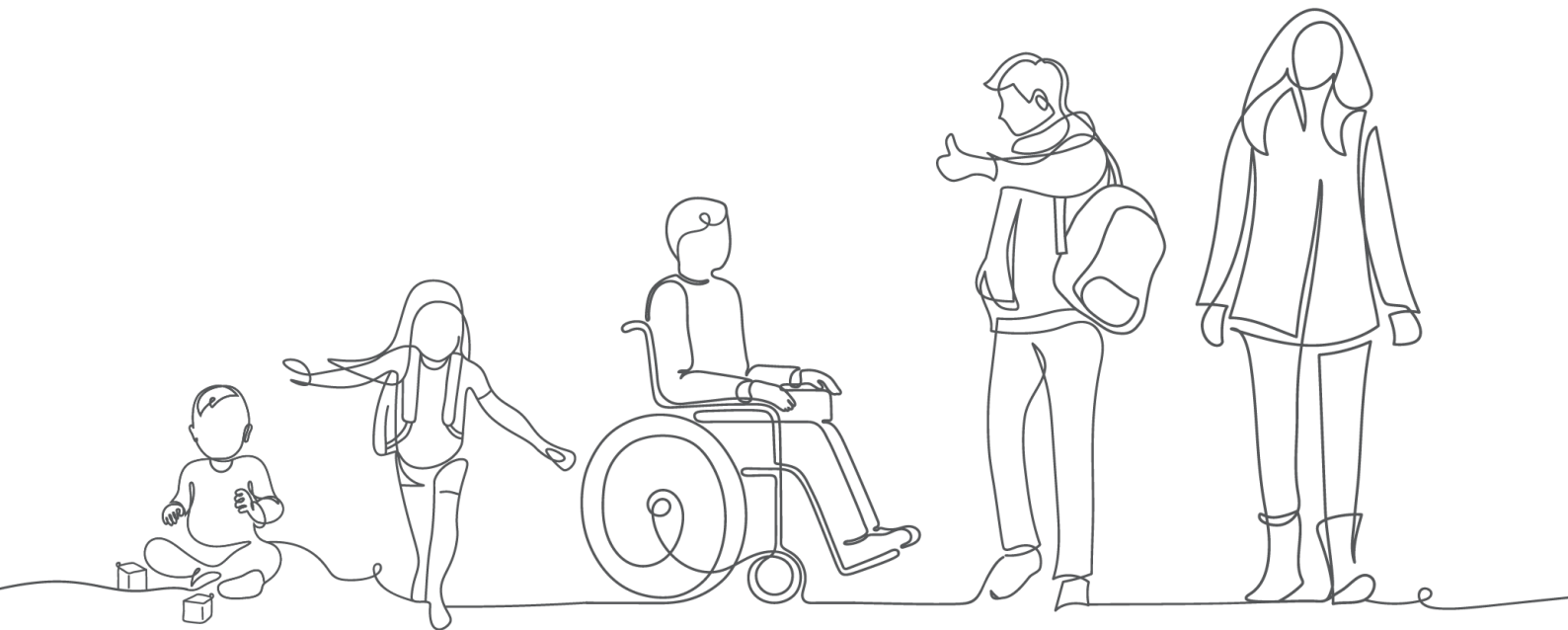# Augmentative and Alternative Communication in Schools and Educational Settings Policy

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Version 2.0 - 8/12/2022

1 Purpose

This Policy outlines the Department for Education Children and Young People's (DECYP) commitment to enable each student's right to communicate and genuinely participate within their school communities and educational settings.

Students with Communication Disability (CD) have a right to a comprehensive Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system relevant to their individual needs. This is essential for students with CD to participate in and access the curriculum in order to achieve, learn, and thrive.

This Policy:

- ensures standards around AAC and accessible communication that align with contemporary best practice
- promotes inclusive education practice in DECYP schools
- sets out expectations of DECYP staff and principals in supporting students with developing their communication competency through use of AAC.

This Policy should be read within the context of the following:

- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)*
- *Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE)*
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006, Article 21 (b).

2 Policy Statement

DECYP aspires to genuine community inclusion of students with CD and sets a high standard for our practice to support students to fulfil their learning potential. It is the responsibility of all members of the school community and educational settings, in partnership with the student and their family/carers, to work towards this vision.

DECYP school communities and educational settings will be supported to achieve a 'whole-of-school' standard of collaboration, shared responsibilities, inclusive curriculum and continuous improvement to develop communication competencies for and with students.

Focus areas for school communities and educational settings supporting a student using AAC include the following:

2.1 Leadership and partnership (staff, family, consultants)

- Awareness of legal responsibilities and principal-led commitment to using a range of communication strategies, including AAC systems, when communicating and educating.
- Collaboration between the school leadership team, Professional Support Staff, other specialists and families to develop student-centred goals and individual Learning Plans.
- Commitment to the shared belief that every student can be a competent communicator and is capable of learning.

2.2 Obtaining AAC systems (within educational settings, support teams and other specialist agencies)

- High technology AAC may be obtained through a combination of sources, including internal DECYP resources via the Inclusion and Access Coordinators, as well as external sources, for example

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), families self-funding, service clubs, community fundraising
- Light technology AAC resources may be created within schools and educational settings, for example Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD) communication books.

2.3 Knowledge and capacity to use and support AAC

- Developing team understanding of the purpose and application of the AAC system to meet individual needs.
- Ensuring success of AAC through positive attitudes, beliefs and the skill and knowledge of communication partners.
- Support from Speech Language Pathologists and other specialist staff to identify and implement learning strategies and adjustments.
- Ensuring the use of best-practice principles including assuming competence, training and ongoing support of communication partners within the educational environment.

2.4 Whole-of-school and educational settings use of AAC

- The student's AAC is always available, used by all members of the school/educational community in a range of natural settings for genuine reasons.
- Modelling language with AAC throughout the school day in both formal learning tasks and during incidental, unplanned experiences.
- AAC is not a curriculum task; it facilitates access to the curriculum. The focus must be building real connections and relationships with others and fostering social networks.
- Respecting all forms of communication and focussing on the communication message, rather than the mode in which it is expressed.

2.5 Communication-accessible curriculum

- A comprehensive AAC system facilitates access to the curriculum for students with CD.
- Adjustments within the school/educational environment and delivery of material to support diverse sensory needs will improve access and reduce barriers for the student.
- Planning for a means of response/interaction for students using AAC in all learning experiences is essential. This may include addition of specific words to a student's AAC system or creation of a specific vocabulary display to be used in a learning activity.
- Use of AAC and other visual tools is necessary for understanding conversation and information for some students with CD.

3 Policy Requirements

Successful implementation of this Policy will be achieved by:

- outlining roles and responsibilities with new and existing staff in all schools
- incorporating professional learning into PDP processes with all staff and promoting professional learning opportunities
- comprehensive Learning Plans, including individualised communication goals with strategies and adjustments that are reviewed regularly.

4 Key Information

Communication is essential for people to fulfil their human rights , for example freedom of expression, freedom of education, freedom of association, and equal participation.

CD impacts on students' independence, autonomy, participation and competence in both education and social interactions. Students with CD may have difficulty expressing themselves and understanding others. Their wants, needs, thoughts and feelings may be expressed through their behaviour. They may need support to communicate in other ways through multimodal Communication and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

Multimodal Communication includes a combination of modes such as gesture, pointing, eye gaze, speech, writing and technology use. This strategy enables choice in using a preferred modality in any given situation. AAC uses specialised methods such as key word sign, picture symbols, communication books and speech generating devices.

An inclusive school/educational community where all forms of communication are valued, advocated for, and practised is essential for students with CD. Shared beliefs about communication diversity and inclusive communication practices are necessary to create and sustain a positive learning environment for students with CD.

Communication occurs in every aspect of our life. It is fundamental to learning and students' access, participation and engagement at school. All forms of communication are valid and should be accepted.

Every student has the potential to learn and must have access to a comprehensive AAC system. Having a means to communicate is essential for:

- making meaning from the world
- sharing thoughts and ideas with others
- building meaningful relationships with others
- enhancing student wellbeing.

Acquisition of any language or communication system requires a community of supportive people who:

- use and model AAC
- scaffold the student's emergent skills so they keep developing
- value and respond to the student's communication methods
- assume that the student can be a competent communicator.

5 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Secretary and Deputy Secretaries

- Ensure the relevant Acts and Standards are adhered to, including, but not limited to, *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, *Disability Standards for Education 2005* and the *Personal Information Protection Act 2004*.
- Initiate processes for the regular review and evaluation of the Policy to ensure relevance.

5.2 Director Student Support, Student Support Leaders, Manager Professional Support Staff, Manager Inclusive Learning and Inclusive Practice Teams

- Ensure all schools, colleges and educational settings are familiar with this Policy.

- Ensure teams are familiar with this Policy and can support Principals and school/educational staff to meet their roles and responsibilities in educational settings.

5.3   Principals

- Foster and maintain a whole-school culture of AAC use in the school/educational setting that values student diversity and inclusive practice.
- Facilitate collaboration between all key stakeholders.
- Ensure external providers visiting the school understand and adhere to this policy (for example NDIS therapists).
- Maintain levels of resourcing to support implementation of AAC.
- Provide opportunities for staff to access relevant professional learning as required, including shadowing.
- Support staff to develop AAC knowledge and skills via the PDP process and promote professional learning opportunities.
- Model the use of AAC in formal and informal situations when interacting with the student/s.

5.4   Senior Staff, Support Teachers, Student Support and Wellbeing Leads

- Prioritise collaboration between all key stakeholders (including parents) particularly in Learning Plan development.
- Support the provision of AAC systems in conjunction with the Speech Language Pathologist.
- Coordinate relief for classroom teachers/Teacher Assistants to attend meetings, professional learning, resource planning and production.
- Ensure ongoing data collection, evaluation and evidence of school/student outcomes within their educational setting.
- Ensure educational adjustments support AAC use across all school settings in consultation with specialist staff (for example Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist).

5.5   Classroom Teachers

- Model the student's AAC system with them throughout the day in all activities.
- Differentiate the curriculum to ensure communication accessibility.
- Plan educational adjustments to be implemented by the teacher and additional staff such as Teacher Assistants to support student learning.
- Plan opportunities for the teacher and additional staff such as Teacher Assistants, as well as peers, to interact with the student using AAC for learning instruction and incidental communication opportunities.
- Collaborate with all key stakeholders in planning for the student's Learning Plan.
- Record evidence of learning and communication outcomes of students using AAC.
- Plan and structure activities to create communication opportunities.
- Develop and use visual strategies to support students within the educational environment (for example schedules). The AAC system is for communication, not behaviour support.

5.6 Teacher Assistants

- Model the student's AAC system with them throughout the day in all activities.

- Prepare and use visual supports as required in conjunction with the classroom teacher and Speech and Language Pathologist.

- Record evidence of learning and communication outcomes of students using AAC in conjunction with the classroom teacher.

- Plan and structure activities to create communication opportunities for the student.

5.7 DECYP Senior Speech Language Pathologists

- Ensure that this Policy and associated guidelines are implemented and adhered to by all Speech and Language Pathologists.

- Ensure that all Speech Language Pathology staff are supported in their work in this highly specialist area by providing access to current research, resources, professional learning, supervision, shadowing opportunities and mentoring.

- Ensure that regular professional learning opportunities are offered to DECYP staff.

- Ensure that school Principals are aware of and understand this Policy and associated guidelines and support their application in schools.

- Support Speech Language Pathology staff to develop AAC knowledge and skills via the PDP process and promoting professional learning opportunities.

5.8 DECYP Speech Language Pathologists

- Collaborate with all stakeholders.

- Contribute to the development of student Learning Plans.

- Consult with Senior Speech Language Pathologists and /or Speech Language Pathologists with specialist experience in AAC if required.

- Assess, trial, prescribe and support implementation of comprehensive AAC systems and strategies as appropriate.

- Write comprehensive assessment reports with recommendations for classroom/educational-based adjustments.

- Support teachers to set goals and develop strategies as part of the Learning Plan process.

- Stay up to date with current research in AAC best practice and participate in professional learning opportunities.

- Provide consistent training state-wide on being an effective communication partner and supporting students to use specific AAC systems.

- Record and share outcomes and evidence of student learning related to their Learning Plan goals.

- Continually evaluate the supports in place as guided by evidence-informed practice.

- Acknowledge the role of all modes of communication in contributing to a student's communication success and, where appropriate, document these for all communication partners.

5.9 External Speech Language Pathology Providers

- Consult with school Speech Language Pathologist and other educational staff if considering alternative AAC options.
- Liaise with school Speech Language Pathologist regarding the student's therapy plan and classroom supports.

5.10 Learners

- Be encouraged to have a positive view of education, learning and AAC.
- Be supported to see their AAC system as their 'voice'.
- Have input into their learning goals where possible.
- Be encouraged and supported to make autonomous decisions with appropriate supports.

5.11 Parents/Carers

- Be strongly encouraged to participate in informed decision making and planning about AAC supports for their children and young people and to have input into their child's learning plan.
- Be strongly encouraged to facilitate sharing of information between school/educational staff and private Speech Language Pathology providers.
- Be strongly encouraged to participate in AAC knowledge and skills development activities with school/educational staff.
- Be strongly encouraged to use AAC at home and in the community.

5.12 Collective responsibilities of all members of school/educational communities

- Enable each student's human rights to genuinely participate, learn, enjoy equal opportunities and access within their school community and educational settings, through effective communication and presumption of competence.
- Ensure every student who requires AAC has access to a personalised and comprehensive AAC system at all times.
- Advocate for the ongoing use of quality AAC practices within the community of users around the student.
- Value and respect all modes of effective communication.
- Participate in continual AAC knowledge and skill development through formal or informal opportunities.
- Ensure genuine opportunities for use of the AAC system with peers, whole class and wider school/educational community to build social connections.
- Support students to be competent and autonomous communicators through practices and strategies that promote self-determination and independence. Physical prompts which alter a student's expressive communication restrict their human rights and should not be used.
- Provide important school/educational documents such as rules, newsletters and notices in a communication accessible format, for example plain language, picture supported.
- Share and celebrate communication and learning achievements in inclusive formats.

6 Related policies and procedures

- [Learning Plan Procedure](#)
- [Literacy Strategy Framework 2019-2022](#)
- [NDIS Providers in Schools Policy](#)

7 Supporting information/tools

- [Good Teaching - Differentiated Classroom Practice - Learning for All](#)
- [Good Teaching - Inclusive Schools Disability Focus](#)
- [Speech Pathology Australia AAC Clinical Guidelines](#)
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Disability and Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031](#)
- [Accessible Island: Disability Framework for Action 2018-2021](#) (Tasmanian Government)
- [Communication Bill of Rights](#) (National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities, 2016)

8 Glossary

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Any tool, strategy or technology that compensates, enhances, expands or helps develop communication.

Augmentative communication is anything **added** to speech. Alternative communication is anything **instead** of speech. AAC systems may be aided or unaided:

Aided AAC

Communication symbols, techniques and strategies that use something external to the body to represent, select or transmit information. For example:

- Light tech-aided AAC (no power) - real objects, photographs, pictures, logos, personal communication dictionary, picture symbols, eye-gaze frame, schedules, topic-specific displays, for example Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD), communication books, spelling, alphabet board
- High tech-aided AAC (powered) - single message device (for example Big Mack), sequential message speech generating device (for example step-by-step communicator), static display speech generating devices (for example Go Talk), encoding systems (sequences of multi meaning symbols represent individual words, for example Language Acquisition through Motor Planning LAMP), dedicated speech generating devices with dynamic display (for example Dynavox), dynamic display on mobile devices (for example Proloquo2Go, PODD), text to speech converter (for example Lightwriter).

Unaided AAC

Communication symbols, techniques and strategies that use the body or parts of the body to represent, select or transmit information. For example, vocalisations, gesture, facial expression, pointing, reaching, eye gaze, mime, key word sign, fingerspelling.

Communication

Communication involves speaking, listening, understanding, reading, writing and using voice to exchange information.

Communication Accessible

Communication accessible means that the messages and information provided meet the communication needs of everyone within the community. This means that all students and other members of the school community can access, understand and engage with the information you are sharing.

Communication Disability (CD)

People who for a range of physical, sensory, cognitive and environmental reasons have difficulty understanding others' communication and/or being understood by others. Their speech and other natural communication are not effective in conveying their thoughts and ideas and they may experience frequent communication breakdown and restricted opportunities.

Communication Partners

The range of people who communicate with individuals with CD and support the acquisition and/or use of AAC.

Comprehensive Communication System

A comprehensive communication system allows for different purposes and includes key words, specific vocabulary, the alphabet and the ability to add words to the system.

Multimodal Communication

Multimodal Communication includes a combination of modes such as gesture, pointing, eye gaze, speech, writing and technology use. This strategy enables choice in using a preferred modality in any given situation. **AAC** uses specialised methods such as key word sign, picture symbols, communication books and speech generating devices.

Speech

The oral expression of thoughts and ideas through sounds, syllables and words that carry meaning.

9 Legislation

This policy should be read within the context of the following:

- *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)*
- *Disability Standards for Education (2005)*

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