Ábalta

Whole School Plan for Language and Communication

(English)

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Title: Language and Communication Policy for Ábalta Special School

## 

**1. Introductory statement and Rationale**

**1.1 Introductory Statement**

Communication and Language (English). “C&L will be used throughout the document instead of the term “Communication and Language”

The development of a whole school plan for C&L – Communication, Oral language, Reading and Writing in Ábalta commenced in the academic year 2016/2017. This policy has been revised and updated by Rachelle Lavelle, Middle Class teacher and Deputy Principal. The policy is under review in collaboration with the teaching team, speech and language consultant and school principal. In completion, the policy will also be reviewed by the Board of Management and the Parents Association. As C&L is a vital element in the education of pupils with learning disabilities as it permeates the entire curriculum and is central to the learning.This plan therefore outlines our whole school approach to teaching C&L. It will also inform other members of the school community of the approaches and methodologies used in our school. The plan will form the basis for teacher’s long and short-term planning.

**Junior Class** students mainly access the Severe to Profound primary C&L curriculum, with some also accessing the main stream curriculum for some areas.

**Middle Class** students mainly access the Mild to Moderate Primary C&L curriculum, with some also accessing the mainstream curriculum for some areas.

**Senior Class** students access the Junior Cycle Level 1, with some students accessing Level 2 in certain areas of the curriculum, as well as the ASDAN curriculum where appropriate.

**2.2 Rationale**

1. To benefit teaching and learning in our school i.e. to be a useful tool for teachers providing them with clear guidelines in the teaching of C&L and ensuring consistency and continuity of practice throughout the school.
2. To ensure that all students’ needs are met through a differentiated approach thus ensuring that each student reaches their full potential in the area of C&L.
3. To conform to the principles outlined in the primary school curriculum and guidelines for teachers of students with mild, moderate, severe and profound intellectual disabilities.
4. To plan for C&L in light of changed emphasis on new methodologies outlined in the Primary school curriculum, such as the new English language curriculum.

**3. Vision and Aims**

**3.1 Vision**

Our vision is to create a positive learning environment in Ábalta which promotes initiation of communication and celebrates each pupil’s uniqueness in the area of C&L. We aim to enable students to develop awareness, alertness, interest and concentration.

**3.2 Aims**

The aims of the whole school plan for Ábalta are to outline the key elements of the teaching and learning of language. The aims of the plan are for the students to develop:

1. Independence - To read for pleasure and to endeavour to stimulate an interest in expression, communication, reading and in the written word.
2. Social Skills – To empower and give confidence to students to be able to cope in various social situations,
3. Self-Management - To become better communicators and thus decrease anxieties and frustrations, with emphasis on appropriate listener – speaker relationships
4. Communication – That students are enabled to communicate their personal needs, emotions and ideas, promoting positive attitudes and developing an appreciation of the value of language – non- verbal, verbal, written and read
5. Academic Skills- To develop confidence in listening, speaking, reading and writing.
6. Comprehension –To develop cognitive ability and the capacity to clarify thinking through oral language as well as functional reading and writing skills.
7. Generalising - To enhance emotional, imaginative and aesthetic development through oral, reading and writing experiences

**4. Contexts for Language and Communication**

This C&L plan will be developed under the following headings

1. Strands and Elements (Primary Level) and Elements (Junior Cycle)
2. Language Programmes
3. Assessment and Record Keeping
4. Timetable
5. Homework
6. Resources and ICT – Including communication systems
7. Individual Teachers planning and reporting
8. Continuing Professional Development of Staff
9. Parental Involvement
10. Community Links

**4.1 Curriculum Planning:**  **Strands and Elements (Strand Units)**

The teaching of English in Ábalta will be planned through the three Strands of: Oral, Written and Reading.

The elements/learning outcomes in each strand are:

**Communicating**- focusing on developing children’s knowledge and understanding of how we build and share meaning together in communicative relationships, as listeners and speakers, and as givers and receivers of information.

**Understanding** - focusing on developing the ability of children to create and interact successfully with texts using increasingly-sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the content and structure of language

**Exploring and Using** – prioritising the development of children’s ability to explore and use language for a wide range of purposes, in a variety of genres, and with a range of audiences, familiar and unfamiliar

Communication and Language in itself is central to the whole curriculum. Children learn language and learn through language. This can deepen the child’s knowledge of himself/herself and of the world, both in School and outside of School. The potential of oral language as learning and teaching medium is acknowledged in the key role it is given throughout the curriculum.

Refer to NCCA planning and Junior Cycle Planning tools

[www.nccaplanning.ie](http://www.nccaplanning.ie)

[www.jct.ie](http://www.jct.ie)

**5** Language **Programme**

Ábalta is a school for pupils with Autism and specific needs therefore pupils throughout the school will have impairment in language and communication, therefore this is a central focus of the teaching in Ábalta and is targeted in every child’s Individual Educational Plan. Central to the development of communication and language skills the following must be taken into account:

* + The development of the child’s system of communication must be prioritised
  + Attention needs to be directed towards teaching the social aspect of language for example turn taking
  + Direct teaching of gestures, facial expression, vocal initiation and body language
  + Using a total communication approach including Lámh, TEACCH, PECs, AAC devices, pictures, body language and oral communication to support and facilitate the child’s communicative initiation and responses
  + Providing clear and manageable directions and instructions based on the system best suited to each individual child

In Ábalta we are supported in our work in language by our Behaviour Support and Learning Specialist, Speech and Language Therapist, and Occupational Therapist. As well as providing intervention for individual pupils with additional needs in this area they are active contributors to the development of the school plan for language; they provide training for staff and they advise on appropriate strategies and activities for the development of the programme throughout the school.

**5.1 Strand: Oral Language**

**Element: Communication**

(i)Engagement, listening and attention

(ii)Motivation and Choice

(iii)Social Conventions and awareness of others

In Ábalta we recognise the impairments in language and communication of our students and therefore, in our whole school plan for language development we realise the importance in exposing our students to a linguistically stimulating environment in school using a total communication approach. We ensure that the language we use is accessible to our students and we are aware at all times that we as staff give good example as role models for appropriate social interaction and supplement understanding with visuals where appropriate. The students of Ábalta can have a deficit in their ability to listen and attend to what is being said, to follow command instructions and directions which can impede learning. The teaching of these essential life skills is therefore prioritised and is taught one to one or in a group setting on a daily basis. The whole school plan for language and communication in Ábalta will take cognisance of the need to develop this skill in the student. Students will commence with one step commands with prompts and adult supports and gradually progress to more complex commands. Within the classroom students will establish visual tracking, eye contact and interpret and use facial expression, intonation, prosody (tone, rhythm and stress) etc.

Students who are non or preverbal are inducted into the use of PECS and LAMH, objects of reference and iPad apps dependent on their level of communicative ability and /or preference. The teaching of oral language training is ongoing through the school Speech and Language Therapist for example: PECs and LAMH and AAC systems. Training may also be made available to teaching staff through external training bodies, where required. Staff is encouraged to engage in Core Word activities – using the total communication approach – modelling on devices, using verbal language and LAMH signs.

Current Communication Techniques used in Ábalta:

Total Communication Approach (using many forms simultaneously)

* Spoken Language
* Gestures/body language
* PECs
* Lámh
* Pictures and Text
* AAC Apps/devices
  + Lamp app/device
  + Touch Chat app/device
  + Accent Device
  + Proloquo2Go
  + PECs IV app
  + GoTalkNow

**Element: Understanding**

(i) Sentence structure and Grammar

(ii) Vocabulary

(iii) Demonstration of understanding

The whole school plan for Ábalta with regard to competence and confidence in using language is to develop the child’s ability to use language as a speaker, a writer and a reader. Competence and Confidence in using language extends across all curricular areas and therefore students are given a variety of opportunities to develop their oral language. Pupils have individual programmes which equip them with the appropriate responses and greetings that are needed in daily life. The Whole School Plan would then endeavour for students to initiate conversations and express their needs and emotions.

**Element: Exploring and Using**

(i) Requests, questions and interactions

(ii) Categorisation

(iii) Retelling and elaboration

(iv) Playful and creative use of language

(v) Information giving, explanation and justification

(vi) Description, prediction and reflection

In this strand the goal is using language to learn. Much of what the child learns and the way that they learn comes from the interaction of language and experience through naming, describing, classifying and modifying things and ideas, knowledge is extended and the command of language is developed (page 6, Primary School Curriculum, NCCA). The students in Ábalta have difficulty in asking and answering WH questions and therefore, this skill needs to be targeted, using Marian Blank’s level of questioning. There is often a marked discrepancy between reading fluency and comprehension. It is important to target comprehension as much as reading ability.

It is a known fact that Students with Autism have impairment in imagination, with a restrictive range of behaviour activities and interests. In developing our pupils imaginative development the whole school plan of Ábalta would be to help the child cope with new and varying activities, pre-empting their anxiety which can result when a change occurs in their routine. Younger student’s imagination are developed through structured play programme, whilst older students are exposed to a rich variety of stories, poems, rhymes and songs. The strategies used to assist in the development of emotion and imagination includes Attention Autism, circle time, drama, music and art activities.

**5.2 Strand: Reading;**

**Elements: Communicating, Understanding and Exploring & Using**

The whole school plan for C&L and in the area of reading will concentrate in enabling the student in making sense of and deriving pleasure from all kinds of visual and tactile representations. The students are exposed to a variety of visuals including print and picture to increase comprehension and understanding of words and images with meaning.

There is a whole school library and individual class libraries, with adapted reader and personalised talk books, available for students. They can choose preferred books to engage with as appropriate. Class trips to local and city libraries are also used to encourage the love of reading. Fostering enjoyment in reading includes listening to and engaging with sensory stories and looking at and handling books. Functional reading involves attending to and discriminating objects, pictures, symbols and texts.

**Development of Reading Skills**

**A The language experience approach**

This approach must be very individual and aims to target the vocabulary that is relevant to that particular student and has a particular meaning for them. Senior class students though the use of scrap books create a portfolio of their activities through their ASDAN program. Creating individualised “talk books” and readers that are relevant and of particular interest to the individual learner is important.

**B Sight vocabulary development**

Sight Vocabulary is developed through regular exposure and repetition throughout all subject areas. Relevant reinforcing words are selected for the individual student and then will progress to common words, core words, words from the reader, high frequency words e.g. Dolch lists and social sight vocabulary lists. Text is used as often, frequently and relevantly as possible, and is encouraged throughout the school, with signage on doors and “locations” images with text.

**C The Teaching of Phonics**

In collaboration with the Speech and Language therapist the ‘Jolly Phonics Programme’ is used. Phonological awareness is developed through action songs and rhymes, concrete materials and discrete structured lessons. Methodologies such as Oro- motor activities in conjunction with discrete letter/sound production trials are practiced to encourage best sound production approximation.

Syllabic awareness – syllabic blending, syllable segmentation, syllable counting, syllable isolation.

Onset and rhyme – nursery rhymes and rhyming poems

Phonemic awareness – identify initial sound – final sound – medial sound

The school uses Jolly Phonics to teach letter sounds and blending. Students will also engage with other literacy and reading programs such as Edmark for sight reading, as well as teacher designed letter and word recognition tasks for individual literacy targets.

**Reading Schemes:**

We use a variety of reading materials such as big books, class readers, vooks, Nala literacy resources, PowerPoint or e-books, sensory stories and parallel readers. These are used to expose students to reading in order to develop their receptiveness to language. It also provides students with an opportunity to talk about reading and expose them to the conventions of print. The criteria that is used in choosing relevant reading schemes is individual interests, age appropriateness, levels of progression and the appropriateness of the vocabulary for the pupils and their experiences***.*** Depending on ability, students in the senior end of the school are encouraged to read novels. Online readers such as the “Tarheel readers” are also used for certain students, with more age appropriate topics while having simpler language.

Samples of readers are available in the whole school library, from the following Reading Programs:

Jolly Phonics

Sunny Street Reader and Skills books

Oxford Reading Tree

StarWays

Moncure

Wonderland

Streets Ahead

A selection of Adapted Readers has been created by Sarah Caulfield and an area available in the senior class library.

The following is a list of available Big Books:

Farmer Duck

We’re going on a Bear Hunt

Pig in a Pond

Handa’s Hen

The Gruffalo

Peace at Last

Ten in the Bed

Dear Greenpeace

I am the Music Man

Social stories are developed for the needs of individual students and/or the class to prepare them for situations with which they may not be comfortable, such as getting a haircut and to giving those strategies whereby they can manage their anxieties when faced with a dilemma which might cause them to become upset and agitated.

**5.3 Strand: Writing**

For students with Autism and complex needs writing can be challenging for many reasons. Poor fine motor skills, decoding symbols, level of and understanding of oral language, understanding of the function of the written word,

Writing can be incorporated into other subject areas and encompasses a broad range of methods. The method used by the students in Ábalta does not just involve pen / pencil but a multisensory approach with the use of objects, pictures, symbols, and ICT. Handwriting without Tears and typing programs are two methodologies used in the school

**Strand: Writing**

**Element: Communicating**

(i) Engagement

(ii) Motivation and choice

Through the class writing programme where possible the children should be enabled to

* Experience and enjoy a print rich environment with displays of student’s own writing, colouring, posters, symbols, text etc.
* Be given help from the teacher to refine and make presentation attractive
* Write for expression, to communicate wants/needs
* Use student’s own experiences and interest to encourage writing.
* Write for different audiences
* Write and draw frequently

**Element: Understanding**

(i) Conventions of print and sentence structure

(ii) Vocabulary

(iii) Spelling and word study

The students in Ábalta are encouraged to use all forms of written expression for example, scribbling, colouring, drawing, shapes, letters, numerals.

Pre writing activities that take place include: plasticine/ play doh, sand, sandpaper, paint, magnetic letters, pegs, screwing and unscrewing, threading, tearing, cutting, theraputty. Students are given support from the school’s occupational therapist to improve their fine motor and writing skills.

Students are introduced to the concept of writing through being exposed to a print-rich environment and where their attention is brought to realise signs and symbols give us information.

* Students will copy from the whiteboard.
* Copy letters and words from samples
* Students will start by matching letters to letters, words to words
* Students with write using whatever system best works for them
* Student s will write/type reinforcers –encouraging an interest in writing
* Students will be given homework as a way to practise their writing
* Use labels to name familiar people and things
* Understand left to right, top to bottom orientation of writing
* Develop a satisfactory grip of writing implements
* Write letters and words from memory
* Develop the confidence to use approximate spelling (using phonics based on ability)

**Strand: Writing**

**Element: Exploring and Using**

(i) Purpose, genre and voice

(ii) Writing process and creating text

(iii) Response and author’s intent

(iv) Handwriting and presentation

Ábalta students will be encouraged to write:

* Marks
* Shapes
* Letters
* Names
* Reinforcers
* Core Words
* Nouns
* Sentences
* Descriptions
* Labels
* Notes
* Journal
* Recipes
* Menus
* Shopping lists
* Invitations
* Summarise stories
* Their news

Teachers will provide as many opportunities with as much assistance as is needed to progress students in this area as much as is possible.

The students in Ábalta will be enabled to write/ draw about their

* Feelings
* Likes/dislikes
* Create poems
* Daily Activities

**Spelling**

Spelling is approached by a variety of means based on the ability of the students. AAC devices using the keyboard, tying reinforcing words from text, jolly phonics sound blending, sight reading and rote learning, “look, say, cover, write and check” are all strategies currently in use in the school.

**6 Assessment and Record Keeping**

Assessment is integral to the teaching and learning process. In Ábalta we utilise the NCCA continuum of assessment which includes:

Ongoing assessment of student’s individualised language learning goals

Teacher observation

Teacher designed tasks and tests derived from the NCCA curriculum assessment tool

Teacher designed reading records

Work samples – permanent products

Digital portfolio – video and photographic evidence of

Observations from behaviour support and learning therapist, speech and language therapist and occupational therapist.

End of year reports

Standard language and learning assessments such as ABLLS, AFLLS and Junior Cycle Level 1 and 2, Reading Assessments such as Schonell Reading Assessment and Oxford Owl reading assessments

A checklist is being formulated to assess each student’s level of literacy performance, which will be kept in the student’s individual assessment folder, along with a record of programs already attained by the student.

The school will also hold a portfolio of the child on the school server. This will include video and photographic evidence of work completed by the child throughout the year, as often permanent products – for example, SLT targets of speech sound production, full sentences fine motor activities such as inset puzzles and threading, can be recorded and uploaded to the student s online portfolio.

Each assessment employed has a contribution to make in helping to monitor individual children’s rates of progress and levels of attainment as they engage with the English curriculum and by using the information provided in them, we can build a profile of each student as they progress through the school. See Ábalta’s assessment policy for more detail on curricular assessment.

**7. Organisational planning**

**7.1 Timetable**

The students receive the required amount of time for Communication and Language on a daily basis (based on guidelines from PDST and NCCA). Teachers also integrate language skills with all other activities throughout the day. Although there are set times for Literacy/Language and Communication, each student accesses C&L goals consistently and incidentally throughout the day, with an emphasis on SLT goals.

**7.2 Homework**

Homework is given at the teacher’s discretion and consists of oral language skills, reading, sight vocabulary and written activities. Depending on each child’s ability and home life, homework is assigned based on what the child is learning at school, and will usually include mastered material, for ease at home, while also maintaining mastered goals. Homework may be given through the use of workbooks, teacher designed materials, or by replicating materials and resources from school for home. SLT targets are also shared with home and based on the individual needs and abilities of the families, will be done either incidentally or as part of discrete homework time.

**8. Resources and ICT**

We are aware of the value of ICT in the teaching and learning of C&L by contributing to the print-rich environment, in supporting the development of word identification, spelling and other reading skills through reinforcement software, the internet, reference books and content free software such as Microsoft word. Each classroom is equipped with a laptop, iPad and an interactive whiteboard and has access to a printer. The school also has a communication iPad, which has a variety of communication apps readily available for trialling and training purposes. Some examples of the software used by Ábalta teachers, staff and students as C&L resources are:

Handwriting without Tears, AAC apps (ProLoquo2Go, GoTalkNow, LAMP, PECS), Twinkl.ie, TarHeelReaders, YouTube, NALA

**9 Individual Teachers’ planning and Reporting**

This plan for C&L, the curriculum documents for primary and secondary, and the relevant Guidelines for Learning Disabilities will inform and guide teachers in their long and short term programme of work in English. In the Junior and Middle classes, teachers use the curriculum for moderate learning difficulties, but also draw on the curricula for mild severe to profound and the infants sections of the primary curriculum, progressing up through the English Curriculum based on each individual child’s ability. Each teacher will evaluate the work of their students on a regular basis and this will inform planning. The senior class continues C&L through the Junior Cycle Level 1 and in some cases Level 2.

At the end of every school year an end of year report is created for each of the students and sent to the parents, which gives a description of the areas of improvement in all subjects including language and communication and also suggestions on how parents can work on the subject at home.

Any formal assessments such as the ABLLS or AFLLS assessments will be communicated to the parents. IEP targets will be discussed during IEP meetings and IEP review meetings. Any targets that are mastered will be communicated to the parents.

**9.1 Parental involvement**

Parental involvement is considered integral to effectively enabling student’s attending Ábalta to access the C&L curriculum to the best of their abilities. We liaise with parents on a regular basis through phone call, communication books and parent teacher meetings. Parents are also requested to contribute to the formulation of their child’s IEP. Parents are invited to meet regularly with the multi-disciplinary team of behaviour support and language therapist, speech and language therapist and occupational therapist to enhance their child’s language and communication abilities at home as well as at school, through active generalisation programmes, video modelling, PECS and Lámh training.

**9.2 Continuing professional development for staff**

Staff development needs are primarily identified through review and discussion at teacher and full staff meetings. Teachers participate in professional development through attendance and participation in various courses and also with a number of support services, such as the SESS and the local education centre. Teachers are encouraged to attend courses and share the information and skills acquired with other members of staff. Courses such as PECS training, Lámh, Jolly Phonics, AAC for Literacy, LAMP training have all been undertaken by one or more teacher. The in-house Speech and Language Therapist completes training for all staff. An environment in which teachers and SNAs feel free to consult and support each other is actively fostered.

**Community links**

All students are afforded opportunities to expand their language and communication abilities in the community. This happens in a variety of environments such as work experience programs, educational trips, shopping trips etc. Some students participate in integration programs in mainstream settings.

**Success criteria**

The success of this plan will be evaluated through the teacher’s planning and preparation and if the procedures outlines in this plan have been consistently followed. We will also judge its success if the students have been enabled to achieve the aims outlined in this plan and children’s learning has been enhanced in the following ways:

**Oral language**

* Increased confidence and competence in communicating
* Improved listening skills

**Reading**

* Improved standards in reading – in line with each pupil’s abilities and disabilities
* Involvement of parents in supporting classroom learning at home

**Writing**

* Improved standards in writing
* Greater fluency in communicating ideas

**PECS, LAMH**

* Staff and pupils using PECS and LAMH signs throughout Ábalta to communicate
* Pupils being better able to communicate their needs and to understand more signs and symbols

The achievement of these success criteria will be assessed through feedback from teacher and parents and observation and evaluation of pupils.

**Review**

1. **Roles and Responsibilities**

It will be necessary to review this plan on a regular basis to ensure optimum implementation of the English curriculum in the school. Those involved in the review will include teachers, pupils, parents, board of management, parent’s association.

1. **Timeframe**

This plan will be reviewed no later than January 2023

**Ratification and Communication**

The Board of Management of Abalta Special School ratified this plan on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

This policy was subsequently accepted by the Parent’s Association on\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Copies of this plan are available in all classrooms and copies are made available to parents on request by contacting the officers of the parents’ association.