

AAC at Ravenscliffe High School

Purpose of this Document	This document has been written to provide key information about Ravenscliffe High School’s Communication and Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) implementation and curriculum to all stakeholders, including teaching staff, school governors, parents, external professionals, and other interested parties. It reflects the school’s values and philosophy regarding the teaching, learning, and development of communication and AAC. The document draws together best practice guidance, statutory SEND requirements, National Curriculum communication expectations, and whole-school approaches appropriate for learners working across all pathways, including Sensory, Emergent, Semi-Formal and Formal. It also promotes the development of pupils’ Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) understanding, including British Values, through communication-rich opportunities. The document seeks to address the individual communication needs of our young people and sets out a clear framework within which teaching staff can operate. It provides guidance on planning, teaching, modelling, and assessing communication skills across the school day as part of our Total Communication Environment. It outlines the following: • The Intent – The purpose, aims and vision for Communication and AAC at Ravenscliffe. • The Implementation – How we meet this purpose through consistent communication practice, AAC provision, curriculum design and staff training. • The Impact – The intended outcomes of our approach, and how progress in communication is assessed, monitored and evaluated over time. This document also contains key information about Leadership of Communication & AAC, Cross-Curricular Opportunities, and links to related whole-school documentation, including SEND policy, curriculum overviews, and assessment frameworks.
I N T E N T	Intent Statement – Communication & AAC At Ravenscliffe High School, we believe that communication—including the use of AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication)—is essential to every learner’s education, wellbeing and independence, and a fundamental right. Our whole-school Total Communication ethos ensures that every pupil, including non-speaking learners and those within sensory, emergent, semi-formal or formal pathways, can access, understand, and be understood, and can participate meaningfully across the curriculum and throughout the school day. Communication and AAC sit at the heart of our school community. We aim to ensure that all learners, regardless of pathway, communication profile or access needs, develop the confidence, skills and opportunities to express themselves, engage socially, access learning and form meaningful relationships. Communication is developed holistically across academic, social, functional and community contexts, with staff consistently modelling communication through multimodal approaches (e.g., signing/BSL, core vocabulary boards, symbol/visual supports, objects of reference, gesture, sensory cues, and high-tech AAC). Our Communication and AAC curriculum is structured around the five developmental areas identified within the DAGG-2 Ability Level Continuum. These components form the foundation of all planning, teaching and assessment, and apply across all pathways:

	Understanding Developing comprehension of language, symbols, instructions and communication partners—progressing from early awareness to understanding increasingly complex communication. <i>Access examples include:</i> sensory cues, objects of reference, visuals, signing and aided language input to secure understanding for sensory and emergent learners as well as semi-formal/formal pupils. Expression Developing the ability to communicate wants, needs, ideas and information using any appropriate method—from intended behaviours and body movement to signs, symbols and device-generated messages—progressing towards increasingly independent message generation. <i>We value diverse expressive modes,</i> including body language, eye-gaze, gesture, symbol exchange, spoken words and AAC output. Social Interaction Developing skills for social communication, including turn-taking, initiating, responding, maintaining topics and adapting communication for different partners or situations, with structured opportunities for collaboration, peer interaction and partner-assisted strategies. Literacy Skills Developing communication-related literacy for AAC: symbol recognition, letter–sound awareness, early reading/writing, and the use of keyboards, spelling and word prediction—with adaptations and scaffolds so all pathways can access literacy at an appropriate level. Other (Operational & Access Skills) Developing the practical skills needed to access and operate AAC: positioning, mounting, navigation, transporting and managing communication tools—so learners can access their chosen method consistently and independently wherever possible. These five strands guide progression across all pathways, ensuring a clear, equitable and developmental curriculum for every learner. Aims We aim for pupils to become: • Successful communicators, using the methods that meet their needs and enable them to be active participants, not passive observers. • Confident learners who ask questions, share ideas and engage with new concepts using inclusive, accessible communication tools. • Active participants in lessons and social situations, with reasonable adjustments and Total Communication supports removing barriers to access and participation. • Learners who understand the importance of communication for identity, independence, self-advocacy and wellbeing. • Contributors to their community who communicate across a range of contexts, generalising skills into real-world settings and life beyond school.
I M P L I M E N T A T	Implementation – Communication & AAC at Ravenscliffe High School Students at Ravenscliffe High School develop their communication skills by learning to express their ideas, thoughts, wants and needs, and by engaging socially through a wide range of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods. Provision is fully inclusive, ensuring that learners who are non-speaking, sensory, emergent, semi-formal or formal can access, participate in, and benefit from communication-rich experiences. Communication opportunities are embedded throughout the school day so pupils can learn, practise and generalise their communication skills in meaningful contexts. Learners take part in social games,

functional routines, choice-making opportunities (e.g., breaktimes, lunch), group learning, and peer interactions, enabling authentic practice across academic, social, and community settings. Activities and expectations are **adapted, scaffolded and personalised** so that every learner can engage meaningfully at their own level.

Total Communication Environment (TCE)

Our implementation of Communication and AAC is underpinned by a whole-school **Total Communication Approach**, ensuring pupils are immersed in accessible communication throughout the day. This includes:

- Core BSL signs
- Word of the Week vocabulary
- Visual supports such as symbols, PowerPoints, schedules and task boards
- Core vocabulary boards and communication books
- Photographs, symbols and objects of reference
- Sensory cues and practical exploration (sound, smell, taste, touch)
- Multimedia modelling using videos, voice output and high-tech AAC systems

Staff model language consistently using the communication methods most appropriate to each learner. This supports receptive and expressive communication, developing engagement, joint attention, vocabulary understanding and confidence. **No learner is excluded from communication due to cognitive, physical or sensory needs**; every pupil has an accessible route to understanding and expression.

Communication Opportunities Across the Day

Communication is planned for and embedded across all curriculum areas, daily routines and social situations. Pupils use communication methods to:

- ask and answer questions
- share ideas
- make choices
- comment on activities
- express emotions
- engage in literacy, numeracy, vocational and community learning
- regulate behaviour and request help

Communication is never isolated to a “lesson”—it is part of the whole curriculum at Ravenscliffe. **Multiple means of communication** (gesture, eye-gaze, AAC device output, switch activation, vocalisation, sensory response) are valued as valid ways of participating and showing understanding.

Assessment, Identification & Specialist Support

Assessment is **inclusive and responsive**. Pupils who may benefit from AAC are assessed by the **School AAC and Communication Specialist** using the **Dynamic AAC Goals Grid-2 (DAGG-2)** and the **Ability Level Continuum**. This identifies:

- the learner’s current communication ability level
- appropriate AAC tools
- long- and short-term goals

- level of prompting required
- progress over time

Learners who require a personalised AAC device receive the tools and adaptations needed to communicate effectively. Opportunities to use their AAC system across the whole day are supported through **home/school agreements** and **family training**. Re-assessments and reviews take place as needed.

Our assessment methods recognise progress in **many forms**, including body movement, vocalisation, symbol use, device output, gesture, choice-making, social engagement and sensory responses. Evidence is gathered through photographs, videos, AAC logs, staff observations, communication passports and EFL tracking.

Learners Without Dedicated AAC Devices

Not all learners require a personalised high-tech AAC device. Their communication needs are met through the **whole-school Total Communication Approach** across all pathways.

Assessment and tracking follow:

- **Formal & Semi-Formal Pathways:**
 - EHCP outcomes
 - EFL – English progression
- **Emergent Pathway:**
 - Emergent Communication frameworks
 - EFL – Communication progression
- **Sensory Pathway:**
 - Routes for Learning
 - EHCP outcomes

This ensures every learner is assessed fairly, supported effectively, and **included fully**, regardless of whether they use a dedicated AAC system.

Four-Tier Communication Framework

Communication support is structured through a clear, whole-school framework:

- **Tier 1:** symbol exchange, core boards, visual supports, communication books and TCE
- **Tier 2:** AAC devices with Proloquo2Go or similar communication software
- **Tier 3:** individualised systems (eye-gaze technology, e-Tran frames)
- **Tier 4:** language structure and pronunciation support, SALT guidance

Staff use this framework to ensure learners receive support matched to their communication needs, with **reasonable adjustments** promoting participation for every pupil.

Communication Levels (tracked where appropriate on EFL)

Our progression model reflects the **DAGG-2 Ability Levels** and supports planning, delivery and assessment.

Engagement / Cause and Effect (Sensory / Lower Emergent)

- Awareness of others and environment

- Early cause-and-effect communication behaviours

Emergent

- Limited understanding of symbols
- Reliance on gesture, facial expression, behaviour

Emergent Transitional

- Awareness of simple symbols, gestures and familiar instructions
- Beginning social intent; seeking familiar people/objects

Context-Dependent (Emergent – Semi-Formal)

- Understanding of photos/symbols for familiar actions and objects
- Using combinations of communication methods
- Early literacy development

Transitional Independent (Semi-Formal – Formal)

- Following simple and more complex verbal instructions
- Wider vocabulary; communicating on broader topics
- Literacy skills such as plurals, tense and prediction

Independent (Formal Pathway)

- Understanding and communication in line with peers
- Effective interaction across contexts
- Confident repair of communication breakdowns

Learners across all pathways can make progress within this continuum, and progress is celebrated in all its forms, including **small-step achievements**.

Whole-School Vocabulary Development

A **Word of the Week** approach reinforces vocabulary consistently across school. This is modelled:

- in core lessons
- in the Emergent Hub
- across pastoral sessions
- throughout the school day
- during assemblies
- on display boards

This supports repeated exposure, generalisation and application of new language for all learners, with adaptations for **sensory, emergent and non-speaking** pupils.

Curriculum Links

Literacy - AAC supports phonics, reading, sound awareness, speaking & listening, responding to questions and participating in language-rich activities—with **multimodal access routes** for non-speaking learners.

Numeracy -AAC supports vocabulary for number, shape, measurement, pattern, symmetry, ratio, problem-solving and instruction following.

PSHE / RSHE - AAC enables pupils to communicate feelings, choices, safety decisions and relationship-based discussions meaningfully and safely.

	Vocational Education / Life Skills - AAC supports functional communication in work-related tasks, following instructions, giving information and participating in routines.								
	Humanities - AAC supports understanding of people, places, events, chronology and cultural contexts through accessible representational methods.								
	Computing / ICT - Pupils access AAC-specific and assistive technologies such as Proloquo2Go, Clicker, Switch It, SimpleSet, switch-accessible content, Cause-and-Effect Software and alternative access tools, ensuring digital inclusion for all.								
	Key Strands - Dynamic AAC Goals Grid-2 (key strands are based on projections of future opportunities, needs, constraints, and capabilities resulting from instruction within those competencies (Buekelman & Miranda, 2005)).								
	Understanding		Expression		Social interaction		Literacy skills	other	
Links to (list in each column)									
Reading		Maths		SMSC + British Values		Character Education		British Values	Other (if appropriate)
Reading – Vocabulary to Support Communication & AAC Reading activities across the curriculum are strengthened through targeted vocabulary teaching and accessible AAC modelling. Communication is supported through: Researching cultural context and the work of artists, designers and makers , using AAC to explore and describe influences, styles, and artistic movements. Developing knowledge of techniques and processes , supported through clear visual instructions, step-by-step modelling, and symbol-supported vocabulary. Following instructions , using AAC symbols, visual schedules, and simplified written/digital prompts to support understanding. Learning and applying key subject-specific vocabulary , modelled consistently via core boards, communication books, Proloquo2Go, and classroom displays.		AAC helps students access maths through repetition, modelling, and differentiated vocabulary support. Key terms include: Shape Measurement Ratio Perspective Pattern Symmetry These terms are modelled using symbols, objects, hands-on AAC-supported tasks, and teacher modelling to enable full participation and understanding.		SMSC + British Values – Vocabulary & Communication Support Communication and AAC enrich SMSC by enabling students to articulate reflections, explore identity, and build connections. Learning focuses on: Historical and contemporary contexts , including discussion of diverse cultural traditions in visual arts. The cultural and heritage importance of art across global cultures , supported through accessible vocabulary, objects, photos, and multimedia. Exploring personal identity and the identities of others , including faith, gender, and race, through AAC-supported discussion, symbol-based reflection, and visual storytelling. Developing curiosity about		AAC supports pupils to develop personal qualities and communication skills that help them engage positively with others: Enjoyment of learning new skills , supported by expressive AAC vocabulary (e.g., “I like...”, “I want to try...”) Sharing learning experiences with others , using AAC for turn-taking, commenting, seeking help, and giving peer feedback. Working collaboratively , supported through communication boards for group tasks. Valuing the work of others , with scaffolded language for praise and peer reflection. Supporting peers through shared learning , modelling key phrases with AAC such as “Can I help?” or “Good idea!”. Developing resilience , taking risks with new techniques or tools, and reviewing their work using structured feedback vocabulary. Communicating ideas clearly to staff and other learners using signs, symbols, speech, or AAC systems. Respecting the work, traditions, and values of		AAC supports pupils to engage meaningfully with the core British Values through accessible vocabulary, structured discussion tools, and visual prompts: Contributing to society and the community through creating and sharing visual art. Developing understanding of others’ beliefs and values , supported by scaffolds for respectful dialogue. Exploring right and wrong through issue-based or narrative-led art projects (e.g., protest art, identity, equality). Developing mutual respect , particularly through collaborative projects, peer critique, and celebrating others’ achievements.	Use of communication apps , such as Proloquo2Go, SimpleSet, or switch-accessible AAC tools. Assistive Technology (AT) to support access, such as eye-gaze systems, alternative input devices, and communication software. Subject-specific software , adapted where necessary with symbols, simplified interfaces, or scaffolded verbal prompts.)

	Using storytelling as a learning tool, helping pupils create meaningful links between visual practice, personal experience, and wider societal or cultural contexts. (e.g., using narrative AAC boards, sequencing symbols, or expressive storytelling through signs, symbols, and digital AAC.)		the wider world and gaining confidence to connect with others in and beyond school. Building spiritual, social and cultural understanding, supported through structured AAC prompts, scaffolded conversation tools, and visual support.	others, linked to discussions on the cultural significance of art in diverse societies.		
	Core word of week Overview					
	Autumn		Spring		Summer	
	Own, touch, hit, hold, her, him, choose, shop, now, ready, to, with, push, pull, same, different, top, bottom, some, all		Early, late, agree/yes, disagree/no, stay, leave, hide, find, full, empty, pick, grow, follow, around, fall, over, under, throw		Few, many, below, above, though, comfortable, uncomfortable, near, far, small, large, us, had, meet, went, outside, inside, next to, hear	
I M P A C T	Impact Statement – Communication & AAC The effective implementation of Communication and AAC at Ravenscliffe results in learners who are confident, active and empowered communicators . Our consistent Total Communication Environment enables pupils to build independence, express themselves meaningfully and engage fully in learning, social interactions and the wider community. Communication becomes a tool for learning, wellbeing, identity and participation . Frequent, purposeful communication opportunities across lessons, routines, social times and community experiences ensure that pupils learn through varied, motivating and authentic interactions . Through daily modelling , access to AAC systems, and exposure to a rich communication environment , learners develop the skills needed to understand others, make choices, initiate communication and share their ideas with increasing independence. Assessment Assessment in Communication & AAC takes place continuously across all pathways . Staff use high-quality observations, modelling responses and targeted prompts to gather formative information throughout each school day. These assessments guide lesson planning, resource adaptation and individualised communication support. Learners using dedicated AAC systems are assessed using the school AAC framework, aligned with the DAGG-2 Ability Level Continuum . Progress is recorded through: • EHCP outcomes • Evidence for Learning (EfL) • The AAC user assessment pathway • Tracking movement across Understanding, Expression, Social Interaction, Literacy and Operational/Access skills					

For learners who do not require a dedicated AAC device, communication development is assessed through:

- **Formal & Semi-Formal pathways:** EFL English progression + EHCP outcomes
- **Emergent pathway:** Emergent Communication progression
- **Sensory pathway:** Routes for Learning

Teachers combine formative assessment with recorded evidence such as **photographs, videos, symbol-supported work, AAC transcripts/logs and communication samples**. This ensures that progress is meaningfully captured **for all learners**, including those who do not perform well in traditional assessment conditions.

Progress Across Pathways

Across all communication pathways, pupils demonstrate **measurable progress**:

Sensory / Routes for Learning

- Increased awareness of others and the environment
- Improved cause-and-effect, early interaction and regulation skills

Emergent Communicators

- Greater use of symbols, gestures and objects
- Increased intentional communication and early initiation

Semi-Formal Pathway

- Use of combinations of speech, signs, symbols and AAC systems
- Growth in vocabulary, functional language and literacy-linked communication

Formal Pathway

- Communicating across a broad range of topics
- Improved narrative skills, independence and repair strategies

Inclusion

- **Inclusive assessment:** Every learner, including **non-speaking, sensory and emergent** pupils, can evidence progress through **multimodal formats**—photos, brief videos, AAC utterance logs/transcripts, symbol selections/exchanges, signing/BSL, object interaction, sensory response and **practical demonstration**—recorded on **EFL** with notes on **communication mode** and **level of prompting**.
- **Accessible progress measures:** Progress is recognised from each pupil's **starting point and pathway**; **academic, sensory, experiential and communicative** achievements are **valued and celebrated**.
- **Equitable participation:** All learners access **communication-rich experiences** with **reasonable adjustments**—core boards, signing/BSL, visuals/symbols, objects of reference, sensory supports, aided language input, partner-assisted scanning—so that **every pupil can engage meaningfully** in learning and school life.
- **Diverse demonstrations of understanding:** Spoken language **and** signs/symbols, AAC device output, eye-gaze, facial expression, body movement, object manipulation and **independent or supported action** are accepted as valid evidence of learning.
- **From inclusion to independence:** Pupils apply communication to **everyday life**—making choices, requesting help, self-advocating, regulating emotions and navigating new people and places.

Accreditation and Extended Opportunities

	Where appropriate, pupils are supported to use their AAC systems within wider curriculum experiences, community visits, life-skills sessions and events. Opportunities such as enterprise projects, enrichment days and cross-curricular themes allow pupils to use communication in meaningful, real-world contexts. Family feedback indicates strengthened communication at home, with increased use of AAC devices, communication books, signing and symbols across daily routines. Overall Achievement By fulfilling our Intent and Implementation aims, we expect all pupils to develop: • increased confidence and motivation in communication • the ability to express themselves across contexts • strengthened independence and self-advocacy • improved social interaction and emotional wellbeing • communication skills that support them into adulthood and future pathways Ravenscliffe students leave school as more confident, capable communicators who participate fully in their communities and make meaningful connections with others.
Leadership and review	Leadership and Review – Communication & AAC Leadership of Communication & AAC Zoe Pardoe is the AAC and Communication Subject Lead and takes overall responsibility for the implementation of all aspects of this document. Zoe has extensive experience leading communication and AAC provision across Ravenscliffe and works closely with teaching staff, the SEND team and external professionals to ensure a consistent, inclusive Total Communication approach across the school. The AAC and Communication Subject Lead reports regularly to the Assistant Headteacher to review all aspects of this document alongside the AAC Development Plan and relevant priorities within the School Development Plan. Communication and AAC are recognised as whole-school priorities and are embedded across all pathways, curriculum areas and daily routines. Zoe is supported by staff across the school who contribute to the implementation of Communication and AAC through classroom practice, modelling, assessment and resource development. Teaching staff take on shared responsibilities throughout the year to support the communication curriculum, including implementation of the Total Communication Environment, use of core vocabulary and AAC systems, and embedding communication opportunities across lessons and routines. Curriculum Review This Communication and AAC curriculum structure reflects current best practice and continues to evolve in response to pupil need, assessment outcomes and staff feedback within the RHS environment. Regular reviews take place through professional dialogue, monitoring activities and meetings with senior leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of provision across all pathways. Formal review of communication pathways, assessment frameworks, schemes of learning and supporting resources takes place annually. Findings from these reviews inform refinements to curriculum delivery, assessment approaches and access arrangements to ensure Communication and AAC remain responsive, inclusive and effective. Development Plan The AAC Development Plan is a working document that outlines key priorities for Communication and AAC across the academic year and links directly to the School Development Plan and SEND priorities. It

	identifies key actions, responsibilities, timescales and success criteria, and is reviewed regularly with the Assistant Headteacher to monitor progress and impact. Supporting Staff Regular professional dialogue, team discussions and informal support ensure that staff are confident and supported in delivering high-quality Communication and AAC provision. Ongoing CPD focuses on Total Communication, AAC modelling, assessment and inclusive practice, with additional training provided as required to meet pupil needs. All teachers at Ravenscliffe are supported through regular lesson observations by SLT and peer support. Communication and AAC practice is monitored through informal drop-ins, learning walks and planned observations with a communication focus. Constructive feedback supports the development of good practice and ensures that the key aspects of Communication and AAC Intent, Implementation and Impact are consistently delivered. Classroom observations and classroom AAC support also take place during the academic year, providing evidence that communication opportunities, AAC use and assessment approaches align with this document and with whole-school policies for recording progress and collecting high-quality evidence on Evidence for Learning. Moderation of communication evidence and assessment supports shared understanding of progression across pathways, including sensory, emergent, semi-formal and formal communicators. This ensures that pupils are assessed fairly, accurately and consistently, including those using AAC or alternative communication methods Supporting Communication & AAC Leadership The AAC and Communication Subject Lead meets regularly with the Assistant Headteacher to review progress against the AAC Development Plan and wider school priorities. The Subject Lead also works closely with Speech and Language Therapy and external professionals to ensure practice remains evidence-based and aligned with current guidance. Opportunities to engage with wider professional networks and research-informed practice support ongoing development of Communication and AAC provision, ensuring Ravenscliffe continues to deliver a high-quality, inclusive communication curriculum for all learners
Linked documents	This document should be read in conjunction with the Whole School Curriculum and Assessment Policy. Other documents that can be read for further information with specific relation to Communication and AAC: • School Development Plan • AAC Development Plan • Schemes of learning • All Subjects 3i documents • AAC Curriculum Overview supporting documents (Appendix A, B & C) • All schools schemes of learning
date	10 th March 2026
Author:	Z Pardoe – AAC and communication subject lead

Reviews by:	D.Pardoe – Assistant Headteacher
Next review	

Rationale for Using the DAGG-2 and Research-Based AAC Approaches (with assessment roles)

At Ravenscliffe High School, we use the Dynamic AAC Goals Grid-2 (DAGG-2) as part of our assessment and planning because it provides a structured, research-informed framework for understanding the communication abilities of pupils who use AAC systems. The DAGG-2 enables us to assess learners across the key components of communicative competence—understanding, expression, social interaction, literacy, and operational skills—offering a clear developmental pathway that supports meaningful progress. Assessments are led by the school **AAC Specialist** and are **collaboratively supported by the wider AAC team**, including **Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), Occupational Therapy (OT), class teachers, parents/carers, students themselves, peers/siblings, and IT departments**, ensuring a holistic, person-centred view that reflects real communication across settings. Embedding research-driven approaches, such as the DAGG-2, is essential in an AAC-rich school, as it ensures that teaching, intervention and target-setting are informed by the latest knowledge about how AAC users learn, develop independence and achieve communicative competence. This approach strengthens the quality of our provision, supports more accurate identification of next steps, and ensures that every pupil receives a personalised communication plan grounded in proven, effective strategies.

<https://download.mytobiidynavox.com/MyTobiiDynavox/dagg%20%20-%20printable.pdf>

Ability Level Continuum*

Use this guide to help provide insight to current and potential target skills and strengths. Mark the statements that best describes an individual's observable communication behaviors. You may not check all of the boxes in any skill area. You may also find that you check boxes in more than one Ability Level.

Ability Level 1: Emergent		Ability Level 2: Emergent Transitional	
Understanding	☐ Limited or no understanding that symbols (e.g., pictures, words) represent ideas. ☐ Pictures may or may not help increase understanding and expression. ☐ Difficult to determine how much he/she understands verbally.	Understanding	☐ Responds to common gestures (e.g., come here, go away, greetings). ☐ Shows understanding of the use of common objects. ☐ Pictures seem to help increase both understanding and expression. ☐ May be starting to follow simple directions within familiar routines and activities.
Expression	☐ May communicate most successfully using facial expression, body language, gestures, and/or behavior (either socially appropriate or challenging). ☐ May indicate acceptance (e.g., smile) or rejection (e.g., turn away) but does not reliably answer other yes/no questions. ☐ May desire or try to communicate in familiar and motivating activities. ☐ Requires help from communication partner to communicate successfully (e.g., narrowing choices, interpreting gestures/body language/behavior). ☐ Sensory behavior is very important for calming (e.g., rocking, mouthing objects) and determining likes and dislikes.	Expression	☐ Understands symbols (e.g., objects, pictures) for basic, common or concrete items. ☐ Starting to use clear and simple symbols (including objects, photographs and picture symbols) in motivating situations or favorite activities. ☐ If using picture symbols, he/she will use one picture at a time to communicate messages. ☐ May use gestures, body language, facial expression or behavior intentionally to communicate (e.g., pointing, showing, giving); however, reliability varies from day to day or activity to activity.
Social Interaction	☐ Reacts to familiar people and/or motivating activities. ☐ Takes turns in familiar and motivating routines (e.g., "high five" or when someone spreads arms to receive a hug). ☐ May respond to close physical interaction by looking, smiling, or reaching.	Social Interaction	☐ Shows clear preference for certain objects, activities, and people. ☐ May be starting to show some interest in social interactions, especially in specific situations. ☐ May not use symbols to interact socially.
Literacy Skills	☐ May not be interested in reading or book activities.	Literacy Skills	☐ May demonstrate a beginning interest in participating in shared reading and/or is beginning to engage with books more independently. ☐ May be able to identify own name and a few other frequently seen words.
Other	☐ Performance with forms of AAC may be inconsistent. ☐ Benefits from help from his/her communication partner as skills are developing.	Other	☐ Performance with forms of AAC may be inconsistent. ☐ Benefits from help from his/her communication partner as skills are developing.

Ability Level Continuum

Ability Level 3: Context-Dependent		Ability Level 4: Transitional Independent	
Understanding	☐ Understands photographs or picture symbols representing objects, common actions (e.g., run, paint, eat), people or situations. ☐ Starting to understand more abstract picture symbols (e.g., think, big, hot, few). ☐ Follows simple instructions in both familiar and unfamiliar routines. ☐ Understands and follows general conversations.	Understanding	☐ Understands conversations as well as same age peers. ☐ Follows simple to complex directions given verbally.
Expression	☐ Uses a combination of communication methods to express messages (e.g., gestures/pointing, symbols, speech/vocalizations, and device). ☐ Uses symbols and objects spontaneously to communicate basic needs and make a variety of requests. ☐ Beginning to use symbols to comment and/or ask questions with support. ☐ Communicates best in routines, about familiar topics, and with familiar communication partners. ☐ Beginning to combine two or more symbols to create longer messages (e.g., uses carrier phrases "I want; I like; I see ____").	Expression	☐ Communicates about a broad range of topics with both familiar and unfamiliar communication partners. ☐ Consistently combines 2 or more symbols to create longer, more complex and/or an increased variety of messages for different communicative functions (e.g., comments, questions, or sharing information). ☐ Uses a wider variety of vocabulary or communication tools within his/her communication device.
Social Interaction	☐ Initiates conversations and social interactions with familiar communication partners. ☐ Benefits from help to take additional turns in conversation. ☐ Answers routine questions appropriately with familiar communication partners.	Social Interaction	☐ Uses socially appropriate comments/questions to initiate with familiar communication partners. ☐ Appropriately answers routine questions with a variety of communication partners.
Literacy Skills	☐ Literacy skills growing to include: identifying letters of the alphabet, connecting some letters with corresponding sounds, understanding word boundaries, reading a small number of high frequency sight words, reading and writing name, beginning to spell words but not necessarily with conventional spelling.	Literacy Skills	☐ Literacy skills growing to include: increased letter-sound awareness, additional sight words, conventional spelling of simple words; adding word endings as appropriate (e.g., past tense "ed", plural "s" or "ing), and solid understanding of the connection between spoken words and print. ☐ May be beginning to utilize word prediction with symbol support. ☐ Reads printed material that is somewhat below an age-appropriate level.
Other	☐ May continue to benefit from the help of his/her communication partner to communicate successfully, especially when the topic, partner or environment is unfamiliar. ☐ Able to use simple strategies (e.g., repeat) to repair communication when not understood with support from the communication partner.	Other	☐ Strong "mental mapping" of where things are in his/her device including navigational symbols. ☐ Able to use a variety of strategies to repair communication when not understood; and, in some cases, with the support of communication partners. ☐ Programs content in the communication device when it's desired or missing given support as needed (e.g., add favorite foods in Word List food category).

Ability Level Continuum

Ability Level 5: Independent	
Understanding	☐ Understands communication and directions the same as same-age peers.
Expression	☐ Combines single words, spelling and phrases together to communicate about a variety of subjects as others would at his/her age. ☐ Able to expand on a thought in conversation.
Social Interaction	☐ Social interaction skills, environments, and activities are similar to other of his/her age.
Literacy Skills	☐ Literacy abilities are on par with same-age peers.
Other	☐ Able to use various strategies to repair communication when he/she is not understood. ☐ Able to utilize rate enhancement features of the device (e.g., word prediction) though he/she may not choose to do so. ☐ Able to program desired content (e.g., personal narratives, etc.) into device.

Rationale for Research-Based AAC Practices at Ravenscliffe High School

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At Ravenscliffe High School, all AAC assessment, intervention and decision-making are grounded in **research-based practice to ensure every learner receives the most effective, ethical and evidence-informed** support. We use structured tools such as the **Dynamic AAC Goals Grid-2 (DAGG-2)** because research repeatedly demonstrates that high-quality AAC provision must address the full range of communicative competencies—**understanding, expression, social interaction, literacy and operational access skills**. This aligns with established AAC literature showing that communicative competence is multidimensional and requires systematic, developmentally-sequenced teaching (Light, 1997; van der Meer & Rispoli, 2010).

Our commitment to a **Total Communication Approach (TCA)**—including signing, visual supports, objects of reference, core vocabulary boards, multimodal modelling and high-tech AAC—is also firmly grounded in evidence. Systematic reviews show that AAC users achieve the greatest progress when communication is supported across **multiple modalities**, enabling learners to combine strengths (e.g., visual processing, motor patterns, symbolic understanding) while reducing barriers caused by motor, processing, or expressive limitations (Baxter et al., 2012; Mirenda, 2003). Research also indicates that AAC enhances communicative effectiveness, reduces challenging behaviours, improves social participation, and increases independence (Ronski & Sevcik, 1997; Durand, 1999).

The use of **speech-generating devices and tablet-based AAC** (such as iPads) is supported by comparative research demonstrating that communication behaviours often **increase or remain consistent** when learners access high-tech systems. In several studies, children with autism and developmental disabilities demonstrated greater engagement, faster communication and in some cases clear preference for tablet-based AAC over picture-exchange systems (Flores et al., 2012). These findings reinforce the importance of personalised AAC selection, explicit teaching and consistent modelling.

AAC also plays a critical role in **social development, emotional wellbeing and friendship formation**. Research exploring friendships involving AAC users highlights the importance of accessible communication systems, inclusive peers and supportive adults; children who use AAC report richer relationships and increased belonging when communication access is embedded throughout school life (Anderson, Balandin & Clendon, 2011). These findings support our whole-school ethos of prioritising AAC not only for learning, but also for identity, wellbeing and participation.

Assessment at Ravenscliffe is led by the **School AAC Specialist** and supported collaboratively by **Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, teachers, IT staff, families, peers/siblings and pupils themselves**. This mirrors national findings that successful AAC outcomes depend on coordinated team-based assessment, family partnership, and ongoing support for communication partners (McNaughton et al., 2008; Communication Matters, 2013).

By embedding research-driven frameworks such as the DAGG-2, ensuring a whole-school Total Communication Approach, and grounding the entire AAC pathway in evidence-based practice, Ravenscliffe High School demonstrates its commitment to providing best-practice, research-informed **AAC provision**. This strengthens equity, consistency, and quality across the school and ensures that every learner has the opportunity to develop independence, confidence and lifelong communicative competence.

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Appendix C

Evidence for learning assessment for individuals without a dedicated AAC device

Sensory: Route for learning and EHCP see sensory 3i document

Emergent pathway: see emergent 31i document

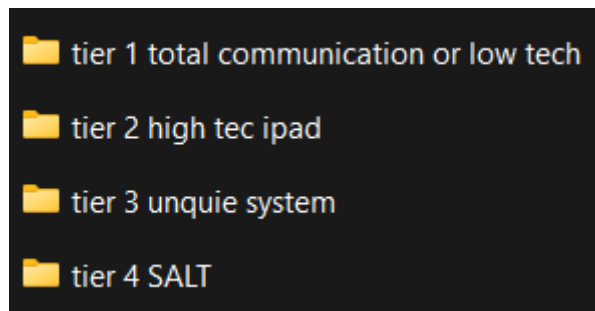
- Emergence communication – expression (speaking)
- Emergent communication – literacy skills (reading and writing)
- Emergent communication – social interaction
- Emergent communication – understanding (listening)

Semi-formal and formal pathways: see English 3i document

- English listening
- English reading
- English speaking
- English writing

Appendix D

X:\Student Care\AAC at RHS



Uses of the school shared driver to share key communication information and guidance with staff, teachers, with a focus on organic child-centred documentation such as 'my AAC communication passport' – supporting our students' communication across school and during transitional life moments.