



Bracken Hill School Communication Policy

Policy Type: Whole School

This policy is reviewed annually to ensure compliance with current regulations

Bracken Hill School

Communication Policy

Next Review Date: May 2027

1. Communication Commitment Statement

At Bracken Hill School, we believe every pupil has a voice. We are committed to recognising, valuing, and developing all forms of communication, ensuring every pupil is heard, understood, and able to participate fully in their world.

2. Introduction

This policy outlines the school's approach to communication for all pupils. Bracken Hill School is a specialist setting for pupils aged 4–19 with a range of communication and interaction needs. Communication underpins all aspects of learning, independence, relationships, and wellbeing. We adopt a Total Communication approach, ensuring all pupils have access to meaningful and functional communication throughout the school day.

We use an all-communication approach, recognising that pupils may use a range of communication methods and that these may change depending on context, environment, and level of regulation. Communication is embedded across all areas of school life, including teaching and learning, personal care, regulation, routines, and transitions.

3. Key Principles

- Communication is a fundamental right for all pupils
- All behaviour is recognised as a form of communication
- A neurodiversity-affirming approach underpins all practice
- We presume competence in every pupil
- Communication must be functional, meaningful, and generalised
- A multi-modal approach is essential
- Communication is embedded across all areas of the school day
- Consistency across staff, environments, and home is essential

Policy dated: May 2026

4. Aims

The school aims to:

- Provide a communication-enabling environment across the school
- Deliver individualised, multi-modal communication systems for all pupils
- Ensure all pupils always have access to their preferred communication method
- Develop communication skills that support independence, relationships, and future outcomes
- Embed communication across learning, care, and daily routines
- Work in partnership with families to support communication development
- Ensure staff are trained, confident, and consistent

5. Valuing and Celebrating Communication

Bracken Hill School recognises and celebrates all forms of communication as valid and meaningful.

Pupils may communicate through:

- Eye gaze, facial expression, and body movement
- Gesture and vocalisation
- Objects, photographs, and symbols
- Signing (e.g. Makaton)
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)
- Behaviour
- Spoken language

All communication attempts are acknowledged, responded to, and valued. Staff prioritise interaction and communicative intent over accuracy, ensuring pupils feel heard, understood, and respected.

6. Behaviour as Communication

The school recognises that behaviour is a form of communication, particularly where pupils are unable to express their needs in other ways.

Pupils may communicate through:

- Changes in engagement
- Repetitive behaviours
- Vocalisations
- Physical behaviours
- Emotional responses

Approach

Staff will:

- Seek to understand the underlying message of behaviour
- Consider sensory, emotional, communication, and environmental factors
- Support regulation before expecting communication
- Pupils are supported to develop alternative communication through:
- Modelling key language (e.g. help, stop, break)
- Providing appropriate communication systems
- Consistent routines and visual supports
- All responses are supportive, consistent, and non-punitive.

7. Pupil Communication Information (School Passports)

Each pupil at Bracken Hill School has a School Passport, which contains key information to support staff in understanding and meeting their needs. Within this, a dedicated section titled “How to Communicate with Me” outlines:

The pupil’s preferred methods of communication

- How communication is typically presented (e.g. speech, symbols, AAC, signing)
- The level of language used (e.g. single words, short phrases, full sentences)
- Any visual or multi-modal supports required alongside communication
- How communication may vary depending on the pupil’s level of regulation

Some pupils may use multiple communication methods, and staff are expected to use professional judgement to select the most appropriate approach at any given time.

School Passports are:

- Accessible to all staff working with the pupil.
- Used consistently across the school day.
- Shared during transitions
- Reviewed annually or updated sooner if there is a significant change

This ensures communication is individualised, responsive, and embedded within daily practice.

8. Communication Across Curriculum Pathways

Communication is embedded across all pathways and is highly individualised.

8.1 Explorers Pathway

Focus:

Policy dated: May 2026

- Early communication and interaction
- Engagement and shared attention
- Cause and effect

Approaches include:

- Intensive Interaction
- Objects of reference
- Sensory experiences
- Core Word Programme
- Simple AAC and visual supports

8.2 Adventurers Pathway

Focus:

- Communication alongside early literacy
- Understanding and expressing needs

Approaches include:

- Phonics
- Symbols and visuals
- Makaton
- AAC

8.3 Pioneers Pathway

Focus:

- Oracy and communication for life
- Conversation and independence

Approaches include:

- Spoken language
- Phonics (where appropriate)
- AAC and visual supports

9. Core Word Programme

The Core Word Programme supports early functional communication within the Explorers pathway. Core words (e.g. go, stop, more, want, help) are consistently modelled by staff throughout the school day and embedded within routines, play, and motivating activities. These words are supported through a combination of symbols, signing, and speech to provide a multi-modal approach. The focus

Policy dated: May 2026

is on developing understanding before use, with repetition and meaningful experiences used to support engagement and communication development.

10. Phonics and Oracy in Communication Development

Phonics is used to support the development of communication by building listening and attention skills, developing sound awareness, and supporting vocabulary acquisition. Alongside this, oracy is a key focus, enabling pupils to express ideas and opinions, develop conversation skills, and engage in real-life communication. Both phonics and oracy are embedded across the school day to support communication in meaningful and functional contexts.

11. Communication Approaches

We use:

- Non-verbal communication
- Objects of reference
- Photos and symbols
- Makaton
- PECS
- AAC
- Visual supports

All approaches are personalised and accessible.

12. Communication Methods and Definitions

- Non-verbal communication: gesture, eye gaze, facial expression
- Objects of Reference: real objects representing meaning
- Symbols/Photos: visual supports for understanding
- Makaton: signs + speech + symbols
- PECS: exchanging pictures to communicate
- AAC: tools supporting/replacing speech
- Aided Language Boards: visual modelling tools

13. Communication Embedded Across the School Day

Communication is embedded in:

- Lessons
- Personal care
- Zones of Regulation

Policy dated: May 2026

- Play
- Visual timetables
- Transitions

14. Communication in Care and Regulation

Pupils are supported to:

- Express needs
- Make choices
- Communicate feelings
- Request support

15. Supporting Transitions

We use:

- Real photographs of the school
- Visual supports
- Consistent communication

16. Monitoring Communication

At Bracken Hill School, communication is monitored rather than formally assessed, recognising that communication development is highly individual and does not always follow a linear progression.

Monitoring is carried out through:

- Ongoing observations
- EHCP outcomes
- The Engagement Model (where appropriate)
- The school's tracking system (SOLAR)

The purpose of monitoring is to:

- Identify where pupils are in their communication development
- Ensure pupils have access to the most appropriate communication methods and systems
- Inform staff understanding of each pupil's communication needs
- Support the adaptation of teaching approaches, environments, and resources

Monitoring does not focus solely on measuring progress but instead provides a holistic understanding of each pupil's communication, allowing staff to respond effectively. Information gathered through monitoring is used to:

- Ensure communication systems are appropriate, personalised, and up to date

Policy dated: May 2026

- Identify when adjustments or additional support are required
- Support decision-making with Speech and Language Therapists (SALT)
- Inform EHCP reviews and next steps

This ensures communication provision is responsive, individualised, and effective.

17. External Professionals

We work with SALT to assess needs, provide strategies, and support staff.

18. Roles and Responsibilities

SLT: Monitor and support

Staff: Model and implement

Parents: Support and engage

19. Policy Implementation

Delivered through training, monitoring, and collaboration.