

Communication Access for all Students – a Tasmanian Experience



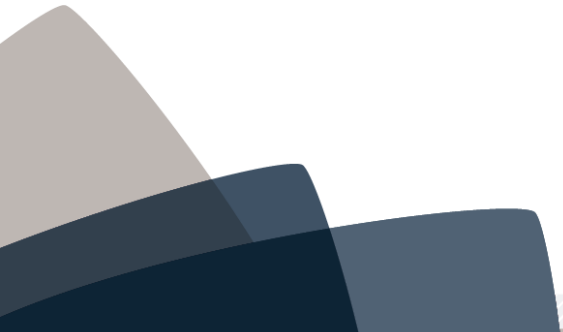
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To be able to communicate effectively is a basic human right.

It is essential to human relationships, learning, participation in life and sense of self.

The Department of Education is committed to ensuring each student's right to communication and genuine participation within their school communities.

Students with **complex communication needs** (CCN) have a right to a comprehensive communication system relevant to their individual requirements; to participate, access the curriculum, learn and achieve with equity.



WHAT IS AAC?

AAC stands for ***Augmentative and Alternative Communication***:

AAC is the term used for all communication that is not speech, but is used to enhance or to replace speech. An AAC system includes the whole combination of methods used for communication. For example, gestures, eye pointing, vocalisations and pointing to symbols.

(novita.org.au)

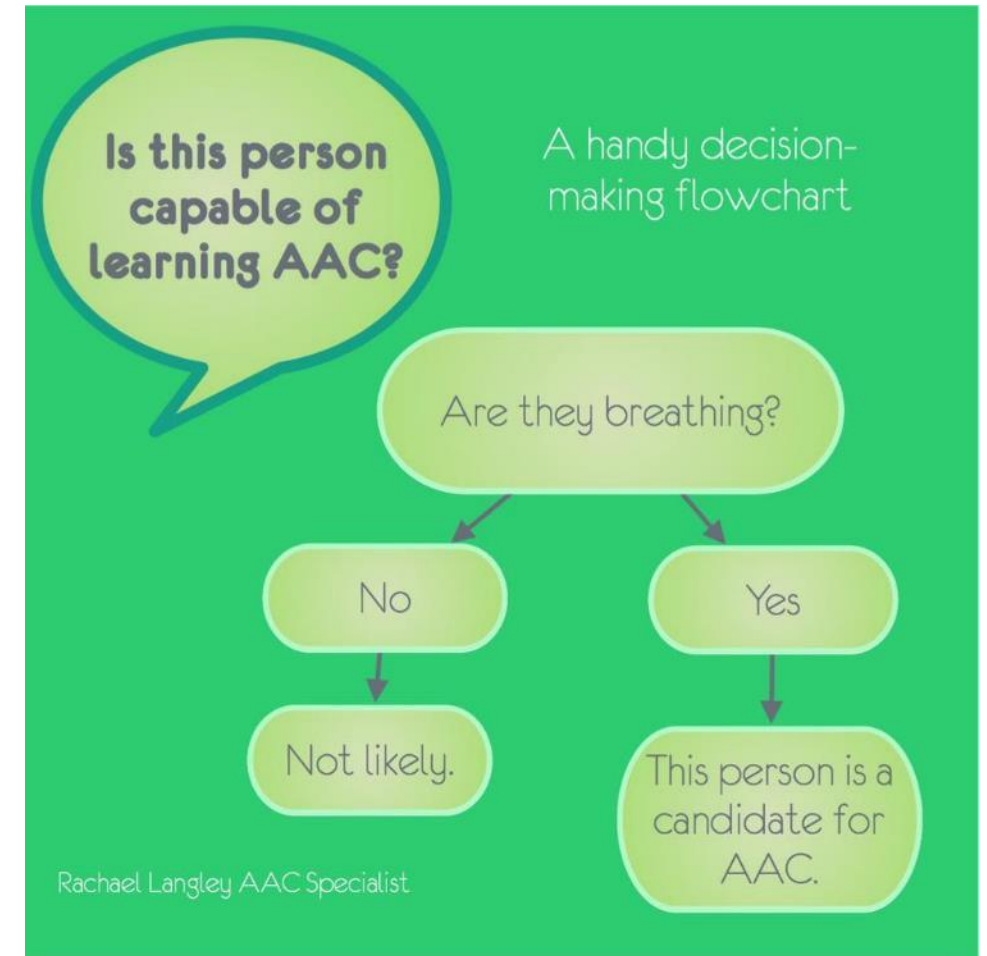
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ARE THERE ANY PRE-REQUISITE SKILLS?

Some common myths:

Before being introduced to AAC, students need to be able to:

- Be able to point
- Be able to match or identify pictures
- Be completely non-verbal




ALL STUDENTS NEED A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

All students have the right to communicate

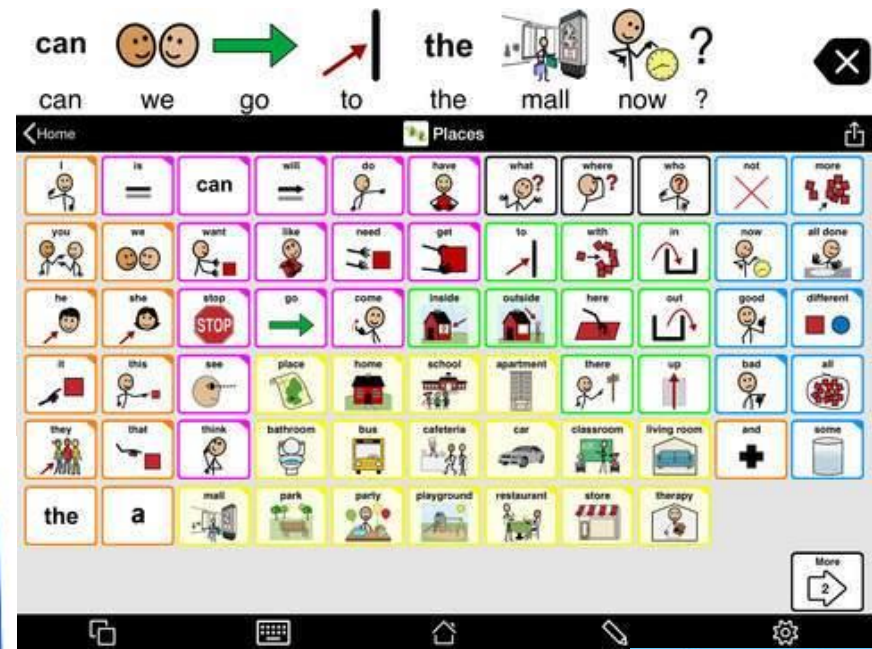
- What they want to say
- When they want to say it
- To whoever they want to say it to
- Wherever they want to say it
- However they want to say it

(Porter, 2007)

Students need a comprehensive communication system that gives them enough vocabulary for them to be able to do this

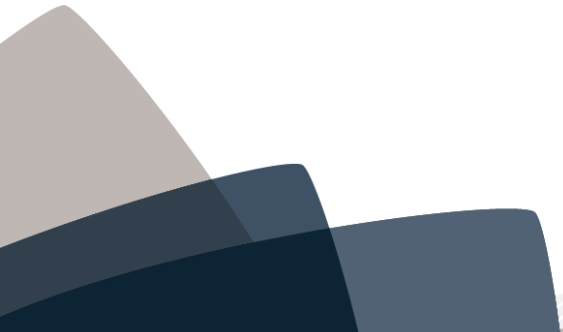
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WHAT DOES AAC LOOK LIKE?



THE LANDSCAPE IN DōETAS

- There are approximately 6000 students in Tasmanian government schools who have a defined disability and require educational adjustments
- A key objective of the Department's Strategic Plan (2018-21) is that 'Everyone is participating and engaged in learning and able to pursue life opportunities'
- This includes students who have a disability, and require an AAC system for communication
- The number of AAC users in DoE is increasing with an increased use and understanding of AAC and range of technologies in use



THE CATALYSTS

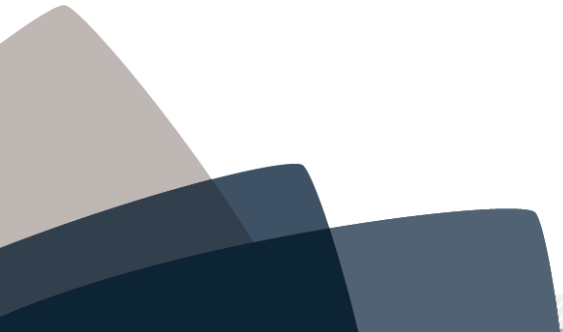
- “We don’t have time to do all that (AAC) because then he won’t have any chance to just sit and listen to the lesson”
High School TA
- “I didn’t use it (AAC) with him today as he did his table jobs so well”
Support School TA
- “The student doesn’t know how to use the device”
- “They keep getting out of the communication app and looking at YouTube”
- “We have a ‘no screen policy’ in our classroom”
- “She just throws it”
- “It’s so expensive, we keep it in the cupboard so it won’t get damaged”

THE GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

Students who cannot rely on speech to communicate require augmentative and alternative communication strategies to access and participate in the curriculum and meet their literacy needs, as well as their learning needs in other areas across the curriculum.

ACARA, Australian Curriculum

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/student-diversity/students-with-disability/> retrieved 5/5/2019



THE GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

- The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) (Melbourne Declaration) provides the policy framework for the Australian Curriculum. It includes two goals:
 - Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.
 - Goal 2: All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.
- Early Years Learning Framework, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009
- Disability Discrimination Act. Australian Government (1992)
- Disability Standards for Education. Australian Government (2005)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, Article 21 (b) – Accepting the right for freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information
- *Communication Bill of Rights* (National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities, 2016)

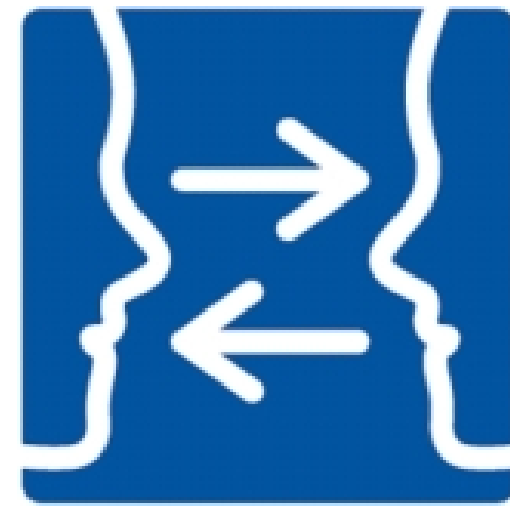
COMMUNICATION ACCESS

Communication Resource Centre, Scope, Victoria (2011)

“Communication Access is about communicating with people who do not use speech or have speech that is difficult to understand. It makes everyone in the community aware that they can play a role in removing communication barriers.”

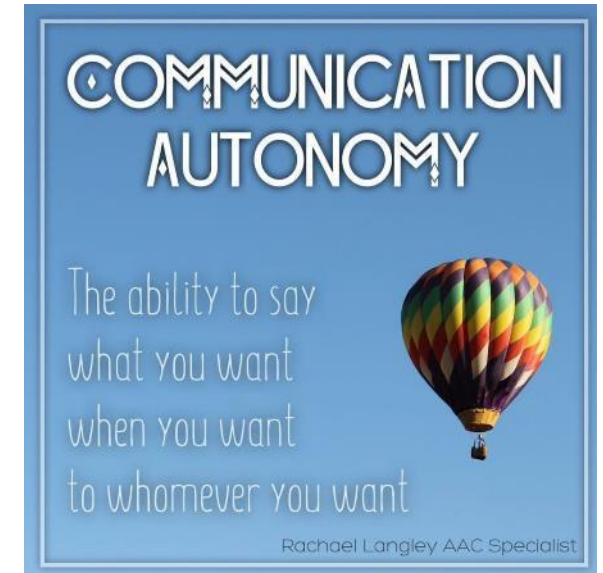
www.scopevic.org.au/index.php/site/whatweoffer/communicationresourcecentre/communicationaccess

“Communication is a two-way process. Both people need to take some responsibility for making the communication effective and successful.”



WHAT IS A SCHOOL'S ROLE?

- Schools have a responsibility to teach. Students have a right to learn. This requires communication input and output.
- Schools' obligations to meet the communication needs of their students goes beyond access to a communication system.
- It extends to teaching all students to learn to communicate more effectively.
- It extends to adjusting the learning and communication input and output modes to suit the comprehension and expression needs of the student.
- Sustaining these obligations requires the collective school community to value and prioritise communication autonomy.



Augmentative and Alternative Communication in Schools Policy

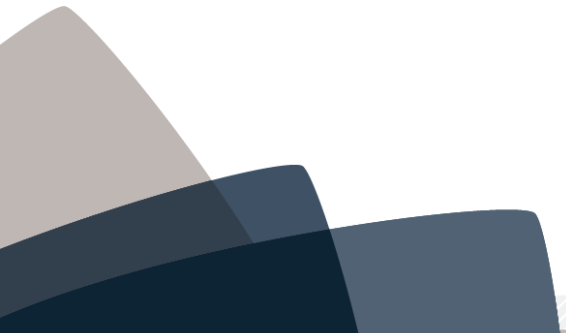
[https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Augmentative%20and%20Alternative%20Communication%20in%20Schools%20Policy%202018.](https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Augmentative%20and%20Alternative%20Communication%20in%20Schools%20Policy%202018.pdf)

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AAC POLICY IN TASMANIA

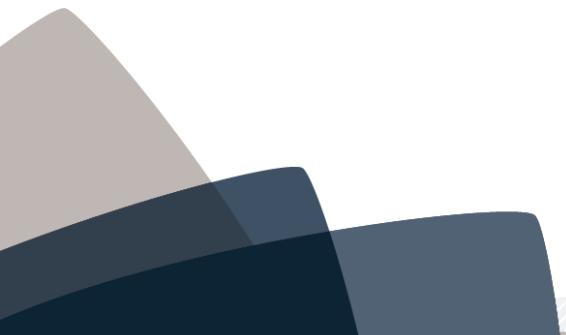
A Policy For All Doe Schools

Department of Education school communities will be supported to achieve a 'whole of school' standard of collaboration, shared responsibilities, inclusive curriculum and continuous improvement to develop communication competencies for students using Augmented and Alternative Communication (AAC).



I. LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP (STAFF, FAMILY, CONSULTANTS)

- Principal-led commitment and awareness of school's legal responsibility to communicate and educate in multiple modalities according to student need.
- Collaboration between school leadership team, Support Service, other specialists and families to develop student centred goals and learning plans.



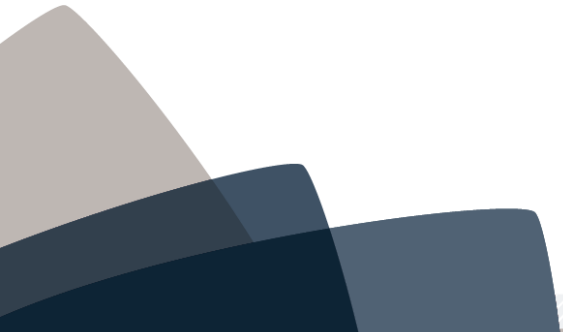
2. PROVISION OF AAC (WITHIN SCHOOL AND WITHIN SUPPORT SERVICE/OTHER SPECIALIST AGENCIES)

- Light technology AAC resources created within schools e.g. communication books, printables
- High technology AAC may be obtained through a combination of sources, including internal DoE resources (e.g. ICT grants) as well as external sources (e.g. National Disability Insurance Scheme, TasEquip, families self funding, service clubs, community fundraising)



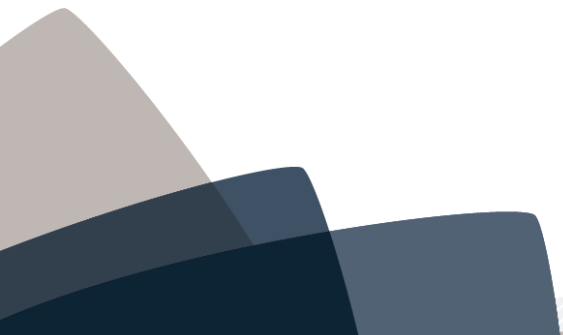
3. KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY TO USE AND SUPPORT AAC

- Developing team understanding of the purpose and application of the AAC system to meet individual needs. Attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of communication partners is critical to the success of AAC.
- Support from specialist staff to identify and implement the learning strategies associated with the AAC (including training and ongoing support of Communication Partners within the school environment)



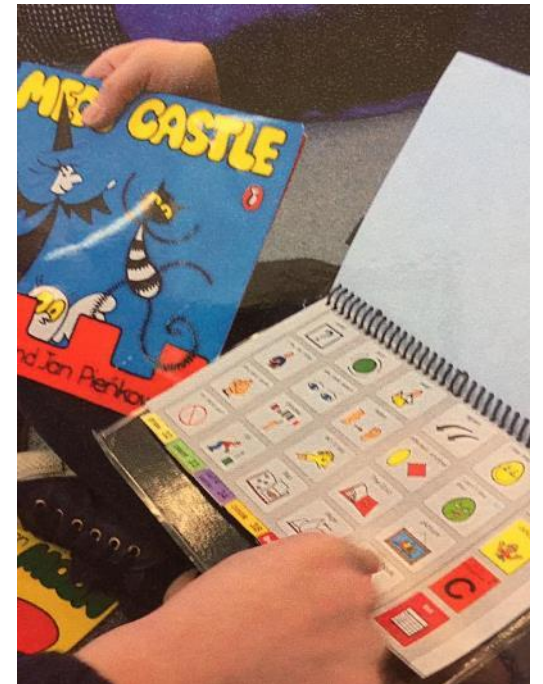
4. COLLECTIVE NATURAL USE OF AAC

- Raise collective awareness of language learning as incidental, unplanned experiences
- AAC is not a curriculum task; it facilitates **access** to the curriculum and fosters **social networks**
- Focus on the communication message, not the mode in which it is expressed



5. COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBLE CURRICULUM

- Access to the curriculum is a requirement for all students. A comprehensive AAC system facilitates this. Adjustments to the quantity, mode or complexity of information may be required. Multiple sensory inputs also require consideration according to student need e.g. visual, auditory, tactile, kinaesthetic, interactive, technology (light or high technology)
- Planning for a means of response/interaction for students using AAC in all learning experiences is essential.

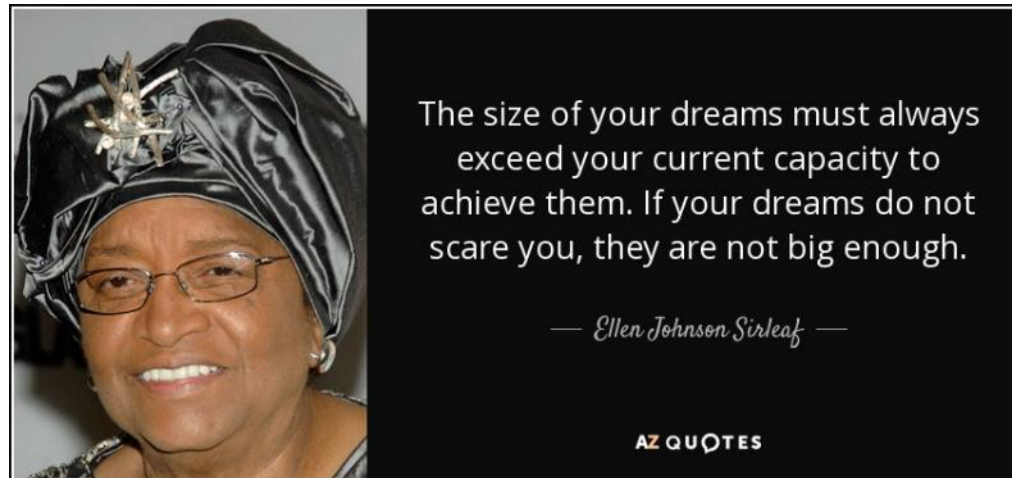


SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS

Acquisition of any language or communication system requires membership within a community of supportive people who are prepared to use, model, scaffold and value that communication method; and assume that the individual can be a competent communicator.

At a school and departmental level we are responsible for leading and reflecting wider community attitudes and expectations about the response to student diversity and inclusive practices.

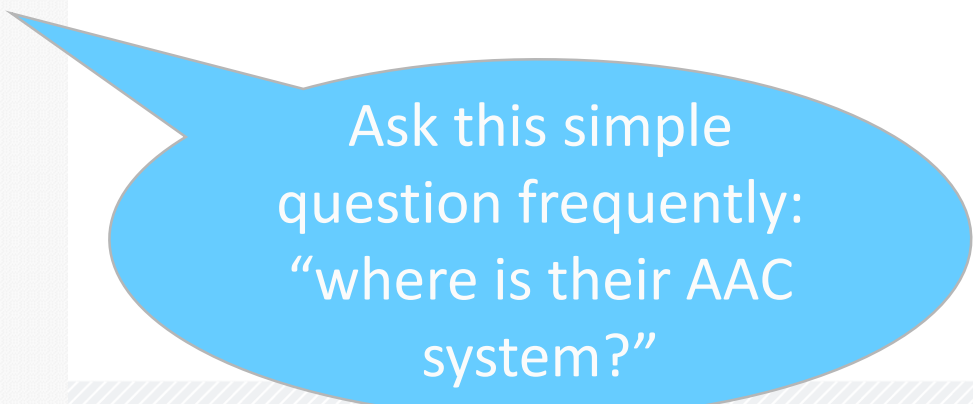
The responsibility for changing attitudes and responses to disability belongs to everyone.



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – ALL MEMBERS OF SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Collective responsibilities of all members of school communities **MUST**:

- Protect human rights, provide equal opportunities and presume competence
- Ensure every student with Complex Communication Needs (CCN) has access to a personalised and comprehensive AAC system or systems at all times
- Foster a community of users who competently use and value various modes of communication and employ effective AAC practices
- Participate in continual AAC knowledge and skill development (e.g. through formal or informal opportunities)
- Ensure genuine opportunities for use of the AAC system with peers, whole class and wider school community
- Utilise situational specific communication supports throughout the school as required
- Provide important school documents such as rules, newsletters and notices in a communication accessible format
- Share and celebrate communication and learning achievements.



Ask this simple question frequently:
“where is their AAC system?”

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Secretary and Deputy Secretaries
MUST:

- Ensure that 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.

The Director Student Support, Student Support Leaders and Manager Professional Support Staff **MUST:**

- Ensure all schools and colleges are familiar with, and implement this Policy.
- Ensure professional support staff are familiar with this Policy and can support principals and school staff to comply.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES - PRINCIPALS

Principals **MUST**:

- Foster and maintain a whole school culture of multi modal communication in the school
- Facilitate collaboration between all key stakeholders
- Maintain levels of resourcing to support implementation and intervention of AAC
- Provide opportunities for staff to access relevant professional learning as required; including shadowing
- Support staff via the PDP process to develop AAC knowledge and skills
- Model the use of AAC in formal and informal situations when interacting with the student.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – SENIOR STAFF and SUPPORT TEACHERS

Senior staff and support teachers **MUST**:

- Prioritise collaboration between all key stakeholders (including parents) particularly in Learning Plan development
- Coordinate the production/sourcing of required AAC systems in conjunction with the Speech Language Pathologist
- Coordinate relief for classroom teacher/TAs to attend meetings, PD, resource planning/production
- Ensure ongoing data collection, evaluation and evidence of school/student outcomes within their school
- Create and maintain specific practices and procedures that support AAC system use across all school settings in consultation with specialist staff (e.g. SLP, OT).

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Classroom teachers

MUST:

- Differentiate the curriculum for communication accessibility
- Plan for both teacher and teacher assistant interaction 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
- Engineer the classroom to create communication opportunities
- Develop/use visual supports as required.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – TEACHER ASSISTANTS

Teacher Assistants
MUST:

- Prepare/use visual supports as required in conjunction with class teacher and/or SLP
- Record evidence of learning and communication outcomes of students using AAC in conjunction with class teacher.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – SENIOR SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

DoE Senior Speech
Language Pathologist

MUST:

- Ensure that this policy and associated guidelines are implemented and adhered to by all speech pathology staff
- Ensure that all speech pathology staff are supported in this highly specialised area
- Provide access to resources, training, supervision and mentoring to enable speech pathologists to perform assessment and intervention for students who need AAC
- Ensure that school Principals are cognisant with this policy and associated guidelines and support its application in schools
- Provide opportunities for staff to access relevant professional learning as required; including shadowing
- Support staff via the PDP process to develop AAC knowledge and skills.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

DoE Speech Language Pathologist **MUST**:

- Collaborate with all stakeholders
- Contribute to the development of individual Learning Plans
- Collaborate with Senior SLP and/or SLP with specialist experience in AAC if required
- Assess; trial; prescribe; and support implementation of communication systems and strategies as appropriate
- Write comprehensive assessment reports with recommendations for classroom based adjustments
- Design an intervention plan as part of the Learning Plan process
- Participate in and/or deliver training on AAC
- Record and share outcomes and evidence of Learning Plan for continual improvement of the intervention plan and the multi modal communication environment guided by research and evidence informed practice.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES - LEARNERS

Learners **MUST**:

- 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.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – PARENTS

Parents/Carers **MUST**:

- Be invited to participate in informed decision making and planning about AAC supports for their children and young people
- Be invited to participate in AAC knowledge and skills development activities with school staff
- Be supported to use AAC at home and in the community.

SCHOOL FOCUSSED RESOURCES TO DEVELOP CAPACITY TO MEET POLICY OBJECTIVES

School Assessment Scale for Communication Access (SASCA)

Evaluating opportunity and access to AAC in the school community



Focus Area		1. Beginning (0-20%)	2. Developing (21-40%)	3. Emerging (41-60%)	4. Consolidating (61-80%)	5. Established (81-100%)	Evidence
Partnership and Leadership	a. Does the principal/leader communicate using AAC and encourage communication using AAC within the school community?						
	b. Do collaborative meetings involving specialists, school team, family and other relevant people occur regularly to evaluate and plan for student communication development?						
	c. Do the students have SMART goal/s to further develop communicative competencies in their Learning Plan?						
	d. Were these goals co-developed?						
	e. Are all team members aware of and recording progress toward these goals?						
	f. Do practices/systems exist to provide new or relief staff with information and opportunities to learn about the students' AAC tools and strategies before or during their work?						
	g. Does AAC training and handover occur in planning for student transitions to new staff/class/school?						
	h. Is AAC practice incorporated in the School Improvement Plan or school policies?						
Sub-total							

Focus Area		1. Beginning (0-20%)	2. Developing (21-40%)	3. Emerging (41-60%)	4. Consolidating (61-80%)	5. Established (81-100%)	Evidence
Provision of AAC	a. Have all students who may require AAC participated in a communication focussed assessment?						
	b. Do all students who require AAC have a comprehensive, personalised AAC system?						
	c. What proportion of students using AAC have access to both light and high technology AAC systems?						
	d. Are sufficient AAC systems available for adult partners to use and model with?						
	e. Are environment specific AAC tools/displays available within the school setting e.g. activity displays, schedules?						
	f. Is there a mechanism to plan and create specific AAC tools as required e.g. expertise, materials, software?						
Sub-total							



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