

Adaptive, Augmentative Communication (AAC) Options

Overview

Our School honours and respects the range of preferred and more useful communication option or options that work best for each student. This means that through support from the Department and School-funded Speech language pathologist, Kirsty Chen, teachers, aides and other members of our wider school community are trained and assisted to interact and communicate with all students with efficacy.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to the methods, systems, and tools used to support or replace spoken or written language for individuals with complex communication needs. In a special school setting, AAC enables students with disabilities to express themselves, interact socially, participate in the curriculum, and demonstrate their understanding and learning.

- AAC can be low-tech, mid-tech, or high-tech, and must always be person-centred, age-appropriate, and integrated meaningfully into the student's daily environments.

These are our Guiding Principles regarding AAC:

- Every student can communicate: All students, regardless of disability, have the right to communicate.
- Presume competence: Always assume a student has the potential to learn and communicate.
- Multimodal communication: Encourage the use of all available means—speech, signs, gestures, visuals, technology—together.
- Functional and meaningful: Communication should serve real purposes in students' lives—greeting, requesting, expressing opinions, etc.
- Consistency and modelling: Staff must consistently model AAC strategies across settings to build familiarity and competence.

Types of AAC Tools

Low-Tech Options

- Require no electricity; they are cost-effective and easily customisable:
- Communication boards/books: Symbol grids (e.g., Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display—PODD books)
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS): Uses picture cards for requesting and commenting
- Core vocabulary boards: Focus on frequently used words to build generative language
- Visual schedules and timetables: Aid comprehension and reduce anxiety
- Choice cards and topic boards: For quick access to relevant vocabulary in specific contexts
- Sign language and key word signing (e.g., Auslan, Makaton): Useful for supporting expressive language and auditory memory

Mid-Tech Options

- Devices with recorded speech or limited programming:
- Single-message devices e.g., BIGmack Record a single spoken message
- Step-by-step communicators: Sequence of recorded messages
- Voice output switches: Used for greetings or simple participation in routines
- GoTalk devices: Customisable voice output with multiple messages

High-Tech Options

- Electronic systems with dynamic displays, often using speech-generating devices:
- Tablet-based AAC apps:
- Proloquo2Go
- LAMP Words for Life
- TD Snap
- Grid for iPad
- Dedicated speech-generating devices (SGDs):
- NovaChat
- Accent devices with NuVoice
- Eye-gaze systems: Enable access through eye movement
- Touchscreen communication software: Customisable symbol-based or text-to-speech programs