



Holy Family School For the Deaf

Language and Communication Policy

Our mission, in co-operation with our wider school community and influenced by the Christian values of Truth, Justice and Peace, is to create a safe and cherishing environment which meets the language, communication and educational needs of each of our students. Holy Family School for the Deaf will endeavour to provide the best possible education, to encourage our students to strive and reach their full potential, physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually.

Language and Communication Policy Holy Family School for the Deaf

This policy will encompass the following:

- Holy Family School for the Deaf mission statement
- Communication modalities
- Language development - A whole school approach
- Guidelines for respectful communication
- Communicating information in school to staff, parents/guardians and students
- Appendices

Our Language and Communication Mission

In Holy Family School for the Deaf our mission is to create a cherishing environment which meets the unique communication and language needs of our students and those of our staff.

An inclusive school

Holy Family School for the Deaf is committed to achieving a fully inclusive school community. Strong partnerships between Deaf/Hard of Hearing pupils, Hearing pupils, staff, parents/guardians and other stakeholders are central to this goal. We aim to create an environment of respect and acceptance so that all members of our school community can learn and work together without barriers.

Communication

Communication is *“the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information”*¹

Communication is transferring information from one place to another place or from one person to another person. Communication is interpersonal. Communication is at the centre of how people interact. It is through good communication that people’s rights, needs and desires are met.

In the context of our school community interpersonal communication is signed, written or oral. Effective communication is fully inclusive and therefore reduces frustration and lowers the risk of isolation.

- Communication within our school environment enables students to be active participants in the classroom, accessing, sharing knowledge and information with their teachers/SNA’s and peers.
- Communication enables staff members of the school community to share and express their ideas, feelings, and needs.

Communication Modalities

“All Deaf and hard of hearing children should be provided with opportunities, at an early age, to acquire fluent language skills while engaged in meaningful activity with capable users of the language, whether the language to be acquired is in signed, spoken or written form.” (NCSE policy paper, 2011). Within our school setting this is realised through the following modalities;

- Irish Sign Language (ISL)
- Signed Supported English (SSE)
- Spoken language
- Written language

Language in the Context of Holy family

The two primary languages used in Holy Family are ISL and spoken English.

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(<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/communication>)

Pupil Modality in Holy Family

Across all sections of the school, the curriculum is taught through the pupil's preferred language and modality so that they have full access to and can achieve the highest possible standard of education. The choice of modality is informed in the first instance by the parent/guardian. Signed, spoken and written modalities are used in the classroom and social settings exposing students to both English and ISL.

Irish Sign Language (ISL)

Holy Family recognises that ISL is essential to the development of Deaf identity and the promotion of Deaf culture of our school. Within the school ISL is part of the formal timetable where possible and school ISL curriculums are developed where one is not available from the NCCA. Additional ISL support is given to students as required. The school, actively links with Deaf organisations, national and international events.²

Spoken Language

Spoken language is respected and encouraged across the school. Students are encouraged to develop their spoken language to their potential. This is achieved through encouraging students to use their technology (hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems, etc) throughout the school day. All students have access to Speech and Language Therapy support. Spoken languages are modified in various ways for lipreading e.g; clearer lip movement, using more gestures, not shouting or slowing down speech, facial expression, etc.

Language Development - A Whole School Approach

A whole school approach to language is adopted. Our pupils learn through experiencing language in a context which is meaningful. In school, we endeavour to provide a variety of language rich environments in which learning language – both formal and informal take place. Each pupil is encouraged to reach their potential in the communication mode they choose. Extracurricular activities and educational outings provide further opportunity to support the development of expressive and receptive language.

Written English

English written language is the language of the curriculum and assessment. Currently the Department of Education do not provide assessment of the curriculum through ISL.

² *Appendix 3*

Teachers in Holy Family assist students learning through written English to access the Early Intervention, primary, post primary curricula and state examinations.

Learning Support

Holy Family develop an IEP³ for all students and where possible students are provided with additional tuition.

Speech and Language

The Speech and Language Therapy Service in the Holy Family School for Deaf Children is provided by the local Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT) Cabra/Grangegorman CHO 9 governed by Avista Children's Services. There is one whole time equivalent SLT assigned to work within the Holy Family School for Deaf Children.

Irish Sign Language: Teacher and SNA professional competence

All staff are **expected** to show a commitment to learning ISL which is essential to professional practice in Holy Family School for the Deaf. We endeavour to provide new staff with a workshop in Deaf awareness and basic classes in ISL. CPD is encouraged for all staff on ISL, Deaf culture, Deaf awareness, Deaf education and special education.

Guidelines for Respectful Communication

Gaining a Deaf pupil or staff member's attention:

The following techniques are used to gain a person's attention;

- Waving in front of a person in a respectful manner.
- Gently tapping the desk.
- Within a large setting turning the lights on and off.
- where safety is a concern, the staff member may tap the student on the upper arm to gain their attention.

As a school community we endeavour at all times to be mindful and respectful of students and staff personal space.

Communicating Informally

School policy is that all group conversations should be through ISL. For those who do not have ISL, another person in the conversation may act as communicator.

³ IEP Individualised Education Plan: An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a written document prepared for a named student which specifies the learning goals that are to be achieved by the student over a set period of time and the teaching strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve those goals. NCSE.ie

Communicating Information in School

ISL Interpreters:

Qualified ISL interpreters are employed for all formal presentations to pupils and staff including presentations from external organisations, staff meetings, parent/ guardian meetings. Qualified registered interpreters (RISLI)⁴ are used within our school.

Interpreters are booked privately or through agencies such as SLIS or Bridge Interpreting services. However, in an emergency situation or when one is not available, we provide communication through a staff member fluent in ISL. Where required and/or available a Deaf interpreter will be used to ensure full communication.

Relaying information to Staff

All staff members are provided with a school email. It is the responsibility that staff should check their email on a regular basis.

Pupil Assembly

Communication at assembly is in ISL and spoken English. Inviting students to be involved in signing what is being spoken allows students to take a leadership role in our school.

Home-School Communication

There is regular communication with parents/ guardians through the following methods.

- Email
- Meeting parents through zoom, facetime, video calls
- Phone calls
- Text messages
- Meeting parents face to face (by appointment)
- Homework journal
- Google classroom
- Seesaw (Primary section)
- School social media; Twitter & Facebook
- Annual parent-teacher meetings
- School reports and assessments

⁴ RISLI Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters

(See Appendix 4 for full details)

Irish Sign Language and State Examinations: Post Primary Section

In School Term/House exams – SNA support is available for all students to access exams.

State Examinations – qualified interpreters are employed for students who have RACE⁵ for exams. Accommodations may include changes to presentation format, response format, test setting or test timing (NCSE, 2021). In relation to our school setting this may involve a reader for English and ISL, scribe, language and grammar waiver, extra time, students having their own room for examinations. Best practice would ensure that management have consulted Deaf staff members to get advice regarding the most appropriate interpreter suitable for the student.

Appendices

1. Communication Modalities
2. Irish Sign Language Act 2017 – Education
3. UN Human Rights and Deafness
4. Communication with Home

⁵ RACE is Reasonable Accommodation for Certified Examinations (Junior Cycle, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied).

Appendix 1 Description of communication modalities

Irish Sign Language (ISL)

The Irish Sign Language Act 2017 states that “*Irish Sign Language*” means the sign language used by the majority of the deaf community in the State” (<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/40/enacted/en/print#sec3>). ISL was recognised as an official language in 2017 by the Irish Government. Irish Sign Language is a language in its own right with its own linguistic and cultural identity which bears no relation to spoken or written languages. ISL is a visual language and is not regarded as a compensation tool for Deafness.

Signed Supported English (SSE) / Simultaneous Communication (sim-com)

Signed support English uses signs from ISL with spoken English word order. This follows the grammar of English along with lipreading to assist communication. It is not an independent language in its own right and its use varies upon the users’ language, skills and knowledge. Usually only the main words of the English sentence are signed, while following the sentence structure of the English sentence. (Marschark, Lang, Albertini 2002)

Signed English

This is also known as signed exact English (SSE). This may be used to teach the specific grammar structure of English to Deaf children. Specific signs are used for grammatical markers in the English language e.g. ‘ed’, ‘er’, ‘s’, etc. (Marschark et al, 2002)

Bilingualism

Sign Bilingualism is an approach using both sign language, written and spoken language. The aim of bilingualism is to enable Deaf children to become bilingual and bicultural in order for them to become full participants of the hearing and Deaf world (Pickersgill, 1998). Bilingualism is the use of two or more different languages. Students may learn the two languages from their social environment (playground, chatting with friends) and/or formally taught or guided acquisition (timetabled during the week). In the context of Deaf education Sign language is the child’s first language which should support the acquisition of a written/spoken language, especially with reference to literacy (O’Connell, 2021)

Spoken Language: According to the Oxford Dictionary language spoken language is speech rather than written language. Within the context of deaf education oralism is the teaching the Deaf/HH child to communication through and speech and lip reading so they can communicate with their family and rest of the community. (Watson, 1998).

Appendix 2 – ISL Act 2017

Educational supports for deaf children

5. The Minister for Education and Skills shall—

- (a) establish a scheme for the provision of Irish Sign Language classes to—
 - (i) the parents, siblings and grandparents of a child who is deaf, and
 - (ii) other persons who serve in *locoparentis* or as a guardian to a child who is deaf,
- (b) pending the conclusion of the review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme which the National Council for Special Education is undertaking and the implementation of any recommendations arising from the review, establish a scheme to provide Irish Sign Language support for children attending recognised schools (within the meaning of the Education Act 1998) whose primary language is Irish Sign Language,
- (c) ensure there is established by institutions of higher education in the State, as part of programmes of teacher education and training provided by those institutions, such provision, as he or she deems necessary, to ensure that there are a sufficient number of educational placements offering Irish Sign Language training for teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and who are attending recognised schools, and
- (d) shall, where practicable and having regard to the need to ensure the provision of education and support services to children who are deaf or hard of hearing and who are attending recognised schools, determine, from time to time, minimum qualifications of teachers of those children.

Appendix 3 - UN Human Rights and Deafness

- The Irish Government formally ratified the UN Convention on Persons with Disability in 2018 and it entered into force on 19 April 2018.
- The UN Convention on Rights for Persons with Disabilities which states:
- Article 24
 - 3. States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:
 - b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;
 - c) Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.
 - 4. In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.
- The UN convention on Children's Rights states:
 - **Article 13**
 - 1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
 - **Article 29**
 - 1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

Appendix 4 – Communication with home/Digital School

School Principal

The School Principal will keep parents/guardians informed of important school matters and events via email. Where possible this communication will be translated into ISL for full access and inclusion.

Text Messages

Parents/Guardians and Staff will be informed of important or urgent matters via text message.

School website and social media

School events and activities are documented and published on the school website www.holyfamilydeafschool.ie

The School Twitter account @HFSchoolDeaf1 and Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/HFDeafschool> are regularly updated

Homework Journals Post Primary Section

It is student's responsibility to keep a record of their homework in their homework journals. If required, they may need assistance from the teacher or SNA. Once homework is finished it should be signed by parent/guardian. If required teachers may write notes to parents regarding achievements of students, unfinished homework, resources (folders, pens, etc) students need for class, outings, etc.

Google Classroom

Google Classroom is a suite of online tools for teaching and learning.
www.edu.google.com

SeeSaw Primary Section

SeeSaw is a digital portfolio tool used in the primary as a form of communication between school and home/boarders. The digital portfolio allows pupils to store their work on an online space and gain feedback from their teacher. Staff are able to use both video messaging and letters and they arrive instantly to the teacher/parent/guardian. It enables teachers to set tasks or assignments and include instruction templates for students to use at home.

School Calendar

The school calendar is available on the school website so that parents/guardians are informed of school events, holidays, school outings, etc.

Parent-teacher meetings

This meeting will happen once a year. Parents/guardians will be invited to decide the form of communication they require to ensure there is full communication at the meeting. Interpreters will be employed to support formal parent/teacher meetings.

School reports

Biannual school reports (Post Primary) and year end (Primary) will be sent to parents/guardians. Parents/guardians may request to have the report translated into ISL. This will be filmed on the school mobile and sent to parents. To fit in with our digital policy and green school this report should be emailed.

Individual parent/Guardian meetings (by appointment)

Parents/Guardians must make appointments through the office to meet staff, principal or deputy principal. Deaf parents may text school phone requesting a meeting. Informal meetings between parents and teachers will be facilitated using the most suitable staff member proficient in ISL. An interpreter will be employed for formal meetings with parents/guardians.

Voice Phone calls

Staff contacting parents should use the phone in the front office. They must keep a record of the date, time and general conversation. Staff are not permitted to use their own personal phone for school business.

Video calls

Staff must use the school mobile phone in the office to have video calls with Deaf parents/guardians. See policy for school phone use. Ensure the room is quiet with good lighting for best communication.

Text messages

Staff must use the mobile phone in the front office to send text messages to parents. All numbers of parents are on the mobile phone.

Communicating with St. Mary's and St. Joseph's Boarding Staff

Staff should communicate with boarding staff through their school email address. Staff may use the designated phone in the office to contact staff in the boarders. When using the phone to contact boarders it is best practice to text to ensure it is fully accessible to all boarder staff.

Religious ceremonies

Religious ceremonies are an integral part of our school ethos. The ceremony is communicated in both English and ISL to ensure full access.

References:

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