CASE STUDY

Holy Trinity is a 460+ Church of England Academy school situated in Halifax West Yorkshire. Our children come from different backgrounds and speak many different languages. Over the past year we have been committed to developing ourselves into a communication-friendly school. In September 2013 we signed up for the Communication Commitment. All staff have Performance Management Targets linked to the Commitment and each half term we have a staff meeting on how we can develop our communication skills. These have been linked to the Commitment's Five Priority Areas.

So what have we done to ensure that all our children have access to a communication-friendly environment?

Firstly, we completed a learning walk around school looking at the environment and how and when children had opportunities to talk. We took photos and discussed them with each other; we also then carried out an audit of the provision. Staff were given various tools to help them do this. They could carry out a quick hot and cold audit, as to where children talk the most (the toilets came out top as to where children talked the most), or they could carry out a more detailed audit using the Language and Literacy Environment checklist. Once they had completed this they then could draw up their action plans to encourage talk. Such actions included removing tables in some provision, or placing chairs opposite each other so that children were face to face when talking. Some classes worked on developing more opportunities for talk by giving children a choice or by using visuals and props.

Secondly, in one of our previous staff meetings we talked about giving children time to talk by implementing the 10 seconds rule. All staff had decided to implement this in their classroom and we made a card for each of them to sign and display to remind them of their commitment to this. We believe that by doing this it means that we are giving each other time to talk. This is especially important because of all the different languages spoken in our school.

Each half term we have a staff meeting on how we can develop our communication skills.

Thirdly, in school we already used a lot of visual support. Each class has a visual timetable and in Foundation Stage we use signs when singing along with objects, and have Board maker signs (Symbol support) in continuous provision areas to indicate the area such as paint or sand, with the same symbols used again in group time. (At the beginning of the year we use objects alongside the signs.)

We now had to think of ways to develop this within school. After much discussion we decided as a whole school to use pictures in the dining hall to help children choose their meals. While another member of staff worked on making a visual uniform chart informing parents what was acceptable, indicated with a simile face next to it and what wasn't, this having a sad face next to it. We then went on to making individual class body language check charts , using photos of children who were doing good sitting and those who weren't.

Fourthly the Senior Leadership Team did a planning scrutiny to ensure that speaking and listening activities were being used in all classes and that there was a progression of activities throughout school. We had already run several No Pens Day Wednesdays and it was from doing this that our planning had evolved. All staff were sign posted to the Communication Commitment handbook and asked to look at SIP project and also the Commtap website for ideas, and the No Pens Day Wednesday activities. One year group was found to have more communication delay then the rest of school; they also have behaviour management problems. To try to overcome these difficulties we have employed a Drama specialist to come and work with them and they will be showcasing their work at the end of term.

We have:

- **audited provision for opportunities to talk**
- **performance management targets linked to the Commitment**
- **implemented the 'think time' (10 seconds) rule**
- **done planning scrutiny for speaking and listening activities**

Finally we decided to have a Mela for our summer celebration. The whole project was planned around developing children's communication skills. This took place last week when the whole school paraded around the streets of Halifax in their traditional costumes led by one giant peacock that everyone had made hand prints for.

So what have we achieved?

I believe that our school is well on the way to creating a communication friendly environment, which encourages good communication skills in all our children. Being part of The Communication Commitment and having access to their resources has supported and reassured us as we have travelled along our communication journey.