



RADLETT LODGE SCHOOL LOCAL PROCEDURE FOR:
GUIDANCE ON ADVOCACY

INTRODUCTION

Advocacy is about making things change because people's voices are heard and listened to. It's about making sure that people can make their own choices in life and have the chance to be as independent as they want to be.

BILD Website 2006

Advocacy is about enabling every person to have a voice of their own and ensuring that they are not ignored and excluded because of their inability to express their views effectively.

Janet Badger 2006

The entitlement of all children to "freedom of expression" has been enshrined in Article 13 of the United Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, which stated that all children must have "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds". This declaration is completely inclusive so that children with significant communication impairments are also fully entitled to these rights. One fundamental aspect of achieving this freedom of expression is the ability to communicate spontaneously: that is to initiate interactions with others in order to convey ones needs and wants. The importance of this attribute cannot be overemphasised, since it is the means through which individuals begin to exert control over their own lives.

Potter and Whittaker 2001

There are a range of communication and cognitive abilities within the young people at Radlett Lodge School. Whilst some of the young people are verbal and are able to express themselves with no or minimal adult support, many do not yet use symbolic communication (speech, sign, symbols or writing). Some pupils may be unable to give a reliable yes/no response and may not yet consistently make a choice from two or more objects. Young people who are able to communicate symbolically may find it easier to communicate about the immediate situation, and have difficulty expressing views about topics beyond the immediate context. Understanding abstract concepts or discussing situations of which they have no direct experience may prove challenging for many of our young people.

At Radlett Lodge School, we understand that the presence of communication differences does not prevent a child or young person from engaging in advocacy activities and should not restrict their right to freely express their wants, needs, and opinions. We understand that it is essential that we have a clear understanding of their

communication skills and the type of environmental, communication or interpersonal supports that best facilitate the young person to express their views. We ensure that different types of advocacy support are in place throughout the school and residential settings. These include self-advocacy, non-directed advocacy and, when appropriate, peer-advocacy.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ADVOCACY

1. Self-Advocacy

This refers to a person expressing their own views and representing their own interests. Other people may not always accept or listen Autistic pupils views due to their communication and interaction differences. Many of the young people at Radlett Lodge require staff support to self-advocate. Some cannot self-advocate in a formal way as they do not yet use symbolic communication methods, however, staff must always be alert to the young person's pre-symbolic messages such as pushing an object away to reject it or smiling to indicate they enjoy a particular activity.

2. Non-Directed Advocacy

This refers to one person making a decision, request, complaint or recommendation on behalf of another. For example, a professional, in conjunction with family the school team and key stakeholders, may decide on a certain course of intervention, when a person is unable to indicate what they want for themselves. Non-directed advocacy should be about:

- Spending time getting to know the young person in order to gather a picture of their communication skills, how they interact with others, their sensory processing and what they like and don't like, and what their day-to-day life is like.
- Supporting the young person to communicate, for example using alternative and augmentative communication means or through close observation of their body language, facial expression, vocalisations and simple actions
- Speaking to significant others in the young person's life, for example family members.
- Ensuring that the young person's rights are respected
- Ensuring that the young person is supported to make choices as far as possible
- Ensuring that the young person's likes and dislikes are taken into account when decisions are being made
- Ensuring that all options are considered

The person advocating on behalf of the young person should not be influenced by their own personal views or beliefs. Efforts should be made to share information with the individual in a manner that can be understood by them, even if they are not yet able to clearly communicate their wishes or make decisions.

3. Peer Advocacy

This is when the advocate and the young person share similar experiences or environments. A young person who has experienced similar situations to another child or young person may feel they have a better understanding of their needs. At Radlett Lodge we encourage peer advocacy through the Student Council. Peer advocacy may also happen informally at times.

ADVOCACY AIMS AT RADLETT LODGE SCHOOL

Aims for Pupils:

- For pupils to be given opportunities to develop self-advocacy skills to their fullest potential.
- For pupils to effectively make choices within their day to day life.
- For pupils to represent their own views and interests in relation to issues including their education, safety, care and future aspirations.
- For pupils to express their wants, needs, feelings and opinions as effectively as possible using their preferred mode/s of communication.
- For pupils to become aware of their own needs and emotions and be able to express them to the greatest degree possible.
- For pupils to develop metacognitive skills such as reflecting on situations and feelings, weighing up information, and planning for future events / needs.
- For pupils to be prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Aims for Staff

- To be aware of pupils' needs and preferences.
- To monitor significant changes in a pupils' behaviour.
- To be aware of signs of distress in a pupil which may result from abuse (see Safeguarding Policy).
- To promote spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils.
- To respect pupils' rights as individuals, as pupils in the school, and as members of the wider community, with particular reference to issues of culture and religion.
- To ensure that staff are well qualified and competent in the development of advocacy skills and that there is training and ongoing staff development and support in this area.
- To support each young person is enabled to be as independent as possible by encouraging them to do things for themselves and reducing their reliance on staff.
- To support each young person to develop a sense of belonging to a local area by means of accessing the wider community.
- To provide opportunities for each young person to experience and maintain social networks and lasting relationships. For example, giving the young person

opportunities to revisit the past and discuss their future. This allows our young people to develop a sense of identity.

- To ensure that all young people are given meaningful interactions.
- To ensure that all young people are treated with respect and dignity.

HOW WE SUPPORT AND PROMOTE ADVOCACY AT RADLETT LODGE SCHOOL

Advocacy for people who do not use speech as a form of communication, or those who have other complex needs are possibly the most difficult group of people to empower and it can be challenging to provide advocacy for them. There may be times when it proves impossible to understand what a person wants to communicate.

BILD, 2006

We support and promote advocacy at the school by giving young people choices and involving them in decisions. We ensure that information is produced using our total communication approach to increase accessibility for pupils who benefit from the use of different means of communication. At Student Council, elected young people are invited to represent their own views and interests, as well as those of their peers, through participating in discussions about school life, generating ideas for development, and voting on issues such as playground equipment, fundraising activities and school events.

As a school we are constantly developing and analysing our procedures, so that all young people are included in decision making, and are given the best times, places and ways to meet people and express their opinions and worries. We ensure that we use creative ideas for enabling the young people to use their skills and talents to express themselves and tell us what they think. Staff work hard to develop strong, trusting relationships with the young people, which supports two-way communication and identification of changes in well-being. Staff are trained to recognise pre-verbal communication attempts, and not to make assumptions about what a young person may or may not want without careful observation.

We do all this using the following practice and resources:

- Taking time to get to know the young person and objectively observe their likes and dislikes.
- Establishing a method of communication that is meaningful to the young person.
- Using a Total Communication (Jones 2000) approach that includes verbal information, writing, drawing, using pictures, Talking Mats™, Makaton, observing the young person's body language, their movements and their non-verbal clues.
- Liaising with Independent Advocates, who should be identified by the Local Authority for any Looked After Children.

Communication Observations:

Difficulties with communication and interaction is one of the diagnostic criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). When thinking about advocacy for an autistic young person, staff at the school must consider the young person's communication profile, including both their strengths and the challenges they may face in expressing their wants, needs, thoughts and opinions. Rather than focus on what a young person cannot do, it is essential to consider the ways in which they can and do express themselves, for example, by smiling and laughing during preferred activities or pushing away a food that they do not like. Staff must also ensure that appropriate learning and transactional supports are in place to ensure all pupils can self-advocate. This is relevant during day-to-day activities as well as during specific "advocacy" activities. For example, during a breakfast session, examples of transactional supports would be:

- Providing one pupil with a written menu from which they can make a choice and verbally request (words and speech).
- Giving another pupil picture choices (pictorial).
- Showing another pupil an object that represents the choices or the actual items so they can reach for the one they want (objects of reference / actual objects).

During the same session, interpersonal supports would include:

- Giving each pupil the time they need to process the information presented and to make a decision.
- Interpreting non-verbal communication.
- Listening to the young person rather than making assumptions about what they want based on the staff members preferences or what the young person *usually* has.

Environment:

The communication environment refers to "those aspects of the environment that influence the individual's ability to communicate" (Bradshaw 1998). There are key social, environmental and sensory factors that influence the abilities of the young people at Radlett Lodge. The environment should be adapted so that the young person is not overloaded with information and can remain in a calm, alert state to make a decision.

The impact of sensory overload within an environment also needs to be considered - sensory issues such as creating noise to block out sounds, creating painful sensations on your own body to block the sound of people speaking, creating a safe space of sitting and flapping to block out the confusion of the world and those in it can be so encompassing that they can prevent the autistic young person from advocating for themselves.

The following factors are considered and reviewed regularly by the school to ensure that the young people are provided with the ideal environment in which to advocate for themselves:

- Physical properties of the environment, for example, noise, light, visual displays, tidiness, zoning of spaces, etc.
- The nature and variety of opportunities for communication that young people encounter in their everyday lives.
- General characteristics of the school setting in which the young people spend their time. For example, space, light, low arousal environments.
- Characteristics of the activities in which the young people engage. For example, activities which are chosen by the young person, enjoyed by the young person and terminated by the young person. Activities that are accessible but also develop the young person's skills and strengths.
- The adequacy/ relevance of the young people's communication systems.
- Characteristics of adult styles of interaction, for example, giving the young people enough time to respond.
- Communication – enabling qualities of materials, for example, do they offer turn-taking opportunities, are they motivating, relevant and meaningful, for the young person.

Music, Drama and Art:

In Creativity sessions we use music, drama and art to provide the young people with opportunities to develop the skills needed to self-advocate. By presenting young people with experiences in which they have a high active input, we recognise their ability and nurture their development. They learn to make choices, express their likes and dislikes through different mediums, and develop communication skills. Artwork is displayed on boards throughout the school and young people are encouraged to look at each other's work and comment on it. Young people who find it easier to draw or use graphics on the computer in place of verbal communication are encouraged to do so.

The school produces an annual whole school performance in which all young people are invited to participate. Participating in the rehearsals, and the production itself, provides opportunities to develop social awareness, self-respect, self-discipline and self-confidence. All of these skills support the young person to learn how to express themselves effectively – a key element needed in order for a young person to self-advocate.

Young people are also encouraged to take part in role-play activities in different curriculum subjects. These activities can provide the young people with a safe environment in which they can deal with real life issues in a safe and non-threatening manner. Again, this type of activity can give a young person more confidence in the area of flexibility and accepting change, and in expressing their opinions and feelings.

Personal Learning Objectives (PLOs) and EHCP Annual Reviews:

SEN legislation and guidance requires that educators involve young people in decisions about their educational provision. Pupil involvement should be seen in terms of the following benefits:

1. Practical – young people have important and relevant information. Their support is crucial to the effective implementation of any individual education programme
2. Principle – young people have the right to be heard. They should be encouraged to participate in decision making about provision to meet their educational needs.

The school ensures that PLO (half-termly) are motivating for the young person and that supports include meaningful activities or resources. Young people are invited to attend their EHCP Annual Review and share work that they have collated themselves with the help of staff members, with their parents and other professionals who attend the meeting.

Every young person is also given the opportunity to contribute to their EHCP Annual Review using the appropriate pupil contribution format. An 'Annual Review Pack' has been developed at three different levels to enable as many young people as possible to contribute their views.

Where possible, young people who are facing transition are invited to a discussion regarding future educational provision, their views and opinions listened to and given due weight according to the age, maturity and capability of the young person (SEN Code of Practice, 2001).

Student Council:

The school has set up a student council where pupils can discuss their own and their peers' issues with the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process throughout their school life. One pupil from each class is invited to attend the half-termly meetings as representatives of their class groups. Pupils were recently involved in deciding on the closing song for the Winter Show "grand finale".

Complaints procedure:

The school has a complaints procedure in place which enables the young people to make a complaint if they are unhappy about something at the school. The complaints procedure is displayed and is designed so that young people of all abilities can access it. The complaints procedure displays the details of Russel who is our Independent Children's Advocate. Young people are able to ring him and meet with him about their complaints and worries.

Young people who are able to self-advocate and wish to make a complaint would be encouraged to follow the complaints process:

- staff who the young person is talking to would listen to what the young person has to say
- they would check they have understood the complaint that is being made
- ask the young person whether they are happy for them to deal with it
- the complaint is then recorded in the school complaints log.

Young people who are unable to self-advocate in this manner would have their 'complaints' raised through staff members and peers who would follow safeguarding guidance, and raise as a class team; for example if the impact of a new pupil on another pupil was perceived to be having a detrimental affect then staff would inform the DSP who would observe, monitor the situation and discuss with SLT any actions required.

Flexibility of thought and actions:

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – 5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) states that, in addition to social communication and interaction differences, to receive a diagnosis of ASD individuals must also have “*Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviours, actions or interests*”. At Radlett Lodge School we recognise that a young person’s restricted or repetitive patterns of behaviour may at times be a self-regulation strategy, supporting them to cope with the difficulties they may experience in: predicting the actions of others, processing sensory information, or understanding social conventions.

When seen from this perspective, it is not surprising that many autistic young people will seek predictability in order to feel safe. However, without access to appropriate support, these *restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour* may impact on the young person’s ability to consider or explore all options available to them (for example, trying new activities or food options, adjusting behaviour to support interaction with friends, or considering different educational options). For this reason, in order to support advocacy, we must also provide supports to help our young people access a wide range of activities and experiences, and promote flexibility of thought and actions.

Examples of supports we may need to provide include:

- Visuals to show steps of a task or activity, through the medium of objects, photographs, symbols, or written information
- Repeated opportunities to try new activities, foods, games etc, in safe environments and supported by trusted adults or peers.
- Use of familiar structures when introducing new activities, items or people.
- Social stories to give information about novel situations, internal thoughts and feelings, and social conventions
- Comic strip conversations to help the young person to reflect on and express their own thoughts and feelings, as well as understand the perspective of others

Providing the above supports, as appropriate for the particular young person, will help to address issues surrounding flexibility of thought and widen their experiences, therefore increasing their ability to make informed decisions and choices.

ASSESSMENT

The pupil's ability to self-advocate is monitored consistently throughout the school day. Many of the pupil’s have specific EHCP Outcomes relating to their ability to self-advocate in different situations, for example, use of AAC to make requests, ability to communicate and socially interact through music and drama.

RESOURCES

- Music Resources
- Drama Resources
- Art Resources
- Talking Mats
- Annual review pack

COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

The very nature of advocacy is defined by a young person's ability to communicate, therefore communication opportunities within advocacy are predominant and extensive.

LINKS WITH OTHER SUBJECTS

Advocacy is worked on throughout the curriculum. All subjects offer frequent opportunities for the young people to advocate their preferences. Plenary sessions at the end of each activity offer opportunities for the pupil's to advocate whether they liked or disliked a session and what their most/least favourite part of the session was. Differentiation according to ability is considered and adhered to when promoting advocacy throughout the curriculum.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Again, the nature of the different types of advocacy that are implemented by Radlett Lodge School, and the differentiation in presentation of resources and materials by staff ensures that each pupil has an equal opportunity to advocate their personal choices.

The Radlett Lodge School Local Procedure for 'Guidance on Advocacy' should be read in conjunction with:

NAS POLICIES:

Quality of Life (QoL) Framework Policy
Equal Opportunities in NAS Educational Services Policy
Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Policy

RADLETT LODGE SCHOOL LOCAL PROCEDURES:

Curriculum
Post 16 Education
Careers