



Spotlight on Ashmount School

Ashmount School in Loughborough was the winner of the SEN School or Group of the Year Award at the 2017 Shine a Light Awards.

Ashmount School is committed to developing a young person's ability to communicate to ensure that they are empowered to meaningfully input into decisions affecting their own lives as they grow up. Believing that "the most important role of the SEN practitioner is to provide young people with effective and appropriate means of communication", they realised that their current provision needed to be restructured.

The school's approach up to that point was perceived as a typical local special school approach, encompassing individual visits by speech and language therapists, teachers of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), physiotherapists and music therapists. This led to significant delays in the implementation and dissemination of support programmes, exacerbating issues around continuity, consistence and communication itself.

In order to address these issues, the school introduced a structured Communication Team to deliver efficient coordinated support. The team includes contributors from classroom support to senior leadership and representatives from related external agencies, with a remit to continually improve practice. This team is ever-evolving as it seeks to meet the needs of their young people and families.

Timetabling and the availability of key professionals has been aligned to facilitate a common language and there is a strong communication focus across the school. As part of this work, the school has created 16 language groups involving pupils using VOCA (Voice Output Communication Aids), Eye Gaze, Makaton and spoken language.

They have developed an assessment toolkit for use with pupils operating at the earliest levels of development, created a switch/AAC assessment library for use by parents and partner schools/centres, and carried out an evaluation of the use of video-modelling in the acquisition of Makaton signing.

This team is dedicated to improving and empowering not only its pupils but providing coherent support for families and surrounding schools. They have made Ashmount School a Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) hub for the East Midlands, coordinating a wide range of language groups and support across the area.

The school has created an enhanced programme of communication training for parents, carers and staff in the local schools. This includes a series of hands-on workshops centred around supporting early communication through music, play and signing, amongst others.