

# School Document/Policy



## Title: Advocacy Procedures


This guidance is to be read in conjunction with related National Autistic Society Policies

### Declaration

The Sybil Elgar School does not promote partisan political views.

The school will have regard for The Human Rights Act, 1998, The Disability Discrimination Act, 1995, as amended by The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001, including new duties 2002, and The Principles of the New Code of Practice, 2001, with special focus on Student Empowerment, Parents in Partnership and Consultation and Joint Working initiatives.

In addition the school has regard for the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

Policy lead (s)	<b>Deputy Principals</b>
Date of document	<b>July 2014</b>
Latest revision	<b>February 2019</b>
Signed Chloe Phillips Principal	

## 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 learning and cognitive abilities within the students\* at Sybil Elgar School. Whilst some of the students are verbal and are able to express themselves with minimum adult support, many are non-verbal and unable to give a reliable yes/no response or make a choice. Many of the students are unable to grasp abstract concepts, communicate about topics beyond the immediate context, or use symbolic communication to express their wishes. However, this should not restrict their right to the opportunity for advocacy input. Therefore, different types of advocacy need to be in place throughout the school setting. These include self-advocacy, non-directed advocacy, also known as best-interest advocacy (see below) and less often, due to the nature of the students' impairment, peer-advocacy.

## **DIFFERENT TYPES OF ADVOCACY**

### **1 Self-Advocacy**

This refers to a person speaking up for themselves. Whilst many autistic people with learning difficulties are good at speaking up for themselves, they can sometimes find it hard to get others to accept this and listen to them.

### **2. Non-Directed Advocacy (Best-Interest 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 and the school team, may decide on a certain course of intervention, using their own judgement when a person is unable to indicate what they want for themselves. Non-directed advocacy should be based on observations/ evidence of the individuals likes, dislikes, well-being and needs and should not be influenced by the advocates personal views or agenda. 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. The term "Best-Interest" can mean different things to different people, dependant on what their own personal values and ideas are. Therefore we feel it is more appropriate to use the term Non-Directed Advocacy as this term does not carry the inference that the advocate is making decisions on behalf of the person for whom they are advocating.

### **3. Peer Advocacy**

This is when the advocate and the advocacy partner share similar experiences or environments. It means that students who have experienced the same things feel they have a better understanding than someone who has not had the same experience and can therefore be more supportive.

## **Advocacy Aims at Sybil Elgar School**

### **Aims for Students (Self-Advocacy):**

- For students to be given opportunities to develop self-advocacy skills to their fullest potential
- For students to have the opportunity to make effective and appropriate choices as far as they are able
- For students to think and communicate as effectively as possible
- To prepare students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life to the degree to which they are able to access them

- 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
  - For students to develop their advocacy skills to their fullest potential
  - For students to have needs and rights advocated for until they are able to successfully develop self-advocacy skills
  - For students to become aware of their own needs and emotions and be able to express them to the greatest degree possible
- Curriculum/Advocacy Policy

#### Aims for Staff (Non-Directed Advocacy):

- To be aware of students' needs and preferences
- To monitor significant changes in a students' behaviour
- To be aware of signs of distress in a student which may result from abuse (see Student Protection Procedure for Staff and NAS Guidelines)
- To promote spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of students
- To respect student' rights as individuals, as students in the school, and as members of the wider community, with particular reference to issues of culture and religion.

At Sybil Elgar it is important that adults who act as advocates do not offer their own opinions. We ensure that advocates at the school measure the quality of life outcomes of the students and make decisions based on these outcomes rather than decisions based on their own beliefs and feelings by:

♣ Ensuring each student is enabled to be as independent as possible by being allowed to do things for themselves and reducing their dependence on others. A student may be included in the smallest of ways. For example, being in the kitchen when food is being cooked, being able to smell and touch the food.

- Ensuring each student has a sense of belonging to a local area by means of accessing the community facilities. For example, educational visits and swimming visits rather than visits to purely specialist services.
- Ensuring each student has an opportunity to experience and maintain social networks and lasting relationships. For example, giving the student opportunities to revisit the past and discuss their future. This allows our students to develop a sense of identity.
- Ensuring that all students are given meaningful interactions with other people and are not being ignored purely because they do not use words.
- Ensuring that all students are treated with respect and dignity.

In order to maintain quality of life outcomes for our students, advocates within the school continually monitor what services are being given to the student, what could be done differently and whether the school can justify the care they are providing.

### **How we support and promote Advocacy at Sybil Elgar 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 students choices and involving them in decisions. But how genuine is that involvement in those decisions?

Whilst we ensure that all our information is produced in both written format and visual format, and whilst we invite students to join the student council and have their say, we also ensure that our students feel valued and included. As a school we are constantly developing and analysing so that all students, both the more able and those who need higher levels of support 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 students to use their skills and talents to tell us what they think. The students work with people that they know and trust, and who are able to interpret what the students are trying to tell us.

We do all this using the following practice and resources:

- Knowing the student and understanding their likes and dislikes and therefore being able to represent their views for others. There is no substitute for spending time with a student to get to know them.
- Establishing a method of communication that is meaningful to the student that we are advocating for.
- Using a Total Communication (Jones 2000) approach that includes verbal information, writing, drawing, using pictures and Talking Mats™ watching the student's body language, their movements and their non-verbal clues.

### **Communication Observations:**

Communication is one of the key impairments of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Therefore, when thinking about advocacy for an autistic student staff at

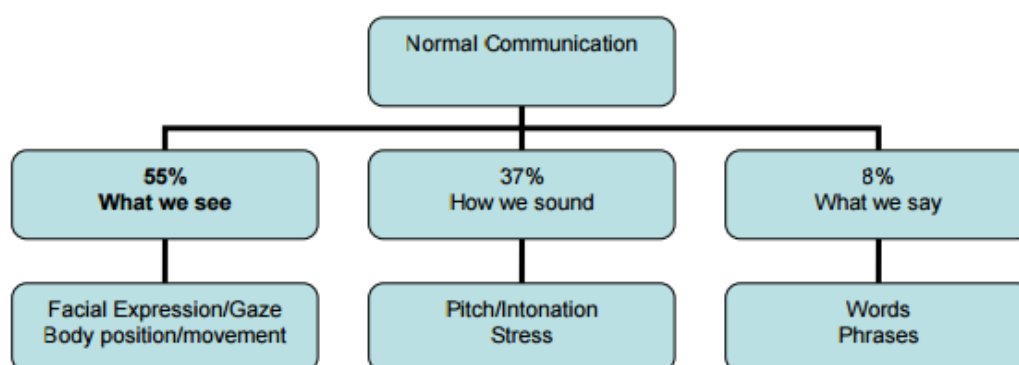
**Review Date February 2021**

the school have to first think about the deficits in communication that each student presents with and ways that the school can overcome this to ensure that the student's advocacy needs are met. Many of the students at the school have an inability to grasp what communication is for – in this instance the student's ability to self-advocate is minimal. It can be difficult for staff members to act as advocates for students who present with this difficulty – it takes time and huge skills to build up a relationship and knowledge base between two people, when one of the partners in that relationship is unresponsive and unable to give much information. It may also take many months for an adult to recognise any kind of communication that the student may give. However, the following statement maintains why it is possible for every student in the school to access advocacy support:

No matter how hard one may try, one cannot NOT communicate. Activity, inactivity, words or silences all have a message value.

**Donnellan et al (1984)**

Donnellan et al highlight how important it is not to rely purely on words to communicate with someone. The chart below breaks down communication into three sections – what we see, how we sound and what we say. When someone is communicating with us, we understand and interpret their communication primarily by relying on what we see. Therefore it is possible to act as an advocate for those students who do not have speech as a communication providing that we observe the student before we take on the role of an advocate.



It is difficult to recognise a student's total communication by observing them for only a couple of hours. In order to feel experienced and comfortable to act as an advocate, staff need to observe a student for long periods of time so that they can:

- Establish the student's current levels of independence and make an informed decision as to whether these need to be improved
- Establish whether the student 'has a voice' or if they are being ignored
- Establish whether the student is given opportunities for choice
- Ensure that the student is treated with dignity and respect
- Ensure that the student is being fully included in everyday activities
- Ensure that the student has opportunities and is provided with the skills needed to form relationships with peers and adults
- Ensure that the student has access to the local community
- Ensure that the student is healthy and safe from bullying and abuse
- Ensure that the student is being listened to

These observations from different staff members inform the students' Individual Education Plans and are used to set yearly identified achievable objectives to give the student the skills they need to ensure that the above is addressed at all times.

## **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 students at Sybil Elgar School. The environment should be adapted so that the student 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 student from advocating for themselves. The following factors are considered and reviewed regularly by the school to ensure that the students are provided with the ideal environment in which to advocate for themselves:

- Physical properties of the environment, for example, noise and light
- The nature of opportunities for communication that students encounter in their everyday lives.



- General characteristics of the school (and, where appropriate, residential setting) in which the students spend their time. For example, space, light, low arousal environments.
- Characteristics of the activities in which the students engage. For example, activities which are chosen by the student, enjoyed by the student and terminated by the student.
- The adequacy of the students' communication systems.
- Characteristics of adult styles of interaction, for example, giving the students enough time to respond.
- Communication-enabling qualities of materials, for example, do they offer turn taking opportunities, are they motivating for the student. Dyer (1989) found that autistic students made substantially more spontaneous requests when they had access to preferred materials compared to non-preferred materials.

The autistic student needs to be taught what communication is for using different types of communication opportunity. People working with the student should encourage basic expression – I want, I like, I need - through whatever means is appropriate for the student, for example, using PECS, objects of reference, symbols, etc. To encourage this development, staff need to have precise detail about the student's preferences, likes and dislikes. For example, staff members need to be aware of any allergies or phobias the student might have. This information is gathered from the parents during the student's admissions interview, updated at each annual review and acted on throughout the student's time at the school.

### **Music, Drama and Art**

The school uses creative subjects such as music, drama and art to provide the students with opportunities to develop the skills needed to self-advocate, especially teaching the student what communication is actually for as well as opportunities to state their likes and dislikes through different mediums.

By presenting students with experiences in which they have a high active input, we recognise their ability and nurture their development. We provide them with a safe environment in which to express themselves and communicate their needs and thoughts independently without the fear of failure.

The school produces several school performances annually where all students are invited to participate in a production that is performed in front of parents and carers. Communication is a key element of the productions and the rehearsals leading up to the production, and the production itself, are a tool for developing social awareness, self-respect, self-discipline and



self-confidence. All of these skills lead the student with ASD to learn how to express themselves and develop an understanding as to why we communicate – a key element needed in order for a student to self-advocate.

Students are also encouraged to take part in role play activities in different curriculum subjects. These activities can provide the students 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 an autistic student more confidence in the area of flexibility and accepting change, and in expressing their opinions and feelings without the fear and anxiety of being judged.

Students use art lessons and technology lessons to communicate feelings, likes and dislikes to staff members. Art work is displayed on boards throughout the school and students are encouraged to share and look at each other's work and comment on it where possible. All students visibly appear to enjoy the displays throughout the school and spend time looking at them. Students who find it easier to draw or use graphics on the computer in place of verbal communication are encouraged to do so, and some students are able to advocate for themselves using the Widgeit Programme, Writing with Symbols.

### **EHCP Outcomes (previously IEP targets) and MyProgress™ EHCP Annual Reviews**

Student participation involves more than following procedures in the SEN Code of Practice. SEN legislation and guidance requires that educators involve students in decisions about their educational provision. Student involvement should be seen in terms of the following benefits:

1. Practical – students have important and relevant information. Their support is crucial to the effective implementation of any individual education programme
2. Principle – students 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 EHCP Outcomes (6 monthly targets) are motivating for the student and include appealing activities. Students are invited to attend their MyProgress™ 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 student is also given the opportunity to contribute to their EHCP Annual Review using the appropriate Student contribution format. An 'Annual Review

Pack' has been developed at three different levels to enable as many students as possible to contribute their views.

Where possible, students 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 student (SEN Code of Practice, 2001).

### **School Council**

The school has set up a school council where students can discuss their own and their peers' issues confidentially with the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process throughout their school life. One Student from each class is invited to attend the half-termly meetings as representatives of their class groups. Students have been involved in fundraising for a new soft play room and choosing new playground equipment through the school council meetings.

### **Complaints procedure:**

The school has a complaints procedure in place which enables the students to make a complaint if they are unhappy about something at the school. The complaints procedure is displayed in every classroom and is designed so that students of all abilities can access it. The complaints procedure displays the details of key adults who can support the students.

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

- Staff who the student is talking to would listen to what the student has to say
- They would check they have understood the complaint that is being made
- Ask the student whether they are happy for them to deal with it.
- The complaint is then recorded in the school or Children's Home complaints book
- Students can also contact:

Children's Commissioner for England

Anne Longfield

02077838330

Sanctuary House

20 Great Smith Street

SW1P 3BT

Students who are unable to self-advocate 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 Student on another Student 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.

### **Self-Awareness**

The drive for predictability to feel safe can hugely affect a student's ability to self-advocate. The autistic student may appear to be making a choice and advocating for themselves, but, differentiating between an informed choice and a decision to watch the same video three times in a row, or talk about computers every time they see someone to ensure that their life is predictable and therefore safe, is problematic.

The student needs to be taught that the most predictable way might not be the best – a very hard lesson to learn! One way in which the school does this is to use video clips of the students to reflect on their own activities and behaviours and self-advocate. Students also reflect on their own feelings and thoughts using photos taken with a digital camera or their iPads. Staff encourage students to experience the same activities in different ways so that they can begin to address issues surrounding flexibility of thought and widen their experiences and therefore their ability to make informed decisions and choices.

### **Assessment**

The student's ability to self-advocate is monitored consistently throughout the school day. Many of the students have specific EHCP Outcomes (6 monthly/annual targets) relating to their ability to self-advocate in different situations, for example, use of PECS to make requests, ability to communicate and socially interact through music and drama.

### **Resources**

- Music Resources
- Drama Resources
- Art Resources
- Problem Solving sheets
- Student Voice/Comment sheets
- Annual review pack

## **Communication Opportunities**

The very nature of advocacy is defined by a student'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 students to advocate their preferences. Plenary sessions at the end of each activity offer opportunities for the student'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. See also Early Years and Post 16 Policies. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES Again, the nature of the different types of advocacy that are implemented by Sybil Elgar School, and the differentiation in presentation of resources and materials by staff ensures that each Student has an equal opportunity to advocate their personal choices.

\*For the purposes of this policy and for fluency the term 'student' is used to describe all learners from the Early Years through to the 16-22 Provision