

The background of the page features a stylized illustration. On the left, a large windmill with a yellow body and four white sails is depicted. To its right, a school building with a grey roof and white walls is visible. The scene is set against a light blue sky with a few white clouds and green bushes at the base.

# **The Edith Borthwick School**

## **AAC (ALTERNATIVE AND AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION) POLICY**

<b>Lead Governor</b>	<b>Robin Reeve</b>
<b>Date approved by Governing Body</b>	<b>26<sup>th</sup> January 2026</b>
<b>Next review date</b>	<b>Spring term 2027</b>

## **1. Introduction**

The Edith Borthwick School is a day special school located in Braintree, catering for children and young people with severe and complex learning difficulties, including autism. We currently have over 245 students on roll, ranging from 3 to 19 years of age.

This policy is written in line with the SEND code of practice (2014) and the Children's and Families Act (2014).

## **2. Purpose**

This policy outlines the commitment of the Edith Borthwick School to support students with complex communication needs through the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems. It ensures that all learners have the right to communicate effectively, participate fully in school life, and achieve their potential.

## **3. Scope**

This policy applies to all staff, students, families, and professionals involved in the education and care of learners who require AAC.

## **4. Definition of AAC**

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to any means by which an individual can supplement or replace spoken communication. We all use some form of augmentative communication in our daily life, for example, gesture (waving goodbye) and graphic symbols (washing label symbols, road signs).

AAC is both a means of accessing an educational curriculum and language in its own right. It is appropriate for individuals who have difficulty with receptive and expressive language due to physical difficulties, sensory difficulties, or learning disability. It provides an opportunity to attain emotional, social, educational, and vocational goals.

AAC can be divided into two categories; unaided and aided communication:

### **4.1 Unaided communication**

Unaided communication can be described as modes of communication that use only the body.

These include:

- Body language, eye pointing, facial expression, natural gesture, use of vocalisation/intonation, sensory stimulation
- Sign languages and signed vocabularies (e.g. British Sign Language, Makaton)

### **4.2 Aided communication**

Aided communication can be described as modes of communication that require tools in addition to the communicator's body. These include:

- Objects, photographs, pictures, graphic symbols e.g: Widgit symbols, or words, which may be organised into paper-based charts or books.
- Communication aids which produce speech and/or text, more commonly called VOCAs (Voice Output Communication Aids). VOCAs are dedicated hardware units or

tablet computers with communication software. They may have a digitised voice from voice recordings or a synthesised voice.

## 5. **Mission statement**

Freedom to communicate is a basic human right. Our goal is to ensure that every learner at our school has a voice, and we aim to promote communicative autonomy and dignity.

At Edith Borthwick School, we provide a Total Communication environment. We recognise and respond to all communication because all forms of communication are valid. We model a wide variety of AAC throughout the day in all settings, including Makaton, gesture and facial expression, PODD, communication books, aided language displays, devices including iPads with communication apps (for example Proloquo2go, TD Snap), and other Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs) such as switches, BigMac, GoTalk and Quicktalker.

We recognise that learners should be able to communicate by whatever means they choose at any given time, ensure that all communication is valued and responded to, and respect the learner's right to choose their preferred communication method at any time. We aim to ensure that AAC is integrated across all environments and activities. Wherever possible, we involve learners and families in decision-making about vocabulary, device settings, and communication strategies.

We value the importance of pupils seeing their AAC system being used by others and aim to immerse the pupils in an environment where AAC is used by adults across the day. We provide equal access to AAC resources regardless of background, culture, or ability. We aim to ensure that all AAC systems are individualised, accessible and culturally inclusive.

## 6. **Roles and responsibilities**

AAC is a shared responsibility across the whole school community.

All adults supporting a child or young person have a role in supporting their AAC use. It is important that all supporting adults work together to ensure the best outcomes. Please see below for a summary of roles and responsibilities:

Role	Responsibilities
Speech and Language Therapist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• assess skills</li><li>• provide recommendations</li><li>• support with implementation</li><li>• provide training to staff and family members</li><li>• review and monitor AAC use</li><li>• collaborate with families</li><li>• refer to external services as needed, e.g. OT, CASEE</li></ul>
Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• recognise need and refer for AAC assessment</li><li>• attend training as required</li><li>• model AAC consistently throughout the day</li><li>• liaise with Speech and Language therapist</li><li>• create opportunities to model and integrate into the school day</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support TAs to model AAC</li> <li>• add vocabulary to AAC devices</li> </ul>
AAC Champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attend training as required</li> <li>• model AAC consistently throughout the day</li> <li>• liaise with Speech and Language therapist</li> <li>• create opportunities to model and integrate into the school day</li> <li>• support other TAs to model AAC</li> <li>• add vocabulary to AAC devices</li> <li>• Advocate for AAC users</li> </ul>
Teaching assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• honour and respond to all communication</li> <li>• model AAC consistently</li> <li>• attend training as required</li> </ul>
Therapy technician	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make and repair paper-based AAC</li> <li>• support set-up of devices</li> <li>• liaise with family regarding vocabulary requirements</li> </ul>
Senior Leadership Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support class teams to implement and model AAC</li> <li>• identify classes that need extra support to model</li> </ul>
Family member/carer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• model AAC consistently</li> <li>• inform extended family on how the child/young person communicates</li> <li>• attend training</li> <li>• add vocabulary to AAC devices</li> </ul>

## 7. Assessment

Learners are referred to the Speech and Language Therapy team for an AAC assessment when their current communication system is not sufficient in meeting their needs. For example, a learner who is attempting to communicate through gesture but is not being understood, or a learner who is able to point to symbols on an aided language display but needs more vocabulary. Assessments and observations are carried out to determine:

- the learner's level of understanding
- modes of, and success in, expressive communication
- what the learner uses communication for (communicative functions)
- how he/she interacts socially with adults and peers
- current use of augmentative and alternative communication system(s)
- The appropriate type of AAC, and if applicable the grid size/page set

Depending on the learners' needs, assessments may be formal (for example standardised assessments), informal or observational. Where possible, assessment includes learner and family input.

Where necessary, the Speech and Language therapy team will liaise with other professionals to determine medical details, seating and positioning needs, visual skills, motor skills, auditory skills and cognitive skills. The Speech and Language Therapist will consider alternate access methods, such as eye gaze when needed.

Depending on the learner's skills, it may be appropriate to refer to The Communication Aid Service East of England (CASEE), a specialist regional AAC service based at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge.

## **7.1 CASEE**

Commissioned by NHS England, CASEE supports individuals with complex communication needs across Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, and Bedfordshire. They provide:

- Specialist AAC Assessment
- Paper and power-based AAC systems, including voice output devices, as well as maintenance of devices
- Training for communication partners.

### **7.1.1 Referral criteria**

A learner who would access a specialised AAC service would have the following:

- a severe/complex communication difficulty associated with a range of physical, cognitive, learning, or sensory deficits;
- a clear discrepancy between their level of understanding and ability to speak.
- be able to understand the purpose of a communication aid;
- have developed beyond cause and effect understanding;
- Be able to communicate intentionally for more than one function, e.g. requesting, commenting, joking - such that the system they need is complex i.e. learners who have a limited vocabulary and/or limited times that they can communicate via AAC would not meet the criteria.

and should:

- have experience of using paper-based AAC which is insufficient to enable them to realise their communicative potential.

## **8. Intervention strategies**

If a learner is identified as requiring AAC of any kind, they will need an episode of care from a Speech and Language Therapist. This may be direct (through 1:1 or group sessions with a Speech and Language Therapist) or indirect (through training and close monitoring/review).

Targets will be set by the Speech and Language Therapist and teachers should ensure that these are embedded within each learner's paperwork.

To ensure effective use of AAC systems, staff will implement aided language modeling as a core strategy. This means:

- Adults will model AAC use during natural interactions, lessons, and routines by pointing to or selecting symbols on the learner's AAC system while speaking.
- Modeling will occur across environments (classroom, playground, lunch) to promote generalization.
- No expectation of immediate student response - modelling is provided to build understanding and confidence.

All adults working with AAC users will receive training on modelling techniques and ongoing support to maintain best practice.

Informed consent must be gained from learners (where possible) and their families before introducing or changing AAC systems.

## **8.1 Paper-based AAC**

Unless there are extenuating circumstances, learners must trial paper-based AAC initially. This gives learners the opportunity to develop and demonstrate their skills using a relatively inexpensive communication aid.

At Edith Borthwick, we currently use core and fringe communication books and PODD (Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display) books. These two types of communication book differ in the way that vocabulary is organised. Both provide robust and reliable AAC.

Vocabulary can be added to paper-based AAC by the Therapy Technician. Repairs and replacements for paper-based communication aids are provided by the school.

## **8.2 Power-based AAC**

### **8.2.1 Tablet devices**

In some cases, paper-based AAC is not suitable for a learner.

Power-based AAC, such as a tablet with a communication app, can provide many benefits, including:

- Fast and simple navigation
- Voice output
- Acceptability
- Motivation
- Portability
- Unlimited vocabulary

Power-based AAC is considered for learners when paper-based communication is no longer sufficient to meet the learner's communicative needs, for example they require voice output, they have a rapidly expanding vocabulary or when paper is a barrier to communication.

Power-based devices and communication apps can be obtained via the below routes:

- School loan (limited trial) - subject to learners meeting the criteria shown below (fig. 1; AAC Pathway)
- CASEE referral (NHS) - subject to meeting the CASEE criteria
- Parent/carer funding
- Charities/fundraising (see appendix 3)

If a learner uses power-based AAC in the form of a tablet, there are several considerations to be made around data protection and safety:

- All devices must have guided access or one-app mode enabled to ensure that the learner can only access the communication app
- Learners bringing a home-bought device into school must have a signed 'Home-school agreement' (see appendix 1)
- Learners trialling a school device must have a signed 'Device Loan Agreement' (see appendix 2)
- Learners must have a separate iCloud account to avoid sharing of personal media

- Adults must ensure that learners do not have access to any recording features, such as camera or voice memos.
- Photos used for communication must comply with the school's GDPR and safeguarding policy

Parents/carers should ensure that AAC devices are charged overnight and come into school with a full battery and with guided access enabled. Parents/carers should also ensure that relevant vocabulary from home is added to the device – support can be provided for this.

The AAC champion takes primary responsibility for adding vocabulary while in school, and ensuring the device is ready for use. However, all communication partners (i.e. anyone that communicates with the learner) should be aware of how to do this in their absence or should seek advice/training if they are unsure.

It is important for power-based AAC users to have a paper-based back-up, to ensure that they still have a voice in the event that power-based fails (for example, no charge, screen breakages).

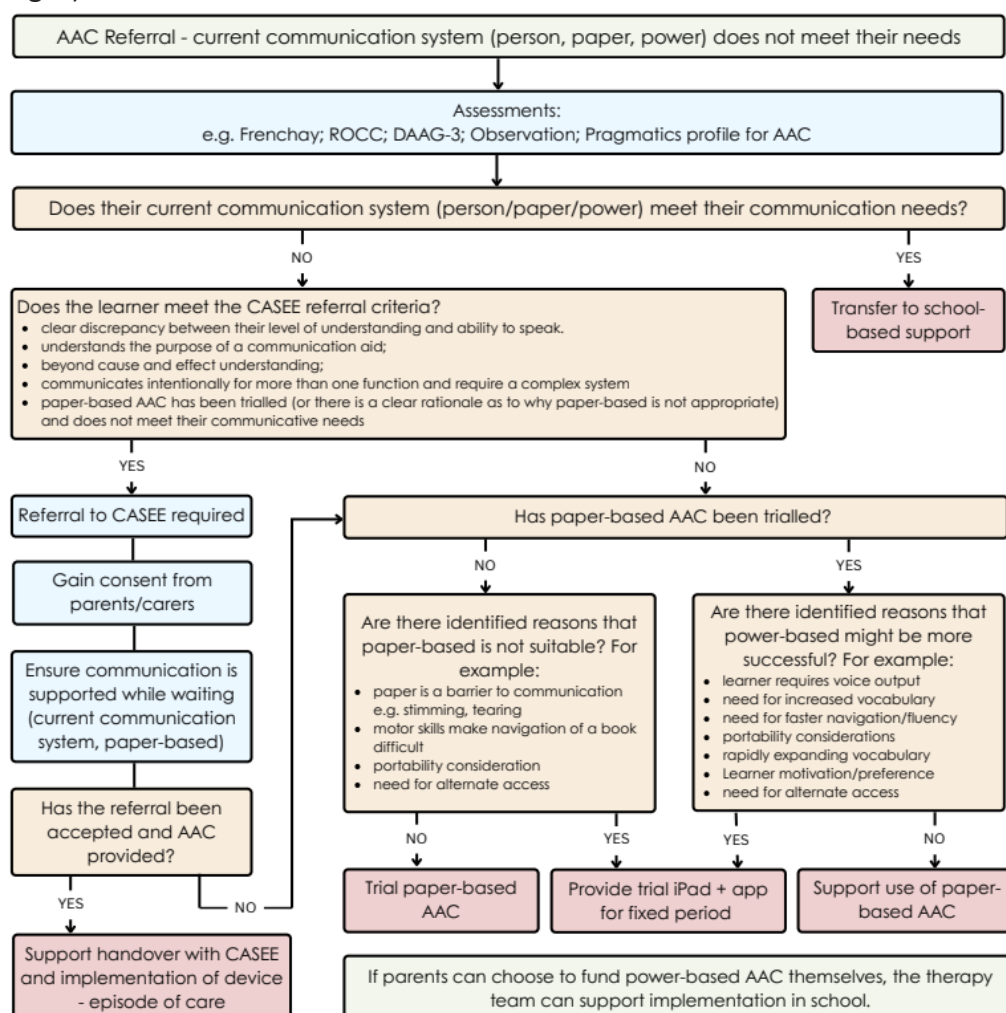


Fig. 1: AAC Pathway

## **9. Training and support**

### **9.1 Induction training**

At Edith Borthwick, all new staff access induction training on Speech and Language Therapy. This includes an introduction to AAC and how to support users in school. This is in the form of virtual training developed by the Speech and Language Therapy team.

### **9.2 Specific staff training**

The therapy team provide regular training for teachers to support AAC use, including PODD, communication books, power-based AAC and modelling aided language.

Training can also be requested on an ad hoc basis.

During implementation of AAC, depending on the needs of the learners and staff, the Therapy Team will spend time in class supporting the team to model and providing in-the-moment training.

### **9.3 AAC champions**

Each class is assigned an 'AAC Champion', who receives additional training and support. The responsibilities of the AAC champions include:

- Advocating for AAC by modelling consistently and supporting other staff members to model too
- Adding and organising vocabulary on a device
- Ensuring that the device is ready for use in school (guided-access is enabled, fully charged)
- Liaising with the Speech and Language Therapist

Ongoing training and support for AAC champions is offered on a regular basis.

### **9.4 Parent training**

Training on navigating and modelling paper-based AAC is offered to parents of learners who have been recommended a communication or PODD book.

Workshops for parents of power-based AAC users (or parents considering power-based AAC for their child) are run on a regular basis. These workshops cover an introduction to power-based AAC, support with choosing a device and app, information on how to implement AAC and other considerations. The workshop also provides ongoing support and an opportunity for parents to ask specific app or learner-related questions.

## **10. Transition**

During a learners' school life, there are many transitions that occur; to another class, another setting or completion of education.

During transition, there is an increased risk of AAC abandonment. This can be due to lack of expertise, lack of support, difficulties with accessing the device and lack of implementation (Baxter et al. 2012).



For transitions within school, class teachers must carry out detailed handovers to ensure that the new teacher is familiar with the learner's communication. The Therapy team are available to provide training for staff new to the AAC user, and written recommendations and advice are available on the learner's shared profile (central records).

## 11. References

- Ace Centre** (2024) *A guide to developing an effective AAC policy in education settings*. Oldham: Ace Centre. Available at: <https://docs.acecentre.org.uk/aac-policy>
- Baxter, S., Enderby, P., Evans, P. and Judge, S.** (2012) 'Barriers and facilitators to the use of high-technology augmentative and alternative communication devices: A systematic review and qualitative synthesis', *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 47(2), pp. 115–129
- Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care** (2015) *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*. London: Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>
- UK Government** (2014) *Children and Families Act 2014*. London: The Stationery Office. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents>

12. **Appendices**  
**Appendix 1 – Home-school Agreement**

## **AAC Device Home School Agreement**

Agreement for home-bought AAC devices to be used in school

### **1. This agreement is between:**

- 1) The Edith Borthwick School
- 2) Parent/carer name:

And governs the use and care of AAC devices brought from home into school for the purpose of supporting communication. This agreement covers the period that the device is in school.

I confirm that I will provide an electronic device to support my child's communication in school, as well as a suitable communication app.

I confirm that I have read the terms and conditions set out in the agreement and my signature at the end of this agreement confirms that I and the pupil will adhere to the terms.

### **2. Damage/loss**

By reading and signing this document, I agree that the Edith Borthwick School takes no responsibility for any damage or loss of personal electronic devices that are brought to the school site.

Personal electronic devices are at risk of damage at school for many reasons. The school will take reasonable precautions to keep personal devices safe but I understand this is not a guarantee.

I agree to provide a suitable and hard-wearing case to protect the device and as well as relevant insurance. I will ensure that the device is labelled with my child's name.

The Edith Borthwick School will not replace or pay funds to replace broken personal electronic devices.

### **3. Unacceptable use**

I agree that my child will not carry out any activity that constitutes 'unacceptable use'.

This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Using ICT or the internet to bully or harass someone else, or to promote unlawful discrimination
- Any illegal conduct, or statements which are deemed to be advocating illegal activity
- Activity which defames or disparages the school, or risks bringing the school into disrepute
- Causing intentional damage to ICT facilities or materials
- Using inappropriate or offensive language
- Making digital media files (e.g. video, photographic or sound recordings) of other people

I accept that the school may sanction the pupil, in line with our behaviour policy, if the pupil engages in any of the above **at any time**.

I understand that the school reserves the right to monitor the pupil's activity on this device and give permission for staff to search the device and remove any inappropriate media

I agree that the school can implement strategies to prevent the use of the camera while on site, such as by placing card to obscure the lens. This is to ensure the safety of all our learners.

I agree that if my child does make digital media files (e.g. video, photographic or sound recordings) of other pupils or staff, I will delete these immediately.

I agree to enable guided access prior to sending the device into school, to ensure that only communication apps are accessible.

I agree to disable any internet/data accessibility prior to sending the device into school.

#### 4. Consent

By signing this form, I confirm that I have read and agree to the terms and conditions set out above.

PUPIL'S FULL NAME	
PARENT'S/CARERS FULL NAME	DEBORAH
PARENT'S/CARERS SIGNATURE	
DEVICE AND APP TYPE	

## AAC Device loan agreements for pupils

Agreement for school AAC devices to be loaned to students

### 1. This agreement is between:

1) The Edith Borthwick School

2) Parent/carer name:

And governs the use and care of devices assigned to the parent's/carer's child (the "pupil"). This agreement covers the period from the date the device is issued through to the return date of the device to the school.

All issued equipment shall remain the sole property of the school and is governed by the school's policies.

1. The school is lending the pupil device for the purpose of accessing a communication app for a trial period of up to 3 months. I agree to seek

2. This agreement sets the conditions for taking an Edith Borthwick device home.

I confirm that I have read the terms and conditions set out in the agreement and my signature at the end of this agreement confirms that I and the pupil will adhere to the terms of loan.

### 2. Damage/loss

By signing this agreement I agree to take full responsibility for the loan equipment issued to the pupil and I have read or heard this agreement read aloud and understand the conditions of the agreement.

I understand that I and the pupil are responsible for the equipment at all times whether on the school's property or not.

If the equipment is damaged, lost or stolen I will immediately inform the class teacher, and I acknowledge that I may be responsible for the reasonable costs requested by the school to repair or replace the equipment. If the equipment is stolen, I will also immediately inform the police.

I agree to keep the equipment in good condition and to return it to the school on their demand from the school in the same condition.

I will not leave the equipment unsupervised in unsecured areas.

I will make sure my child takes the following measures to protect the device:

- Keep the device in a secure place when not in use

- Don't leave the device in a car or on show at home
- Don't eat or drink around the device
- Don't lend the device to siblings or friends
- Don't leave the equipment unsupervised in unsecured areas

### 3. Unacceptable use

I am aware that the school monitors the pupil's activity on this device.

I agree that my child will not carry out any activity that constitutes 'unacceptable use'.

This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Using ICT or the internet to bully or harass someone else, or to promote unlawful discrimination
- Any illegal conduct, or statements which are deemed to be advocating illegal activity
- Activity which defames or disparages the school, or risks bringing the school into disrepute
- Causing intentional damage to ICT facilities or materials
- Using inappropriate or offensive language

I accept that the school may sanction the pupil, in line with our behaviour policy, if the pupil engages in any of the above **at any time**.

### 4. Personal use

I agree that the pupil will only use this device for communicative purposes and not for personal use and will not loan the equipment to any other person.

### 5. Data protection

I agree to take the following measures to keep the data on the device protected.

- Keep the equipment password-protected
- Make sure my child locks the equipment if it's left inactive for a period of time
- Do not share the equipment among family or friends

I agree and understand that the school will maintain control of the device and take steps to ensure that digital media files (video, photographic, and sound recordings) cannot be made. I understand that the school will remove any such files to ensure the safety of all learners.

### 6. Return date

I will return the device in its original condition to the school office at the end of the trial period (see date below).

I will ensure the return of the equipment to the school if the pupil no longer attends the school.

I agree to fund/seek funding for a device and communication app and ensure that this is in place at the end of the trial period.

## 7. Consent

By signing this form, I confirm that I have read and agree to the terms and conditions set out above.

PUPIL'S FULL NAME	
PARENT'S/CARERS FULL NAME	
PARENT'S/CARERS SIGNATURE	

Device model/number:

Device serial number:

Date of issue:

Return Date:

## Appendix 3 – Funding options

### Funding options

#### Charities

##### *The Sequal Trust*

A communication disability charity that aims to improve the quality of life for those living with severe learning disability, mobility issues and communication difficulties.

<https://www.thesequaltrust.org.uk>

##### *Lenderhand*

An ~~essex~~-based charity helping underprivileged children and adults by providing them with the support they need to thrive.

<https://lenderhand.org/>

##### *Wipe Away Those Tears*

Wipe Away Those Tears is a charity that aims to grant a wish of a child with a serious or life limiting condition.

<https://www.wipeawaythosetears.org/>

##### *Dream Big Trust*

A grant giving charity to improve the lives of vulnerable children, young people and adults

[www.dreambigtrust.org](http://www.dreambigtrust.org)

##### *Family Fund*

Family Fund deliver grants for families raising a child or young person with disabilities on a low income in the UK. You can apply once per year.

<https://www.familyfund.org.uk/>

#### Government Funding:

##### *Disability Living Allowance (DLA)*

DLA is a UK government benefit that helps with the extra costs of living with a disability or long-term health condition. It is available for children under 16 who need extra care or have mobility difficulties.

##### *Personal Independence Payment (PIP)*

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is a UK government benefit designed to help people aged 16 or over who have a long-term disability or health condition that affects their ability to carry out daily activities or move around. It replaces Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for most people over 16.

## Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is a way of raising money by collecting small amounts of funds from a large number of people, usually via the internet. Some examples of Crowdfunding website given below:

- ◊ GoFundMe
- ◊ Just Giving

## Other Considerations

- You will need to source a device and a communication app. Please be aware that some charities may fund one and not the other, so you may need to make more than one application.
- Try a refurbished device. A refurbished device is a previously owned or returned product that has been inspected, repaired, and tested to ensure it functions like new. These devices are often certified, come with a warranty, and offer a cost-effective, eco-friendly alternative to buying new – please check iOS and battery suitability
- An iPad is not necessarily required, other tablets are available but please ensure that the app is supported by the device. This includes making sure that, for example, the IOS update on an iPad accommodates any apps that you're looking to install
- App prices vary. Check for sales and offers
- Where possible, the device should be used solely as your child's voice