



Wollaston Primary School

Voice care Policy

Review Date: October 2024

Reviewed By: Senior Leadership team

Voice Care Policy

Wollaston Primary School is aware that it has a responsibility for the wellbeing of its staff. Evidence shows that teachers are particularly at risk of developing voice problems. Female voices can be more vulnerable and some subjects, e.g. physical education, music and technology are more risk to the voice than others.

Having a good environment can help maintain a good voice and avoid strain. The Headteacher and Governors will consider:

- class size;
- class layout and design;
- noise;
- acoustics;
- chalk dust, fumes, irritants; and
- uncomfortable temperature, poor ventilation.

Research also indicates that as the voice influences the listener's reaction, the teacher's voice quality can influence children's learning.

The most common voice misuse is shouting and screaming, strained loud voice and also excessive throat clearing. The usual symptoms of voice problems are:

- throat pain when speaking or swallowing;
- sore throat in the morning which disappears when the voice 'warms up'
- hoarse, tired voice in the evening;
- increase in mucus
- rapidly-changing pitch or loss of control of voice.

Wollaston Primary School aims to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to minimise the risks to staff

Wollaston Primary recognises that under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employers must do all that is reasonably practicable to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work. This includes providing health and safety information, instruction and training, and providing a safe working environment, without risks to health.

Staff are encouraged to seek medical help if there is:

- persistent hoarseness for more than 2-3 weeks;
- regular hoarseness or voice loss;
- significant voice quality changes;
- constant vocal fatigue;
- difficulty or pain when swallowing.

The school will record any concerns about voice and refer them to the appropriate services if required.

Guidance for a Healthy Voice

- Stretch, hum and hiss before work.
- Stretch up and wave the arms from side to side to raise the ribs and open the chest.
- Exhale then breathe in deeply on the recoil.
- Exhale slowly to 'ssss' then 'shhh' then 'zhhh'. Imagine your lungs filling from lower down like balloons. Feel the rib cage expand further with each new intake of breath.
- Hum gently to 'mm', feel the vibration in the upper chest, throat, nose and chest. Start off very quietly, gradually increasing volume. Let the hum fill your mouth like a drink. This will warm the muscles powering the vocal folds safely, and help increase resonance. Best place for this is in the shower, or as you drive to work.
- Practise vocal slides up and down on 'ng' to eliminate pitch breaks.
- Energise the articulators with a few tongue twisters. Repeat rapidly, about six times each: Mixed biscuits, Rubber baby buggy bumpers and Peggy Babcock.

At Work

- Stand tall - shoulder blades sloping down the back, head comfortably balanced at the top of the spine to increase breath support and give both you and the class the reassuring feeling that you are in control.
- You will not feel or convey confidence by standing in a 'sag' position. Claim your territory in the classroom and walk forward, leading with your legs, not your chin.
- Remember to breathe (sometimes we forget) - allow yourself to breathe deeply and easily before you have something important to say. Big breaths generate volume, enabling you to power the voice from lower down, keeping tension away from the throat. Think of speaking from the belly rather than your neck. Be focused on where you are sending the sound.

To prevent problems, avoid

- Smoking, or cut down if you can
- Excessive consumption of alcohol, caffeinated tea, coffee, fizzy drinks (they dry you out)
- Medicated lozenges that kill pain - (pain is telling you to stop talking); suck non-medicated pastilles instead
- Heavy/spicy meals last thing at night (can cause indigestion and acid reflux, which inflames the vocal folds)
- Dairy products which can cause over-production of mucous around vocal folds
- Talking above background noise or yelling in excitement (causes strain)
- Talking in a whisper when your voice starts to go (folds are held in tension and the problem is made worse)

- Clearing your throat unnecessarily or as a mannerism (smacks the folds together, increasing mucous production, which makes you clear your throat again).

Early warnings

These may include breaks in the voice (sudden stoppages), unexpected changes of pitch (voice all over the place), changes in vocal quality (hoarseness), changes in the body (sore throat), increased effort to talk (voice tires easily), regular loss of voice, and a sensation of lump in the throat (usually emotional tension).

What can you do?

- Voice rest - stop talking when you get home
- Body rest - relax - take steamy baths
- Steam inhalations to moisten the back of the throat, and ease pain
- Gargle with boiled, cooled salty water to reduce pain and fight infection
- Hydrate by drinking lots of water (1.5 litres/day)
- Early nights
- Take time off to allow inflammation or swelling of the vocal folds to subside.