The Bridge Curriculum Principles and Procedures

This document provides an overview of the curricular offered at The Bridge Primary and Secondary Schools and the rationale underpinning the choices we have made about the curriculum. This document is made up of four sections:

- The Bridge Curriculum Overview
- The Bridge Pedagogy
- Formative Assessment at the Bridge and
- Summative Assessment at The Bridge

All four sections are linked as they provide information about teaching, learning and assessment at The Bridge. The Curriculum Overview provides a description of the overarching decisions we have made about the content of the curriculum for our pupils, and the principles we adhere to in delivering the curriculum. The Bridge Pedagogy describes the teaching approaches we use in delivering the curriculum. Formative Assessment at The Bridge provides a description of the range of formative assessment strategies used to inform learning both within the present learning situation and for future lessons and Summative Assessment provides an overview of the data collected on an annual basis to measure pupil progress in different areas and to benchmark against other schools.

These documents need to be set within a framework of our vision, which in relation to the work of the school states that we want to be:

- Continually evolving and improving assessment and teaching to facilitate the best learning and progress for The Bridge pupils
- Embedding and integrating work with all agencies
- Extending the knowledge base of all staff
- Maintaining a culture of innovation and sharing what works
- Continually reviewing the ‘offer’ and modifying and individualising as and when appropriate
- Continually improving facilities, resources and the environment
..and our values, agreed by stakeholders, which state:

At The Bridge we ...

- develop each pupils communication skills to their full potential, equally valuing all ways of communicating.
- ensure that pupils can learn and interact in a caring, happy, safe and secure environment.
- provide a tailor made, challenging but flexible curriculum, which addresses the specific needs of every pupil and develops pupils self confidence and independence.
- believe in the importance of friendships and encourage good, trusting relationships throughout the school and in the community.
- involve pupils, their parents, therapists, family and other professionals in decision making regarding their education and life choices.
- empower pupils and families to make their individual mark on and contribute to the community.
- maximise inclusion opportunities within multi-cultural and peer group settings to become active members of the community.
The Bridge Curriculum Overview

The Bridge curricula recognise that children and young people with both severe and profound learning difficulties face particular challenges with learning which demand particular solutions (Collis and Lacey 1996; Northway, 2001; Ware, 2003; Porter, 2005; Hewett, 2006; Goss, 2006; Lacey, Layton, Miller, Goldbart and Lawson, 2007; Lacey, 2009; Imray, Gasquez-Navarro and Bond, 2010; Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2012). The Bridge is a special school which provides for pupils with PMLD, SLD and autism. The pupil’s cognitive levels vary from p1 to L2 as shown on the graph below, with the greatest number of pupils achieving between p3ii and p6. (Data from July 2013 data collection).

The school provides learning opportunities for pupils from ages 2 – 19. The Bridge has separated its curriculum models into seven areas. There are three cognitive bands; those learning consistently at or below P4; those learning consistently within the P4 and Level 1 bands of the National Curriculum; those learning consistently at or above Level 1; and 5 age related bands. A representation of the curricular offer is provided in the table below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Foundation Stage</th>
<th>P 1-4</th>
<th>P3 – L1</th>
<th>L1+</th>
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<tr>
<td>KS1</td>
<td>PMLD curriculum with age appropriate activities</td>
<td>Foundation stage curriculum</td>
<td>Primary p3 – L1 curriculum</td>
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<td>KS2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary L1+ curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>KS3</td>
<td></td>
<td>KS3 p3 – L1 curriculum</td>
<td>KS3 L1+ curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>KS4</td>
<td></td>
<td>KS3 p3 – L1 curriculum</td>
<td>KS3 L1+ curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS5</td>
<td>13 + curriculum (differentiated according to need)</td>
<td>6th form curriculum (differentiated according to need)</td>
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The Bridge recognises that children and young people with Learning Difficulties have unique abilities and ways of learning. We take this to mean that for those who are likely to remain within intellectual parameters well below their chronological age for the whole of their school lives (that is, in the main at or below Level 1 of the National Curriculum) the National Curriculum will not provide the only basis for an appropriate curriculum.

Lacey (2009) has noted that typically this group of learners have inefficient and slow information processing speeds, little general knowledge, poor strategies for thinking and learning and difficulties with generalisation and problem solving. These problems may well be compounded by an additional description of autism (Jordan, 2001); the considerably higher than average chance of having attendant challenging behaviours (Harris, 1995; Emerson, 1997; Allen et al, 2006); and the increasing complexity of learning difficulties noted since the turn of the century (Carpenter, 2010).

We at The Bridge School regard all of our pupils and students as capable of making great progress over their school lives. We have very high expectations of them and we passionately believe that they are all capable of taking control of their own learning. To give us the maximum chance of enabling this with each and every one of our pupils, The Bridge School has determined some fundamental principles underpinning the curriculum.

1. **The curriculum should be broad, balanced and coordinated**
   
   We accept the absolute necessity of providing a broad and balanced and coordinated curriculum, which is wholly appropriate to the needs of the child. Time in full-time education is limited and precious, and we are duty bound not to waste it.

   The curricula provided by The Bridge are a content map of what might be taught. The curricula provide a framework for how learning can be scaffolded for groups of pupils, and makes suggestions for content.

   Alongside the curricular content all pupils are assigned to broad communication and learning frameworks. These will be discussed again in the section on pedagogy but are mentioned here to emphasise the broad offer made to all pupils. There are four communication and learning packages. Each describes a range of provision that should be made for pupils functioning at different developmental levels. The descriptors focus on provision that enables access to learning, particularly strategies to address expressive and receptive communication, attention and sensory regulation.

   At The Bridge we accept that unlike many of their mainstream peers our pupils are not always able to make the links between different learning experiences. For this reason we teach themes through other curriculum areas, for example numeracy skills are often specifically practiced in the community, using money and time in real situations.
2. The curriculum should be individualised and flexible

The curriculum as well as providing a framework for learning opportunities also provides life skills opportunities. The curriculum is not a round hole which we attempt to fit a square peg into. Carpenter (2010) suggests that the burning question for teachers in the 21st Century is how to engage learners; this process of engagement, he argues, must be at the heart of any curriculum development. Successful engagement must take into account an individual learner’s preferred learning style and his/her level of motivation and readiness to learn, as well as the availability of any resources required.

Individual learners may well move within The Bridge curriculum frameworks at various times of their school lives. They may equally be working within different models at the same time but in different areas of learning.

The requirements of each individual pupil are determined through careful observation and assessment, discussion with parents and with other agencies, particularly school based health professionals. There are many and varied opportunities to engage with parents to seek their views on their child’s learning potential. Person Centred Planning is used for all pupils from Year 5 upwards and takes place on an annual basis. Termly parent conversations are held with all primary parents which focus on a parents aspirations for progression. Regular meetings are held during the term and induction sessions are provided for all new parents so that they can find out about the school, but also so that they can contribute to staff knowledge about their child.

The Bridge also has an in-school behaviour team who can provide support and advice for the management of individual behaviour difficulties to best ensure access to learning.

3. The curriculum recognises teaching as an art

It is not the intention of The Bridge curriculum documents to dictate to teachers the what, when and how of teaching; it gives ideas, not instructions. We recognise teachers at The Bridge as being highly skilled professionals and it is their responsibility as leaders in the classroom to draw from the relevant curriculum the aspects that will ensure broadness, balance and which are coordinated, but which address individual needs and promote learning and progress. Senior Teachers and the Heads of each School ensure that all staff involved in delivering the curriculum (teachers, teaching assistants, multi-disciplinary professionals, meal supervisors, volunteers, etc) are given the support they each need to deliver the curriculum.

We recognise that the staff team are skilled facilitators of learning opportunities, particularly through adapting their own communication, scaffolding learning for individuals, using visual support where required and adapting the environment.

Support for the curriculum primarily uses a cascade model. Most support is focused on the class teacher, who then passes on information to other staff/professionals. A personalised approach to support is utilised with teachers having the opportunity to meet with their supporting Senior Teacher on a weekly basis.
All new staff and particularly newly qualified teachers have a personal development plan to provide a framework for the support they require when they are new to The Bridge. All new staff undertake a thorough induction process. All teachers have regular recorded supervision sessions with Senior Teachers which provide an opportunity to ensure that all their support requirements are met and that they are able to provide the best possible teaching and learning experiences both in and out of the classroom. Class teams meet at least twice weekly and once a half term teachers have more formal development meetings with teaching assistants.
The Bridge approach to pedagogy

The literal translation of the Greek word pedagogy is ‘to lead the child’. At The Bridge we aim to lead and facilitate learning. There is less emphasis on a teacher as director of learning.

There is considerable debate about the approach to pedagogy for pupils with special educational needs. Norwich (2008) argues for a similar approach to teaching for all pupils, with those with special educational needs being taught using similar techniques to those not defined as having special educational needs, except where a pupil’s needs are clearly unique and then these needs should be specifically addressed. Hinchcliffe and Imray (2012) argue against this position, suggesting that for pupils with more complex needs, particularly those attending special schools, a general differences position should apply. This means that a curriculum for those with PMLD or SLD should be supported by specific and different approaches to pedagogy.

Without wishing to appear like mediators we agree with both propositions in different contexts. Generally for our pupils with more cognitive impairments we have adopted the unique differences approach, where the approach to pedagogy is not at all similar to teaching that you would see in mainstream education (the PMLD curriculum document provides an example of this). However for some of our more cognitively able pupils and even when teaching those less able specific things or engaging in specific teaching activities more conventional pedagogical approaches are used.

At the Bridge we recognise that children with special educational needs do not necessarily follow a typical developmental trajectory. This is particularly the case for pupils with autism. Therefore the curriculum needs to provide a framework which can support learning for those that learn in a ‘typical’ and ‘atypical’ manner.

In essence the pedagogical approach proposed by The Bridge is one that is fit for purpose. Most teachers have been trained as mainstream teachers and therefore already have a bank of good pedagogical practice to call upon which is commonly used in mainstream schools. We also teach staff pedagogical approaches drawn from the ‘general differences’ framework. This provides each teacher with a repertoire of pedagogical approaches which can be used to teach individuals, groups and classes as required and can be made fit for specific purpose.

One of the clearest examples of a pedagogical approach which is drawn from the general differences framework is that of process based teaching and learning. A brief overview of this is provided below.
**Process Based Teaching and Learning**

At The Bridge we acknowledge the difference between process based and skills based teaching and learning and specifically promote process based teaching in many situations.

Hewett (2006) describes traditional approaches to teaching as tending to be highly structured, with the teacher leading the activities in ordered sequential steps and represents this with the following diagram:

![A visual representation of ‘structured’ teaching](image)

The nature of learning for children with significant special educational needs would he suggests, look more like this:

![The complexity of communication learning](image)

This model mirrors the arguments of Routes for Learning (2006) on the holistic nature of learning for those with PMLD and The Bridge believes that this to be equally true for all those with significant learning difficulties. This group of learners do not do well with the compartmentalised learning that advocates the teaching of discrete subjects such as Literacy and Numeracy.
Process based teaching and learning (Burden, 1990; Hinchcliffe, 1994; Collis and Lacey, 1996; Hewett and Nind, 1998; Nind and Hewett, 2001; Hewett, 2006; Imray, Gasquez-Navarro and Bond, 2010) posits that teaching understanding and knowledge-content (fact) together requires a holistic approach, where the process of the lesson becomes the objective.

As such;

- there may be no specific individual (SMART) objectives or targets;
- we are open to progress of any description;
- pupils take it where they can;
- adults ‘ladder’ and ‘scaffold’;
- we record regularly and assiduously;
- we establish regular plenaries which involve learners in their own ongoing assessment.

Intensive Interaction is a classic example of process based teaching where the key elements are:

- tasklessness;
- teachers follow, celebrate and extend;
- teachers act as facilitators to learning by “tuning in” to the learner and looking for “communication moments”;
- creating the communicative flow is the objective of the session.

This model also holds that;

- a ‘target set’ curriculum has a tendency to drive us to teach to targets;
- these targets are largely based on a pattern of conventional and normative development (as discussed above);
- they are academic in principle;
- they may not allow other learning to take place, in that the teachers’ drive is towards achieving the target;
- they compartmentalise and close the notion of learning, rather than adopting an open ended approach.

The adoption of a process based ideology for part of the curriculum heralds a significant change in emphasis. We are now concerned with the specific process of making a pizza or painting or travel training or shopping or dressing etc; the by product is now the Maths (or the English or the Science); curriculum design can concentrate on what is important to the child; we can fit the curriculum into the child rather than the child into the curriculum.

Process based teaching and learning encourages the development of concepts throughout the curriculum. For example mathematic concepts will be learned as a natural consequence of teaching the making a pizza. Here the mathematical thinking will involve the concepts of size, quantity, position, measurement, weight, structure of properties, temperature, sequencing, cause and effect, estimation, counting, addition, subtraction, fractions, division and possibly more.
Similarly, the opportunities for developing language, literacy and communication are self-evident and there are no doubt considerable openings for a number of scientific concepts to be explored. The open-ended nature of process based teaching and learning not only allows for, but positively encourages, all learners to stretch and be stretched. It ensures that teachers are facilitators of learning rather than mere trainers. Because the learner is to a large degree in control of his own learning, it naturally lends itself to seeking out highly motivating activities for each individual learner which in turn increases levels of engagement. High levels of engagement themselves ensure stretch and so the upward spiral continues.

**Skills Based Teaching and Learning**

There is however, also a place for skills based teaching and learning within our curricular. Skills based teaching and learning is anything that might be taught and learned by rote, where complete understanding is not an absolute essential to learning. It is of course desirable and should always be sought by the teacher, but it is not essential. One may for example, teach a pupil how to make a slice of toast without requiring him or her to understand what happens to the bread to turn it into toast. Similarly, we can teach the steps required to wash one’s hands without requiring the learner to understand exactly why washing one’s hands is necessary. Though we may use behavioural task analysis techniques such as chaining, backward chaining, shaping and fading to teach these specific skills, they should always be taught in context so that knowledge-content (the skills) can at least be related to an understanding of the event, for example, washing hands after using the toilet and before engaging in cooking etc.

Examples of skills based teaching and learning might be:

- Self help and independence – dressing and undressing, teeth cleaning, washing, using the shower, hair washing and brushing, using the toilet, personal hygiene, eating etc;
- some pre-numeracy and pre-literacy skills – counting to 10, gaining attention etc

There might also be specific skills within various activities:

- travel training, such as knowing the sequence for crossing at a zebra crossing;
- shopping and money handling, such as knowing where to put one’s money before going to the shops;
- cooking and the kitchen, such as knowing how to use a kettle safely;
- independent living, such as how to make a bed;
- ICT, especially in using a qwerty key board, the sequence necessary for successful texting, how to capture and play back still and moving images on a phone, how to log onto the internet, how to bring up favoured apps on an i-pad etc.

This list is not exhaustive and there are many other skills that should be taught by rote, but teachers must beware that this method of teaching can be highly inappropriate in certain areas. For example, pupils may not be secure in their use of number. That is, they may have learned to rote count, but as they could not detect simple counting errors their ability to use number effectively was largely negated.
In practice, each of The Bridge curricular will be taught using elements of both process and skills based teaching and staff need to be skilled teachers using both pedagogical approaches.

**Specific teaching approaches**
When educating pupils with learning difficulties, and specifically pupils with autism, some advocate for one or two specific approaches to be used across a school. The argument for this is that it provides a consistency to everything that the pupil experiences. It also presents less of a challenge when developing staff as they only learn to operate within one framework which is consistently reinforced.

At The Bridge we see the purpose of the curricula as being about providing a broad and wide ranging educational experience which promotes the development of the young person in the widest possible sense and helps them develop skills and knowledge to operate within our wider society. We do not subscribe to the use of one specific approach to teaching as we accept that all our pupils are very different and what works for one young person will not necessarily work for another.

This could be perceived as a more difficult path to follow as this requires ensuring all of our staff are conversant with a wide range of teaching approaches and are able to match appropriately approaches to individual children. We are however committed to this approach from an ethical standpoint and have developed the in house training and support mechanisms to develop our staff to work in this way.

Some of the approaches staff at The Bridge become familiar with are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PECS</th>
<th>Handwriting without tears</th>
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<tr>
<td>Makaton</td>
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<td>Intensive Interaction</td>
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<td>Sensory diets</td>
<td>Sensory stories</td>
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<td>Sensory integration circuits</td>
<td>Call and Response</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEACCH, particularly visual timetables</td>
<td>Colourful Semantics</td>
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<td>Using ipads</td>
<td>Halliwick swimming</td>
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<td>Attention Autism</td>
<td>Sherbourne movement</td>
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<td>Fun with Food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heuristic Play</td>
<td>Eye gaze</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive art</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive music e.g. Tacpac and Communication</td>
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This is a many and varied list and will not be exhaustive. The children are our teachers in much of our work and we always look for new and improved ways of providing their education.
Formative Assessment at The Bridge

Formative assessment is the assessment which takes place during learning. During learning activities staff can build in many opportunities to assess how students are learning and then use this information to make beneficial changes to the learning opportunities being presented. Formative assessment stands in contrast to summative assessment, which generally takes place after a period of learning activity and requires making a judgment about the learning that has occurred (for example by assigning a p level to work a student has taken part in).

**Purpose and benefits of Formative Assessment**

Black and Wiliam (1998b) define assessment broadly to include all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning. Under this definition, assessment encompasses teacher observation, classroom discussion, and analysis of student work. Assessments become formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet the learner’s needs.

When teachers know how students are progressing and where they are having difficulty learning, they can use this information to make necessary adjustments, such as re-teaching, trying alternative approaches, breaking down the task into smaller components or offering more opportunities for practice. These activities can lead to improved success.

Black and Wiliam (1998a) conducted an extensive research review of 250 journal articles and chapters from books to determine whether formative assessment raises academic standards in the classroom. They concluded that efforts to strengthen formative assessment produce significant learning. They determined that formative assessment helped low-achieving students, including students with learning disabilities, even more than it helped other students (Black and Wiliam, 1998b).

At The Bridge we are committed to formative assessment and all staff are continually assessing pupil progress. This assessment takes many forms. We do not dictate to staff how they should carry out formative assessment as different techniques suit different staff groups and different learners. Teachers are provided with a range of strategies and systems for recording formative assessment and they determine which is the most appropriate to use in the learning situation.

Formative assessment is recorded in a range of ways, but is always used to plan future learning activities and opportunities and provides the information used to feedback to parents/ carers, in the termly report, the achievements their son/daughter has made and inform the discussion about what future learning opportunities are appropriate and should be offered.
Summative Assessment at The Bridge

At The Bridge summative data is collected and analysed once each year. Data is collected in four areas:

- PIVATS data is used to report on P level and National Curriculum level achievement
- Social and emotional well being
- Challenging behaviour
- Targets achieved

We collect data and report P levels and National Curriculum levels using PIVATS. This means that we will record pupil’s achievement using the PIVATS notation of a,b,c,d or e. This enables us to measure smaller amounts of progress as each P Level or National Curriculum Level is broken down into five sub sections. Achievement using PIVATS notation is also reported to parents at the autumn parents evening.

In addition staff are asked to complete an assessment of pupil’s achievement relating to their social and emotional well-being. This is an in-house assessment which staff have contributed to and was initially drawn from the Every Child Matters agenda.

Staff are also asked to complete a challenging behaviour report which records a numerical score for the amount of support a pupil needs to manage their behaviour.

Annual review targets are deliberately set to be loose and allow some room for maneuverability over the year. Tighter targets are set for each term. Achievement against these targets is reported to parents in the termly report but is also scored using four scales.

The data collected is analysed to provide information about individual pupil’s learning and also to look at any trends in specific cohorts. The P level and National Curriculum level data is compared to national data sets using both the Progression Guidance materials (although the data set for comparison is from 2009, so is outdated) and CASPA (an on-line programme).

The Bridge has worked with Learning Plus UK to design a data dashboard which allows further analysis of overall achievement, viewing all four of the above over time along with attendance. This allows for analysis of individual achievement in all areas as well as analysis for progress over time for specific cohorts, for example pupils who receive the Pupil Premium funding, or those with English as an additional language.

Whilst performing analysis of data is interesting, what is most important is to learn lessons from the analysis and to ask questions informed by the analysis so that new areas for improvement can be identified and included in the Learning Improvement Plan.

Data analysis is recorded in a booklet which is made available for all staff. The ‘lessons learned’ are explicit in this booklet and the identified areas for improvement are included in the Learning Improvement Plan.

The data booklet is also shared with all governors so that they have an oversight of the achievement of the school. Governors receive an annual presentation on the school’s data where they can specifically perform their role as the school’s critical friend. There is a specific governor committee for Teaching and Learning and this committee look at different aspects of the data analysis throughout the school year in greater detail.
References


Goss P (2006) *Meaning-led learning for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties*. British Journal of Special Education. 3 (4); 210-219


Hewett D (2006) *The most important and complicated learning: that’s what play is for!* ICAN, Talking Point, March. [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)


