
Overview of the curriculum



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What follows provides an overview of the curricular offered at The Bridge Primary and Secondary Schools and The Integrated Learning Space. It explains the rationale underpinning the choices we have made about the curriculum. There are four sections:

- The Bridge Curriculum Overview
- The Bridge approach to teaching and pedagogy
- Process based teaching and learning
- Skills based teaching and learning
- Specific teaching approaches

All four sections are linked as they provide information about teaching and learning 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.

This needs to be read in association with our vision and values (above).

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 L3 as shown on the graph below, with the greatest number of pupils achieving between p3ii and p6. (Data from July 2014 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.

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.

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.

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 on an annual basis and this will underpin the new Education, Health and Care Plans. Termly parent conversations are held with all 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.

The Bridge approach to teaching & pedagogy

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 that teachers at The Bridge are 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, Special Needs Professionals, 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 once a week and there are regular formal development meetings with Special Needs Professionals.

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.

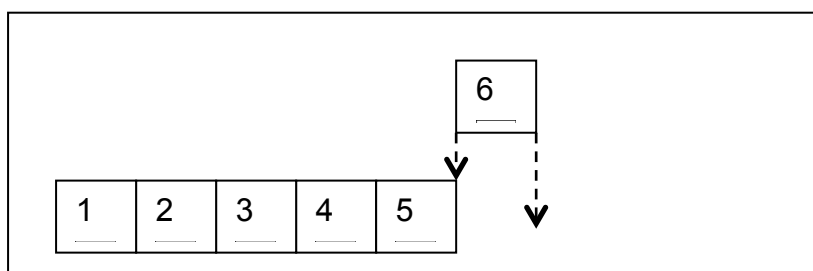
In essence the pedagogical approach proposed by The Bridge is one that is fit for purpose. Most teachers have been trained as mainstream teachers and therefore already have a bank of good pedagogical practice to call upon which is commonly used in mainstream schools. We also teach staff pedagogical approaches 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

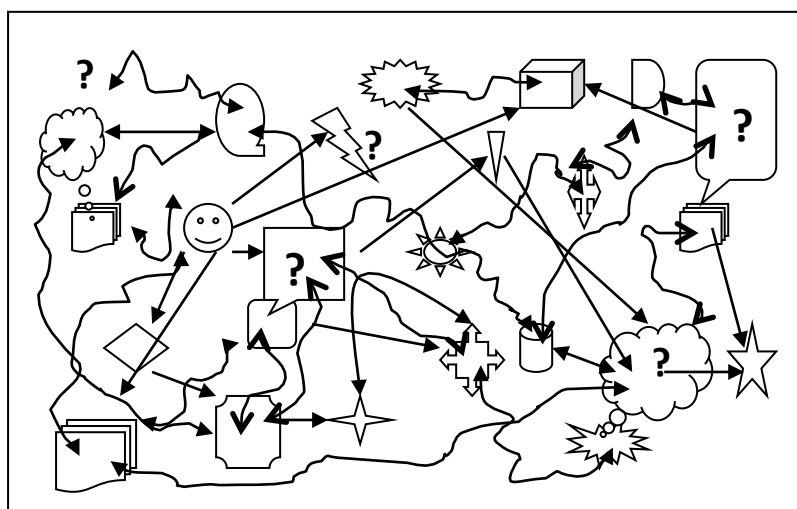
At The Bridge we acknowledge the difference between process based and skills based teaching and learning and specifically promote process based teaching in many situations.

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

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



The complexity of communication learning

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 an 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 favourite apps on an iPad 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.

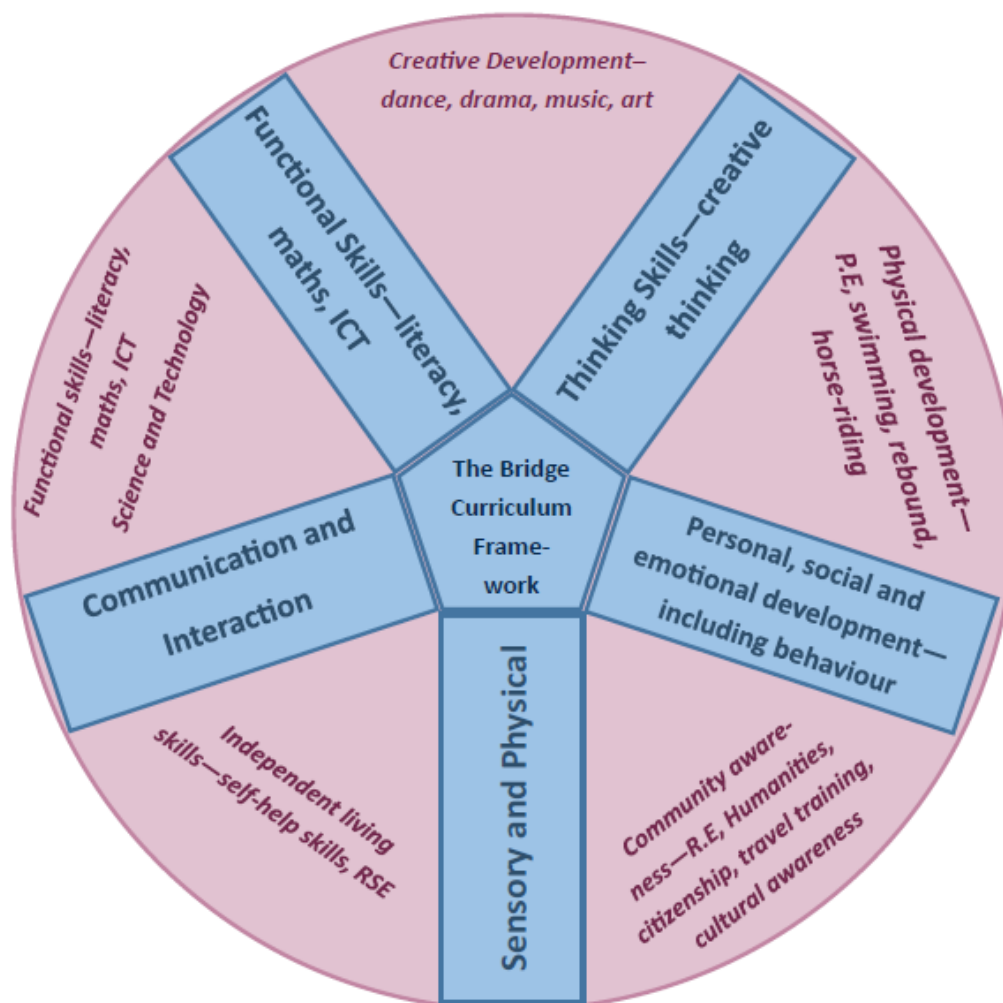
- PECS
- Makaton
- Intensive Interaction
- Sensory diets
- Sensory integration circuits
- TEACCH, particularly visual timetables
- Using ipads
- Attention Autism
- Fun with Food
- Heuristic Play
- Interactive art
- Interactive music eg. Tacpac and Commusication
- Handwriting without tears
- Multi-sensory approaches
- Sensory stories
- Call and Response
- Colourful Semantics
- Halliwick swimming
- Sherbourne movement

It is up to the teachers to decide which of the above are most suitable and beneficial for their students. Research and evidence is very important in deciding which approach to use. We encourage the implementation and evaluation of new ideas.

The curriculum in practice

To provide a common framework for the curriculum, we have revisited each of our previous, diverse curricula and ensured that there are common subjects in all areas and common themes which pervade these subjects.

This is shown diagrammatically below:



In essence in each of the curricula there are five strands

- **Social and Emotional**
(e.g. feelings, behaviour, interaction)
- **Cognition and Learning**
(e.g. Functional skills – English, Maths, Science, ICT)
- **Communication and Interaction**
(e.g. expressive communication - short sentences, single words, non-verbal (use of Body language/facial expression / signing/pictures or symbols / objects)
- **Sensory and Physical**
(e.g. Health needs / Engagement in physical activities / Sensory processing / Special diets / Puberty)
- **Independence**
(e.g. Community access / travel training / Work placements / Personal Care)

And there are six subject areas

- Functional skills – Literacy, Maths, ICT
- Creative development – dance, drama, music, art
- Physical development – PE, swimming, rebound, horse riding
- Independent Living Skills - Self help skills, RSE
- Community awareness – RE, citizenship, humanities, travel training, cultural awareness
- Science and Technology

What is taught in the subject areas will vary according the needs of the pupils for each of the curricula, but these headings are used for timetable purposes to ensure a common language throughout the school. Many teachers will use sub-headings to provide more detail to what is being delivered in the session and this is encouraged.

Parents will receive three reports a year providing an overview of their son/daughter's achievement in each of the subject areas.

The targets from the strands are written in discussion with parents. They form the IEP targets that are taught through the relevant subjects.