



ASHGATE SPECIALIST SUPPORT PRIMARY SCHOOL

START

A curriculum for pupils with profound and complex learning difficulties.

(previously assessed as working from P1- P4)

Purpose of the policy and guidance documents

- Introduce the START approach.
- Describe the key features of the learning environment and staff skills and attributes required to deliver the curriculum.
- Introduce the key areas of learning for the curriculum for pupils working from P1 to P4.
- Summarise our approach to assessing and planning for the individual needs of our pupils working at a very early stage of development.

Personalised learning

All children at Ashgate are encouraged to participate in lessons at a level that is meaningful to them. We recognise that each child is unique and that different cohorts of children may have different learning styles and require different teaching approaches.

Many of the children working with the START curriculum will have a complex profile of physical, sensory, learning and health/medical needs. However, many of the principles and approaches may also be relevant to children with a diagnosis of autism and severe learning difficulties.

When developing our curriculum for pupils working from P1- P4 we have drawn on our own experience at Ashgate, in other schools we have worked and the practice of schools who have been generous enough to share their philosophies on their websites, in publications or via internet forums. In particular we have looked at the work Dr Penny Lacey at Castlewood School Birmingham and the work of The Bridge School in Islington.

START

Staff created START to describe the key attributes of staff and features of the learning environment we felt were essential to enable pupils with the complex profiles of need to begin to learn successfully and access the curriculum.

S.T.A.R.T

Space

Our children may explore by rolling, propping, crawling or shuffling on their backs which requires more space than standing, sitting or walking.



Time

it may take our children longer to explore toys and equipment due to their physical and sensory needs and a high level of support may be required.



Appropriate toys and activities

Toys, activities and equipment may need to be modified to take into account each child's physical and sensory needs including the use of specialist sensory approaches such as small sensory spaces/little rooms.



Responsive Staff

who recognise and respond appropriately to each child's early communication skills and work effectively as a team.



Team Approach

from families, staff within class and colleagues from a range of health and education services.



Features of the Learning Environment

We believe that all children should have the opportunity to learn by exploring their environment as independently and actively as possible. For children with complex physical, sensory and learning needs this is provided through:

Space

- Children with physical difficulties may explore by rolling, propping, crawling or shuffling on their backs which requires more space than standing, sitting or walking and the children need to be safe within this space.
- For equipment for positioning (lying, sitting, standing, moving) & hoist based transfers.
- Personal space in which individual children can exert as much control as they can over their environment (e.g. activity arch, or simple 'reactive environment' such as the piano mat or space blanket)

Time

It may take our children longer to explore toys and equipment due to their physical or sensory needs. Time is also needed to:

- Provide pupils with regular changes of position throughout the day.
- Sensitively complete care routines such as giving tube feeds or support mealtime plans with orally fed children.
- Complete individual programmes which may include exercise programmes, intensive interaction and Reach for Sound sessions.

Appropriate toys, activities and equipment that are modified to take into account each child's physical and sensory needs including:

- A range of interesting objects, activities and events that can be appreciated through the senses – starting with those that give a strong sensory feedback when touched, grasped, knocked.
- Multisensory activities that particularly utilise the child's strongest sense/s but also stimulate the other senses as well.
- Small sensory spaces/little rooms, Tac Pac and sensory massage.
- Songs of reference/music of the day, sensory cues, on body signing, objects of reference, photos for routine activities (depending on individual children's needs)
- Access to learning spaces with minimal visual or aural clutter with a good light source on the person or object that is the focus of attention and good quality sound sources.
- Switch adapted or accessible technology such as using the computer to explore cause and effect activities or controlling electrical equipment such as the electric mixer or foot spa via the Powerlink.

Responsive Staff who:

- Understand how each child's physical, sensory and health needs impact on their learning.
- Work creatively to meet the needs of all pupils in class and readily adopt new ideas and activities.
- Are confident in meeting the pupil's physical, medical and general care needs and handle medical emergencies calmly and sensitively.
- Recognize and respond appropriately to each child's early communication skills.

- Move and handle children safely and respectfully and know how to help children use their equipment to the best of their ability.
- Enable children to extend their physical skills by providing physical support during challenging activities such as independent sitting on a physiotherapy bench.
- Support children appropriately so they can move for themselves and explore as actively as they can.
- Assess the level of stimulation that is right for each individual child and provide appropriate activities (loud and exciting or gentle and calming)
- Recognise that care routines can provide vital learning opportunities and enable children to practice self-care and independence skills for themselves wherever possible.
- Use their initiative to adapt the structure of the day and resources or activities in response to pupil needs, for example, if staffing changes due to a member of staff needing to accompany a pupil to hospital.

Team approach

The immediate class team

In each class the team consists of a teacher, teaching assistants and a lunchtime organiser. As all staff work closely with the children it is important that they feel valued and listened to. As our children require a high level of support during mealtimes and personal care routines our lunchtime staff are often working 1:1 with pupils and can provide detailed observations of each child's skills and behaviours at these times.

Multi-agency Approach

Training and support from other professionals is also essential if our pupil's needs are to be safely met in school.

A number of our children have complex medical needs and staff receive annual updates of training to enable them to support pupils who are tube fed or require emergency medication in school.

Pupils' with significant mobility problems will have an individual moving and handling risk assessment compiled by a Physiotherapist and equipment will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains suitable for their needs. Moving and handling training is also regularly updated to enable staff to move and position pupils effectively whilst being mindful of their own back health.

The Speech and Language Therapist provides advice and support for both communication and feeding and swallowing needs and may work in conjunction with an Occupational Therapist to address seating and sensory issues associated with mealtimes.

Staff from the Sensory Service provide training and information to staff to enable them to successfully address each child's vision and hearing needs and provide suitably adapted activities in the classroom.

Staff from our partner agencies may work with pupils in class alongside the class team or work individually with pupils in specialist rooms in school but all those involved keep each other informed through agreed lines of communication.

Working with Families

A family partnership approach which makes good use of two-way communication is essential for our pupils. To help foster good attendance it is vital that parents have faith in the support we provide and know we will communicate any concerns about their child's health as well as celebrations of achievements. Each pupil also has a home school diary to enable daily messages to be sent between home and school. School and partner agencies all keep in close contact and try to consider whole family needs wherever possible.

The Curriculum

Starting with the child

The curriculum is personalised for each child based on assessments of individual needs. Personal targets are identified in consultation with families, classroom staff and representatives from partner agencies. These targets focus on learning fundamental skills and gaining a basic understanding of the world. Key targets open doors to wider learning opportunities and are reviewed at least once a term.

Our learners come to school having already faced many challenges in their lives. They may have spent time in hospital or found it difficult to access opportunities outside the home due to their complex profiles of need. When starting school admission arrangements need to be:

- Family friendly (e.g. meetings at home if cannot get into school).
- Sensitively paced.
- Allow time for discussion.
- Honest about what we can and cannot provide (e.g. in terms of the levels of support that can be provided by partner agencies).
- Provide us with the essential information that we need to help us look after the child safely and help them access learning opportunities successfully.

One Page Profiles

A one-page profile is a simple summary of what is important to someone and how they want to be supported. Every child at Ashgate has a one page profile and input from families is crucial at all stages if we are to describe our children's needs effectively. Each child's profile is updated every year as part of the EHCP review process.

Individual Learning Plans/ Individual Education Plans

Building on from their One Page Profile we continue to use a person centred planning approach in the individual learning plans we produce for our pupils which start from each child's needs, strengths and interests.

Core areas of Learning

The core areas of learning for our pupils working from P1 to P4 have been identified as:

- How I communicate (Communication and Literacy)
- My body and how it moves (Physical Development)
- My thinking (Cognition)
- Looking after myself and my body (Independence and personal care)

Participation in the wider life of the school

Children with complex learning and medical needs are valued members of the learning community at Ashgate Specialist Support School. The children join in with whole school activities and celebrations wherever possible and inclusion opportunities are also offered for class based and outdoor play activities as appropriate for individual pupil needs.

Quality of life and the voice of the child

A small number of our pupils have ongoing serious health problems. They may have experienced regular hospital stays involving surgery or other invasive medical procedures or have experienced frequent episodes of illness. As a result they may find it difficult to achieve a comfortable position and be sensitive to touch based sensations. Such pupils are often unable to control their own environments effectively and may need to wait for the world to come to them. When planning for all our pupils we try to maximise the comfort of each child and engage them in activities they enjoy to increase their quality of life. Staff also keep the children's needs in mind, using careful observation to help them keep the 'voice of the child' at the centre of everything they do.

Finding out more

If your child is working in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) you can find out more about our curriculum for our youngest children by looking on the website in:

Parent Information – Early Years

If you would like to find out more about the curriculum we offer for pupils working from P1 to P4 please contact school on 0161 219 6642.