Castle School

Together We Learn

Pre-Formal Curriculum

A guide for parents, carers, staff and visitors.

Be Confident | Be Kind | Be Creative

Pre-Formal — Reactive

Curriculum Intent

Our intent is to provide a highly individualised, sensory and therapeutic curriculum that enables learners working at the earliest developmental levels to engage with people, experiences and the world around them. The curriculum starts with the individual learner, recognising their communication, sensory, physical and emotional needs and celebrating small but significant steps in progress.

Through consistent, responsive relationships and motivating experiences, we support pupils to be confident in expressing preferences and communicating intentionally, be kind through developing trusting connections with others and be creative as they explore, anticipate and respond to their environment.

We aim to build engagement, intentional communication, joint attention and emerging independence, ensuring that every learner has opportunities to exercise choice and develop a sense of agency. In doing so, we enable pupils to belong, to achieve in ways that are meaningful to them and to thrive through increasingly active participation in their own lives.

Pre-Formal — Proactive

Curriculum Intent

Our intent is to provide an ambitious, individualised and developmentally appropriate curriculum that builds upon learners' emerging communication, cognition, physical independence and social awareness. Through a broad range of sensory, practical and purposeful experiences, pupils are supported to become increasingly active participants in their learning and everyday lives.

We provide appropriate challenge and high expectations so that pupils develop the confidence to initiate, make choices, solve problems and communicate with greater purpose. Learners are encouraged to be confident by developing agency and independence, be kind through increasingly meaningful interaction and relationships, and be creative by exploring, experimenting and applying their developing skills in different contexts.

By recognising individuality and celebrating progress, we support pupils to belong within their school community, achieve increasingly ambitious personal outcomes and thrive as confident and active learners who are ready for their next stage.

Our Pre-Formal Curriculum p1

Our pre-formal curriculum is carefully personalised to reflect the individual needs, abilities, interests and developmental stages of every pupil. Each learner is at the centre of our teaching and learning, with opportunities and experiences thoughtfully planned to reflect their strengths, preferences and individual learning priorities.

Our pre-formal learners have profound and complex learning needs and benefit from a highly individualised approach to education. Many require significant levels of adult support to access learning, develop communication and interaction skills, build engagement and meet their personal care needs. We recognise that every pupil is unique and ensure that their learning experiences are meaningful, appropriate and purposeful.

Sensory exploration is a fundamental part of our curriculum. We provide a rich variety of multi-sensory experiences designed to engage, motivate and stimulate pupils through sight, sound, touch, smell, taste and movement. These experiences enable learners to explore their surroundings, develop their senses, communicate their responses and build an understanding of the world around them.

Our Pre-Formal Curriculum p2

Our curriculum is flexible and responsive, allowing us to adapt learning opportunities in line with pupils' individual and changing needs. We place great importance on providing meaningful experiences that encourage curiosity, promote engagement and support each learner to develop at their own pace.

There is also a strong emphasis on specialist provision and targeted developmental opportunities. These include swimming, physiotherapy, massage stories, intensive interaction and physical development programmes. Each provision is carefully selected to support pupils' individual needs, wellbeing and development. Where appropriate, increased staffing levels ensure that learners receive the support and attention they need to participate fully.

This booklet provides an overview of the lessons, specialist provision and learning experiences offered across our pre-formal curriculum.

Our Pre-Formal Curriculum p3

Our Curriculum:

- **Provides time for repetition and consolidation,** allowing learners to revisit, practice and develop skills at their own pace.
- **Values consistency and routine,** recognising the importance of familiar people, environments and experiences in supporting learning and wellbeing.
- **Promotes engagement and motivation** by identifying each learners' interests, preferences and individual motivators and using these to create meaningful learning opportunities.
- **Prioritises individual learning targets,** ensuring that teaching is purposeful and focused on each pupil's next steps, with their interests used as a vehicle for learning and development.
- **Responds to individual sensory needs,** providing carefully considered sensory experiences and appropriate levels of stimulation to support engagement, regulation and exploration.
- **Develops communication and interaction,** recognising and valuing every form of communication and providing opportunities for pupils to express themselves, make choices and connect with others.
- **Supports the development and generalisation of skills,** creating opportunities for learners to transfer and apply what they have learned across different activities, environments and everyday situations.

Above all, our pre-formal curriculum celebrates every achievement, however small, and recognises that progress looks different for every learner. We aim to provide a nurturing, stimulating and supportive learning environment in which every pupil is valued, included and given the opportunity to reach their individual potential.

Progression

Your child may begin their journey at Castle School in a Pre-Formal class. Throughout their time at school, their progress and development will be regularly observed and assessed, taking into account their individual physical, cognitive and learning needs. Where appropriate, pupils may move between classes to ensure their provision continues to meet their changing needs.

Curriculum activities and approaches are used consistently across the school. However, each Pre-Formal class follows its own topic cycle long-term curriculum plan, allowing learning to be tailored to the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils within that class.

Some interventions and learning approaches may be shared across classes, but the resources, equipment and themes used will vary. This provides opportunities for pupils to revisit familiar skills and experiences in different contexts, supporting them to transfer, generalise and apply their learning across a range of activities and settings.

Classroom resources and learning materials will also reflect the current topic and the individual needs of the pupils.

Curriculum Planning

Each pathway follows a long-term curriculum plan built around a range of creative themes and topics, which are changed termly to provide varied and engaging learning experiences.

Each topic includes suggested sensory activities, stories and learning opportunities designed to capture pupils' interests, encourage engagement and support their individual development.

Teachers use this framework flexibly, selecting and adapting activities to reflect the needs, abilities, interests and learning styles of the pupils in their class. This ensures that learning is meaningful, accessible and appropriately challenging for every pupil.

Planning is designed to incorporate and develop four key areas of learning:

Cognition and Learning, developing awareness, exploration, curiosity and early thinking skills.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health, supporting relationships, emotional well-being, interaction and engagement.

Sensory, Physical and Life Skills, developing sensory awareness, physical skills, independence and participation in everyday experiences.

Communication and Interaction, developing communication, understanding, expression and interaction with others.

These four areas are woven throughout the curriculum to provide a holistic approach to each pupil's learning and development.

Assessment, Recording and Reporting

Ongoing assessment is an important part of our pre-formal curriculum. Teachers regularly observe and assess pupils' learning to understand their individual needs, recognise their achievements and support their development.

This helps us to:

- **Plan meaningful learning opportunities** that are tailored to each pupil's individual needs, interests and abilities.
- **Support and monitor progress,** ensuring that every pupil has the opportunity to develop new skills, build on what they already know and make the best possible progress.

Assessment
Evidence For Learning (EFL)

We record students progress on EFL, a secure online platform. Achievements are linked to your child's Personalised Learning Goals, which reflect the targets agreed at their Annual Review and outlined in their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). These goals are also included in the student's digital passport.

EFL allows us to capture and celebrate the students learning and achievements through photos, videos and other evidence. We share these updates with parents, carers and families daily, helping families to see what their child has been learning and the progress they are making.

Parents and carers can also use EFL to share photos, videos or updates about important events and achievements at home, helping us build a fuller picture of your child's learning and development across home and school.

Parents and carers receive a school report alongside their child's EHCP, as well as an end-of-year report. These reports celebrate your child's achievements, highlight their progress and share the successes they have enjoyed throughout the academic year.

Assessment Engagement Model

The engagement model helps us understand how the students learn, develop new skills and build on what they already know. Twice a year, in January and June, teachers assess each pupil's progress in five key areas:

- **Anticipation,** showing excitement or expectation about an activity or event.
- **Exploration,** exploring objects, activities and experiences in different ways.
- **Initiation,** beginning an activity or showing a desire to take part.
- **Realisation,** understanding the results of an action or recognising that something has changed.
- **Persistence,** continuing with an activity and staying engaged for longer.

Teachers use observations and evidence to build a picture of each child's progress, including how they develop new skills, apply what they have learned and maintain their knowledge over time. This helps us recognise each child's individual achievements and identify the next steps in their learning.

Assessment is also an ongoing part of everyday learning. During each session, teachers observe how pupils engage with activities and make progress. The focus for learning is recorded in short-term plans, which are shared with the class team through pupils' individual workbooks or on the classroom interactive whiteboard.

For further information about the Engagement Moel and how it is used to assess pupils' progress, please visit the GOV.UK Engagement Model guidance.

Assessment
OCR Life and Living Skills

The OCR Life and Living Skills qualification is a credit-based qualification offered to pupils in Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form.

The qualification supports pupils to develop important skills for everyday life, helping them prepare for greater independence, take an active role in their community and develop their confidence and personal skills. Throughout the year, teachers focus on specific Life and Living Skills criteria over a two-week period each half term. These skills are carefully planned into our long-term curriculum to ensure that pupils have opportunities to develop the required skills and work towards completing the relevant units.

We record pupils' achievements and progress on EFL using photos, videos and other evidence in the same way as we do for daily learning updates. This helps us capture and celebrate the skills pupils develop in school.

At the end of their time at Castle, each pupil's evidence is brought together into a portfolio and submitted to OCR for external moderation.

On successful completing, pupils receive an OCR Entry Level 1 Certificate in Life and Living Skills, recognising their learning, achievements and the skills they have developed to support everyday life.

Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) p1

At Castle School we are committed to preparing all our pupils for adulthood and life beyond school. We recognise that every young person has the right to experience a meaningful, fulfilling and valued adult life, regardless of their cognitive, physical, sensory or communicative abilities.

PfA is embedded throughout our curriculum and daily practice. We place a strong emphasis on developing the skills, experiences and opportunities that enable pupils to achieve their greatest possible level of independence, communicate their wishes and feelings, build relationships, participate in their communities and experience positive health and wellbeing.

We recognise that every pupil's journey towards adulthood is unique. For some pupils. This may involve developing practical life skills, increasing independence and preparing for employment or supported opportunities within the community. For some pupils, progression may be demonstrated through much smaller but equally significant steps, such as developing consistent responses, expressing preferences, making choices, anticipating familiar routines, communicating through eye gaze, facial expressions, gestures or objects of reference and engaging meaningfully with the people and environments around them.

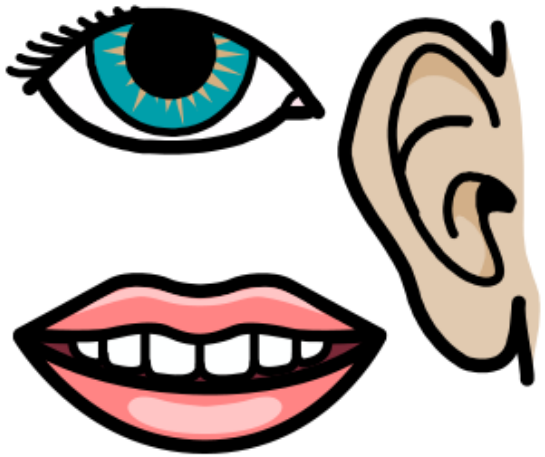
Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) p2

For our pupils, preparing for adulthood is not simply about achieving independence in the traditional sense. It is about maximising autonomy, ensuring their voices are heard, recognising their individual communication methods, promoting dignity and ensuring they have meaningful opportunities to influence their own lives. This includes supporting pupils to make choices, develop positive relationships, access stimulating and enjoyable experiences, participate in everyday routines and maintain the best possible quality of life.

We understand that independence will look different for every pupil. For some, it may mean completing a task with reduced support; for others, it may mean indicating a preference, initiating an interaction, making a choice between two experiences or developing a greater awareness of their surroundings. All progress is valued, celebrated and recognised as an important step towards adulthood.

Through personalised target setting, directly linked to each pupil's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) outcomes, we ensure that learning is purposeful, individualised and relevant to each young person's future. Targets are designed to build on pupils' existing strengths, address their individual needs and provide opportunities for meaningful progression across all four PfA areas.

Communication and Interaction



Communication



communication

Intensive Interaction

What it is:
Intensive interaction is an activity that enables the students to become aware that they are communicating with another person. The student's movements and vocalisations are copied and their awareness is noticed.

How it is carried out:
The activity can be carried out with close body contact to enable the student to feel secure, or adults can work away from the adult and their movements and vocalisations are copied.

Outcomes for the activity:
Intensive interaction enables the students to become more aware of themselves and others around them and therefore they can begin early communication from the world around them.

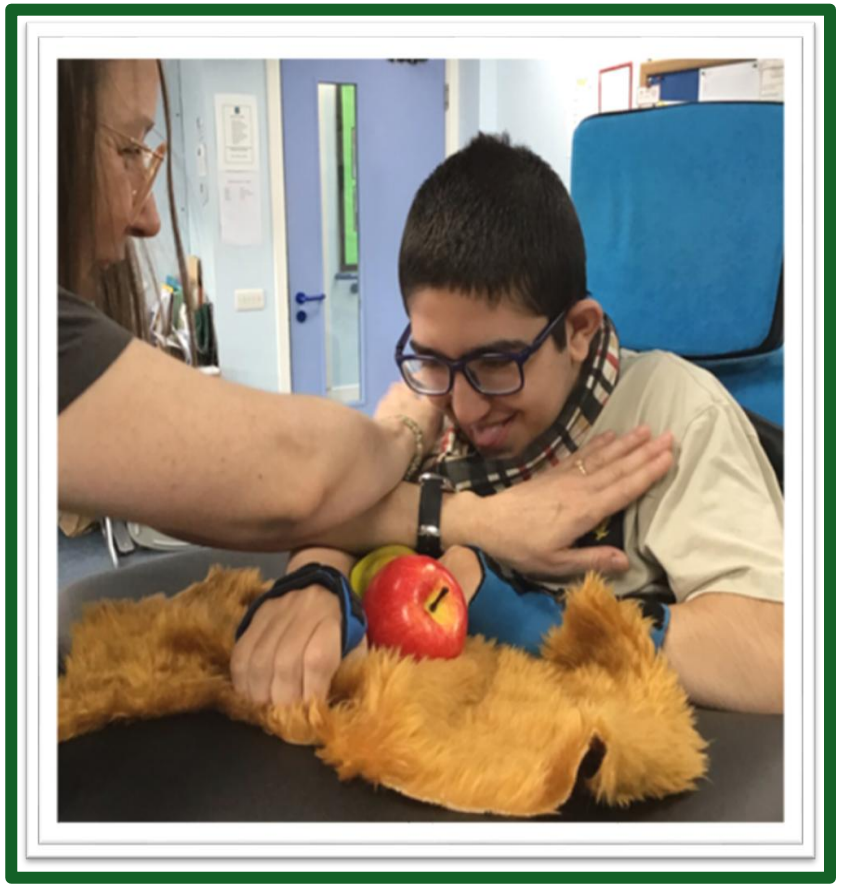


Massage Story / Poem

What it is:
Massage story is a mixture of words and pressure, moving your hands in different shapes so that the student experiences different sensations on different body parts with each touch.

How it is carried out:
Massage story is carried out with a short story of around six sentences. Each sentence has one touch and is repeated three times.

Outcomes for the activity:
From carrying out Massage stories in this way, the students begin to anticipate what is coming next. They may begin to link a certain word with an action and may begin to communicate for 'more'.



Sensory Story

What it is:
Sensory Story is a mixture of sentences and objects to explore. The students' responses to the objects and sentences are observed.

How it is carried out:
Massage story is carried out with a short story of around six sentences. Each sentence has one touch and is repeated three times.

Outcomes for the activity:
While working through the sensory story the students can communicate their preferences for different objects.

They are working on anticipating throughout the story and experiencing how to use familiar objects.



Attention Building

What it is:
Attention building time is time given for the students to develop their shared attention with an adult.

During this time the adult explores the object while the student watches what the adult is doing.

How it is carried out:
During this time the adult sits in front of the student with a bucket and sings a simple song. They then explore an object from the bucket trying to draw the student's attention to the toy without giving them time to explore it. The toy then goes back in the bucket, and a different object is explored.

During the next stage; the adult completes a simple activity while the student watches and begin to anticipate the outcome.

Outcomes for the activity:
The activity gives the students opportunities to develop their shared attention and the length of time they can concentrate on an activity that is not their choosing.



Soundbeam

What it is:
Sound beam is an auditory communication activity. An invisible beam is projected within close proximity to the student, and a sound is produced when a student breaks the beam by moving or pressing a switch.

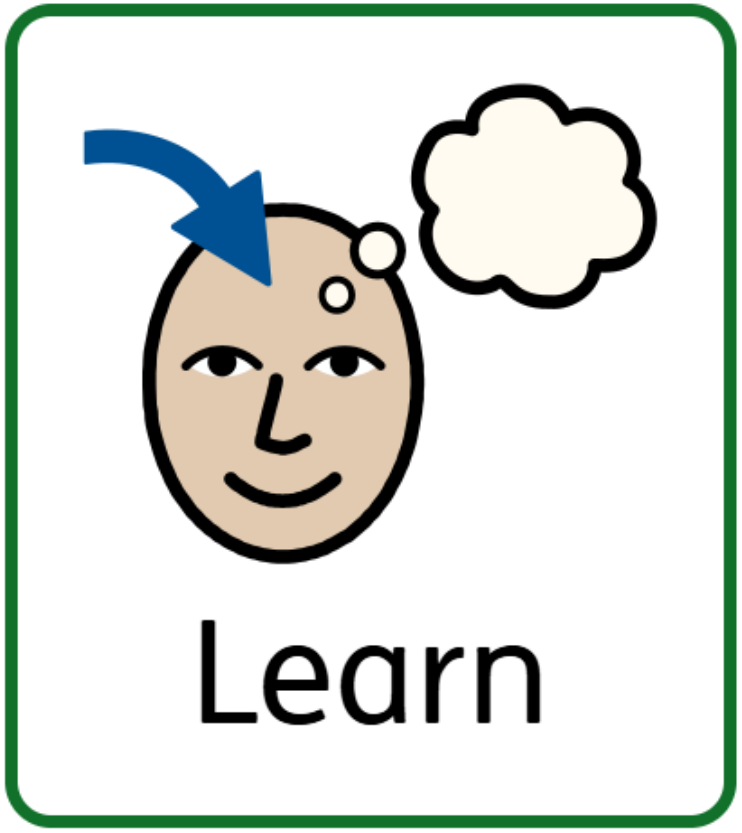
How it is carried out:
During the activity a student is placed near the beam or switches and given a time to move and listen to the sound created.

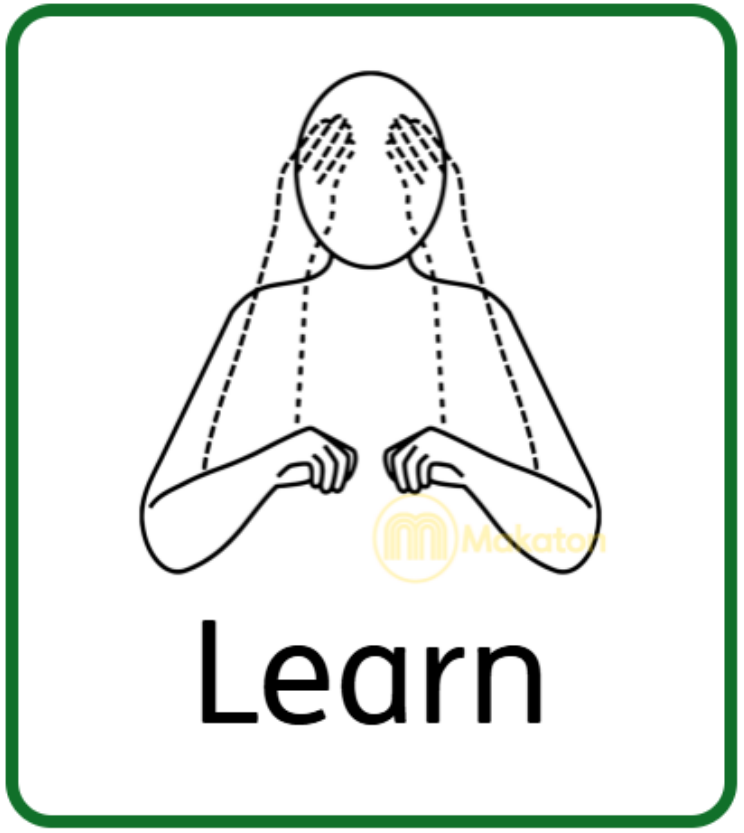
Initially students explore their understanding of how their movement creates the sound they hear. Following on from this students may be supported to take turns to hear the sound they are making and then listen to a friend making a different sound with a different beam or switch.

Outcomes for the activity:
The activity has been designed to develop the students' awareness of different sounds and their movements in relation to the sounds happening.



Communication and Interaction





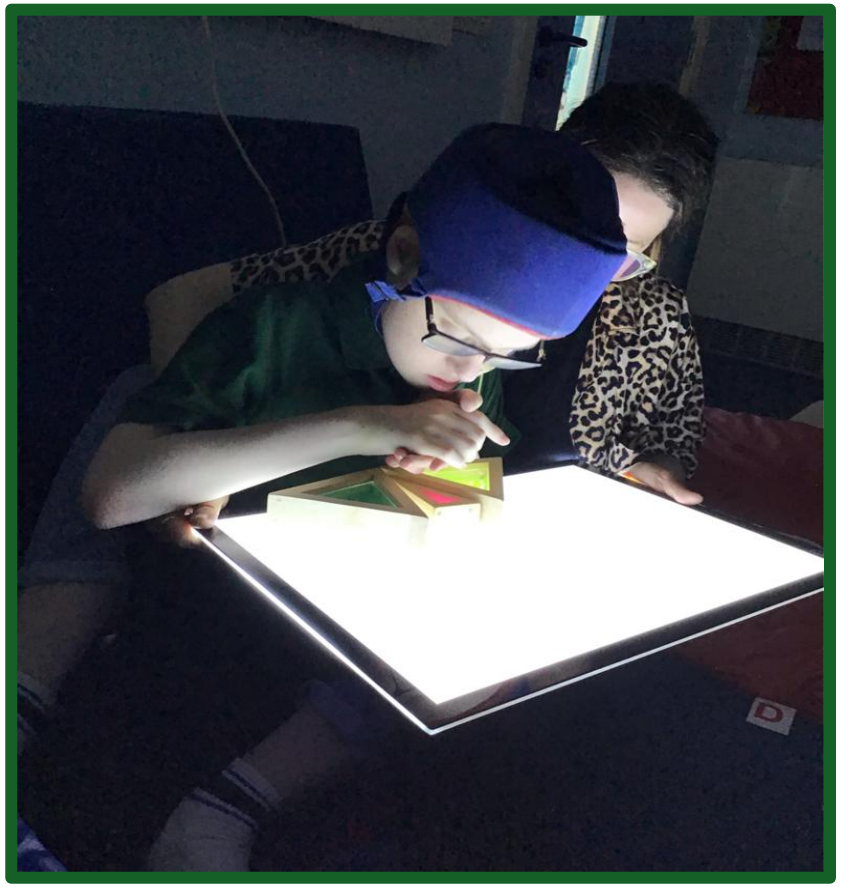
Vision

What it is:
Vision activities are designed to develop vision through different stages of visual development.

How it is carried out:
The stages of visual development contain different activities which the students progress through as they show they are able to use these skills across their day.

Outcomes for the activity:
When carrying out these activities we are looking for how the students respond to different environments.

We are also careful to take into account their vision needs and the distances they are able to see.



Resonance Board

What it is:
Resonance board is a time where students can experience different sounds and vibrations of the sounds whilst sitting or lying on a resonance board.

How it is carried out:
During the activity the adult will place different objects on the board for the students to explore. The students will be encouraged to move their feet or hands to make the objects move.

The adult will also support the experience by moving the objects around slowly on the board, near to different parts of the student's body. Songs are also sung when using different objects to allow the students to recognise the link between the song and the object being used on the board.

Outcomes for the activity:
The students are given the opportunity to feel different vibrations through their body without the object touching them.



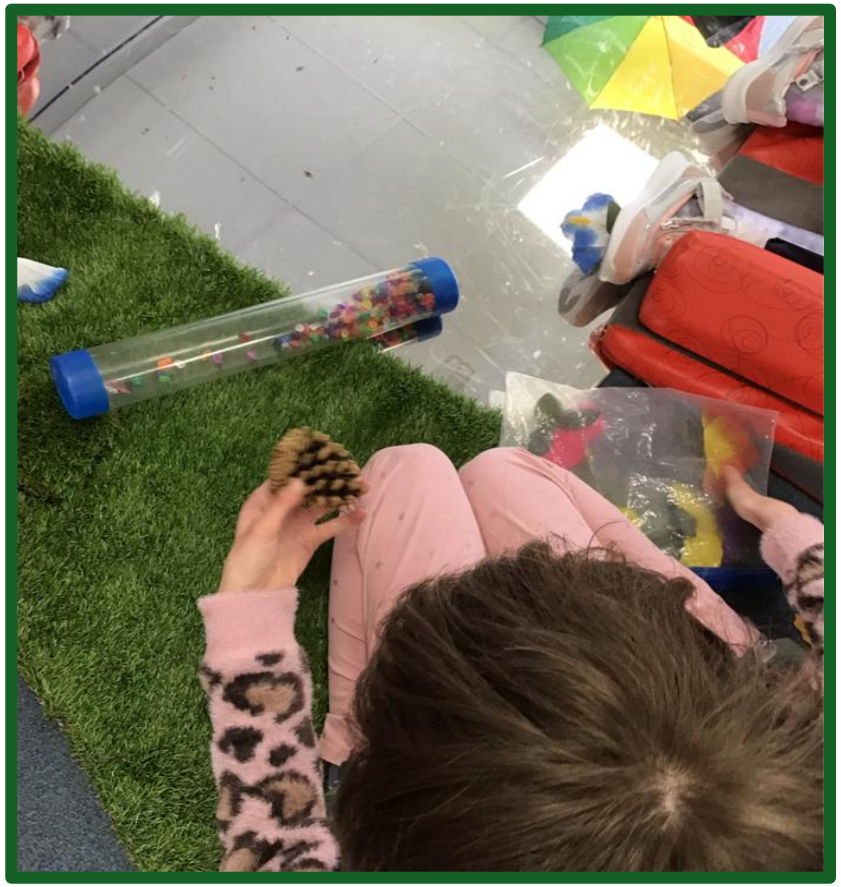
Sensory Exploration

What it is:
Sensory investigation is an activity which offers the students a chance to investigate different textures and using their hands or feet.

How it is carried out:
During the activity the students are given time to investigate the object in different forms. An activity can start dry and then water can be added or start cold and be heated.

This gives the students opportunities to experience the object in many different ways and could enable the student to respond in different ways.

Outcomes for the activity:
This activity will encourage students to investigate different textures they may not normally handle. They investigate the different ways the object can be presented, enabling them to show preferences to different textures or smells.



Music

What it is:
Music is an activity which encourages the students listen to the adults singing and offers opportunities to vocalise as well as explore different instruments.

How it is carried out:
Students are given, time to anticipate through repetitive songs. Students are also encouraged to ask for 'more' periodically through songs or at the end of songs. They are encouraged to make vocal sounds at certain points through the songs and are given time to anticipate what is coming next.

Outcomes for the activity:
This activity gives the opportunity for the students to experience singing and how their vocalisations can join in with this.

They are encouraged to explore different musical instruments and how they can sound and feel when held in different ways.

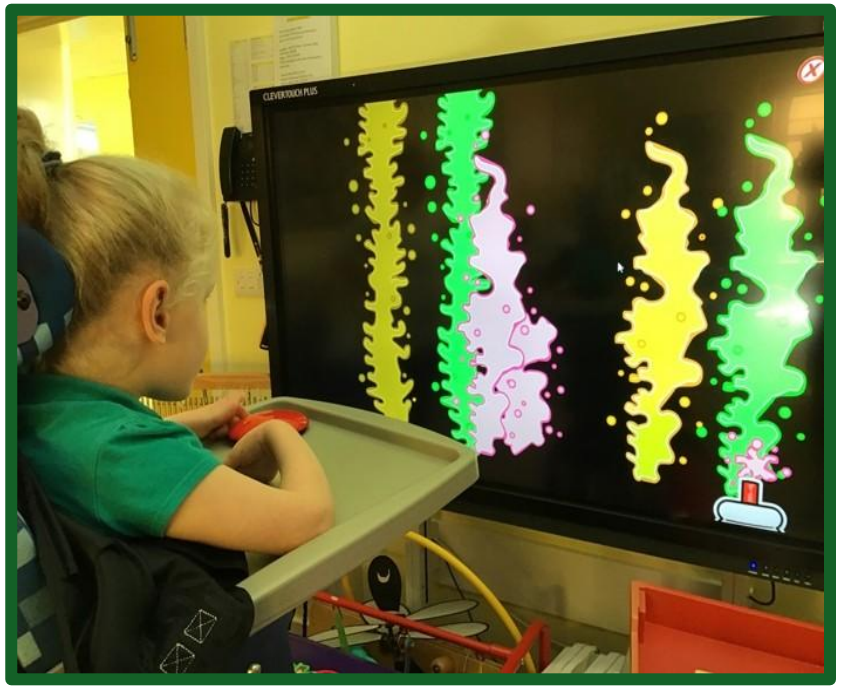


Contingency Awareness and Responding

What it is:
Contingency awareness and responding is when students learn about cause-and-effect activities. We use any objects which allows the student to make something happen and understand they can cause an effect by using their body.

How it is carried out:
During this activity the students are given objects with which they can cause an effect. They could use objects with switches or where they have to use their hand to move something, like a marble run. Through the use of touch the students can begin to learn that they control what happens with the object.

Outcomes for the activity:
This activity encourages the students to become aware that they have an impact on the world around them. They begin to experience that through their controlled actions they can cause an effect on different objects.



Tac Pac

What it is:
TAC PAC provides a structured framework for students to make contact with their own bodies, their environment and other people.

How it is carried out:
TAC PAC is a combination of familiar textures / objects, e.g. a sponge, accompanied by a piece of music specifically to match the texture of the object.

The activity and object is announced before each piece of music starts. The student hears the music while they feel the texture on their skin.

Outcomes for the activity:
As the session is repeated over several weeks or months, students work on recognising the music and showing anticipation for their favourite objects or music.



Touch and Groove

What it is:
Touch and groove is a tactile and auditory activity. A range of songs and rhythms related to the term's topic are curated alongside a combination of soft and hard textured objects.

How it is carried out:
During the activity, a song is played, and objects are explored on the student's body.

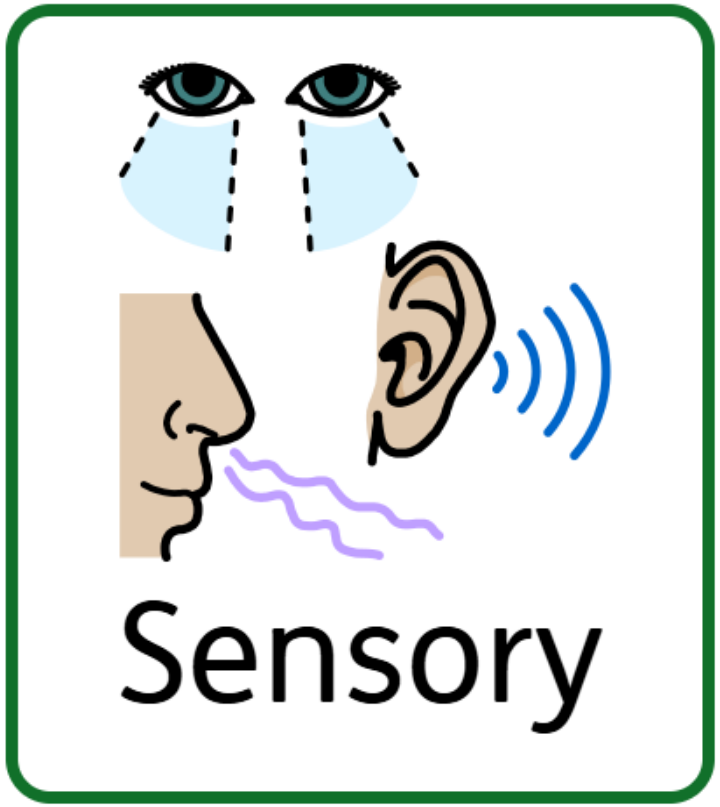
Students explore one object for each piece of music. The object is rolled or tapped along their body to the beat of the music; different body parts are used for different objects and songs.

Outcomes for the activity:
This activity had been designed to develop the student's awareness of different songs and objects.

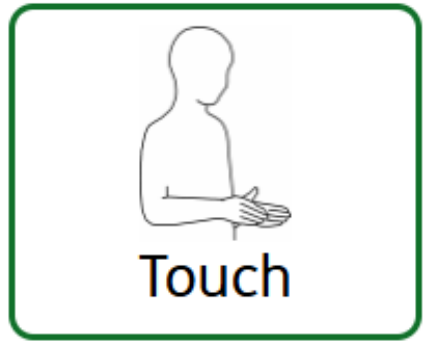
The student can show anticipation and communication skills throughout this activity.

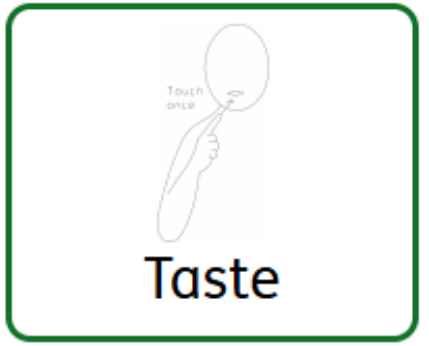


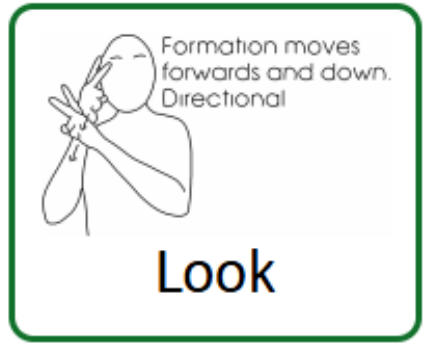
Sensory, Physical and Life Skills











Sensology

What it is:
Sensology is the work of Flo Longhorn and Richard Hirstwood. It embraces the importance of the theory of early learning through sensory stimulation, sensory experiences and multisensory environments.

It covers the five basic senses (see, her, touch, smell, taste) but also movement-related sensory systems: the vestibular (balance, head movements and gravity) and the proprioceptive (body positions, body mapping and planning movements). In a Sensology workout, these senses are literally given a warm-up.

How it is carried out:
Sessions can be in groups or 1:1. Classes may have daily or weekly sessions that follow the same format as one by one, the senses are worked through. Each one is named and indicated (e.g. 'I have eyes') and then put to work.

Outcomes for the activity:
Students awaken their senses and respond to sensory features of items and activities. They make choices and decisions and begin to develop and communicate preference.



Sensory Circuits

What it is:
Sensory circuits works an altering, organising and then grounding their sensory systems to help their readiness for learning.

How it is carried out:
Each morning our students are invited to take part in a sensory circuit. We recognise that some students may benefit from this input at different times, so the sensory circuit is available to use outside throughout the school day.

Alerting: Energy lifting section – the aim of the alerting activities is to provide vestibular and proprioceptive stimulation. This prepares the brain for learning and the demands of the day.

Organising: This section includes activities that require motor sensory processing, balance and timing. The child needs to organise their body, plan their approach and do more than one thing at a time.

Calming: Finishing the circuit with calming activities ensures that as the child leaves the circuit, they are feeling calm, centred and as ready for the day as possible.

Outcomes for the activity:
Sensory circuits supports the pupils sensory processing skills to ensure they are regulated and ready to learn.



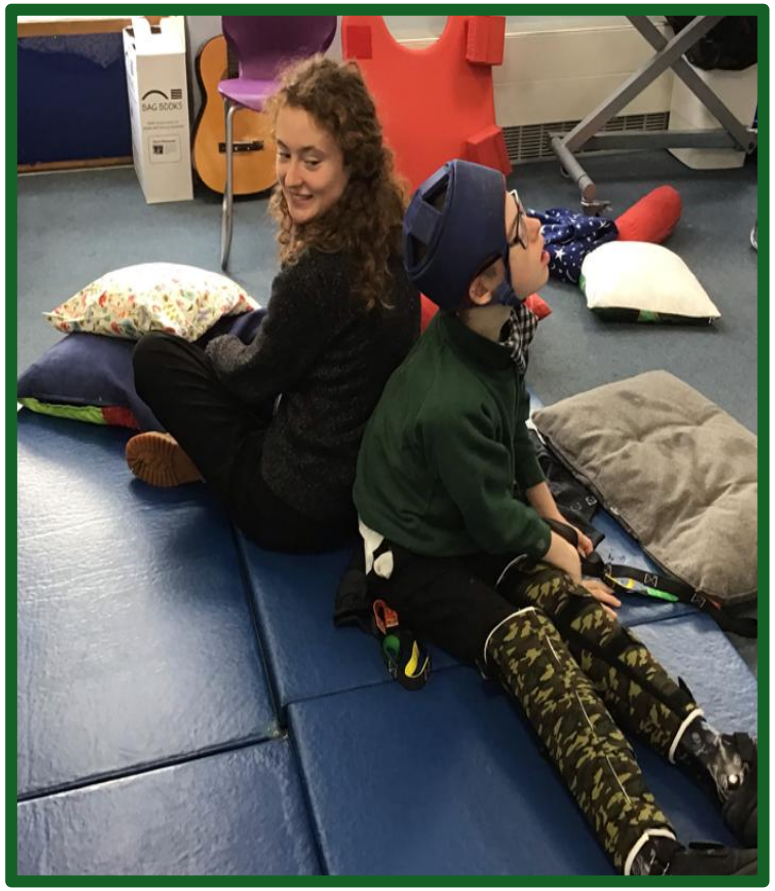
Sherborne Movement

What it is:
Sherborne Developmental Movement is a method of working in which the movement is securely based in normal developmental movement experiences. It was developed by Veronica Sherborne in the later part of the twentieth century. It is an inclusive approach to teaching and working with movement and one that is well grounded in Laban's Movement Theory, which has been developed over a period of 40 years.

How it is carried out:
Students participate in Sherborne movement within their PE sessions supported by staff and led by Sherborne trained.

Outcomes for the activity:
Awareness of self; This is gained through movement experiences that help the student concentrate so that they become aware of what is happening to their body, listening via touch and by feeling of inner physical sensations rather than by our usual way of looking and thinking. This helps lesson self-criticism and allows students to grow in terms of self-esteem and confidence both a physical and emotional level.

Awareness of others: The next step is to begin to learn to move around and interact with others in ways that encourage the further development of trust and the building of positive relationships. These movement experiences enable the student to be appropriately supported while being encouraged to explore their unique creativity through shared movement activities



Move and Groove

What it is:
Move and groove is an activity which encourages body movements to music. It is based on Sherborne and works on the students becoming aware of their different body parts and how they can be used.

How it is carried out:
The students listen to music whilst they are encouraged and supported by an adult to move different body parts in different ways.

Moving on, the students are also supported to work together with a friend.

Outcomes for the activity:
This activity encourages the students to begin to link words to their body parts, making them more aware that when the adult says 'head' they know where their head is.

It also encourages them to explore the movements they can make independently.



Yoga

What it is:
Yoga is an opportunity to support the students to move their bodies in different ways and become aware of their ability to put their bodies into different positions.

How it is carried out:
Yoga is carried out in small groups with 1:1 support, where needed. With relaxing music, students are supported to move their bodies through the yoga sequence.

Over time, students are encouraged to hold the position themselves, copy an adult or repeat the position with less support.

Outcomes for the activity:
Students become more aware of their bodies and their position in the environment.

Over time, students may become familiar with the sequence of positions and show anticipation of the next position or when repeating a position.



Physiotherapy

What it is:
During physiotherapy sessions, students work through the programmes set by their physiotherapist. Across their day the students are positioned in different ways and work on their programmes whilst carrying out tasks, they also take part in stretches with an adult to maintain their flexibility.

How it is carried out:
The students work 1:1 with an adult to carry out different stretches and positions. They can have breaks between different positions allowing them to relax before being asked to carry out another task.

Outcomes for the activity:
This activity is encouraging the students to build up their body strength whilst using positions for a purpose throughout the week.



Swimming

What it is:
Hydrotherapy enables students to experience and learn about the impression the water and the pool environment has on their body. They also feel and begin to understand the basic actions involved in swimming such as kicking legs, floatation and rotating.

How it is carried out:
We focus on experimenting with support, how we can travel through the water at different speeds, in different directions and adhering to various positions in the pool such as moving on our front, back, and standing. Lessons focus on increasing confidence in the water and encourage each student to move their arms and legs as independently as they can.

Outcomes for the activity:
Hydrotherapy enhances the student's physical, emotional and cognitive skills in the pool and incorporates physiotherapy programmes..



Social, Emotional and Mental Health



Social



Social

Meal Times

What it is:
Mealtimes focus on communication and personal hygiene, using cutlery and practicing self-help.

How it is carried out:
During mealtimes students are encouraged to communicate in their preferred way, with vocalising, PECs or individualised snack communication mats. Students practice indicating their choice of food or if they want to have ;more' or are 'finished'.

Life skills, such as personal hygiene, tidying up and appropriate social interaction are also encouraged during snack and lunch time.

Outcomes for the activity:
Students work on making independent choices and indicating their wants and wishes to the adult in an appropriate manner.



Outside / Social Time

What it is:
During times of outdoor experiences, from accessing and experiencing the Castle and playground to courtyard camping, that is linked to the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh, students have the opportunity to explore their environment and interact with peers.

How it is carried out:
Play and interaction opportunities are set up and students are engaged in the activity using a range of strategies such as touch, interaction, experiencing different movements on the equipment.

Students are given time to anticipate events and interactions with each other as well as the environment around them.

Outcomes for the activity:
Students work on their awareness of the world and people around them. The students are able to show anticipation, realisation and initiation through their communication skills.



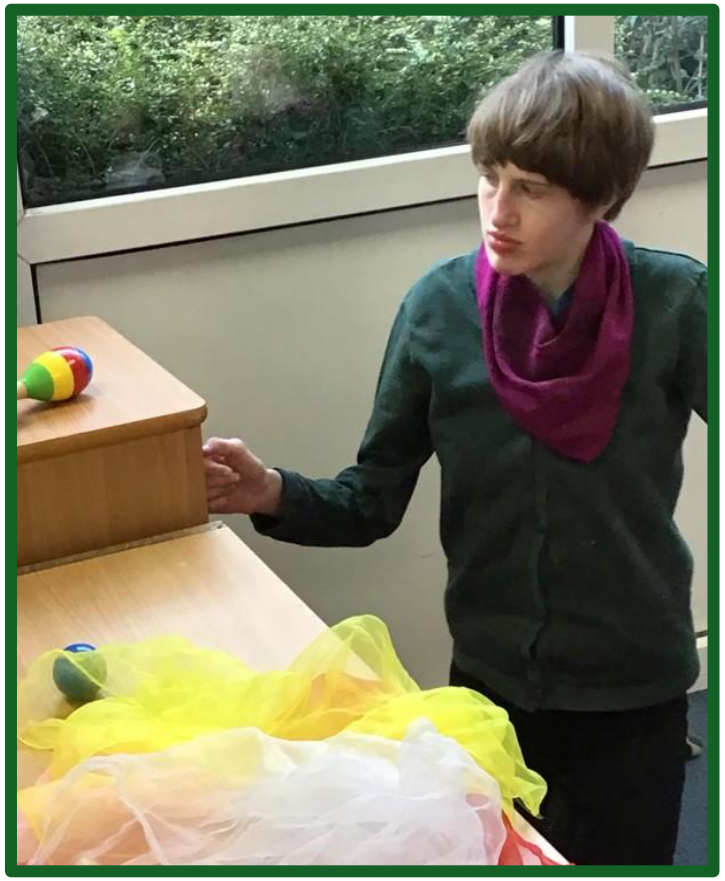
Independent Exploration

What it is:
During times of sensory exploration students have the opportunity to explore independently.

How it is carried out:
Exploration, opportunities are set up and students are engaged in the activity using strategies appropriate to the student; this may be with adult support, modelling or visual or verbal clues.

When the student's engaged, the adult will step back from the activity, allowing time and space for independent action and discovery.

Outcomes for the activity:
During this time, adults will be looking for behaviour indicating discovery or realisation and also looking for independent exploration.



Touch and Taste / Food Technology

What it is:
Touch and taste / cooking allows students to become familiar and confident with new foods by looking, smelling, touching and tasting in a familiar environment.

How it is carried out:
Touch and taste is carried out as a group activity where each student has the opportunity to touch, smell and taste or lick if appropriate, different foods. They are then supported to weigh, chop or mix to complete a simple recipe.

Outcomes for the activity:
When the activity is repeated over several weeks, students begin to recognise the foods and become more confident to explore independently.



Community Outings

What it is:
Outings takes learning into real life, sparking excitement, curiosity and increased motivation and engagement.

Students use their preferred means of transport, wheelchair, buggy, walking or school minibus.

How it is carried out:
Places visited can link to classroom topics or are local places of interest.

Outcomes for the activity:
Outings benefit students in many ways and can be inspiring, positive experiences. They enhance learning and develop social, communication life skills.

