

Teaching & Learning Policy

Fairley House School

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www.fairleyhouse.org.uk

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The policy addresses the following aims:

- Providing a first class education for children with SpLD.
- Giving children with SpLD the skills and confidence to maximise their potential after 2-3 years at FHS in mainstream education and throughout their lives.
- Ensuring that children's needs are met by offering a unique transdisciplinary assessment and whole school approach.

Fairley House meets the needs of children with specific learning difficulties through a **whole school approach**. Staff work together collaboratively to meet the individual needs of each child, using a **trans-disciplinary approach**. Some staff members are specialist teachers, some teaching assistants, some speech and language therapists, and some occupational therapists. There is also an Educational Psychologist and a full time Clinical Psychologist. The staff has different specialisms and skills, which can be pooled to enhance teaching and to maximize learning. In the past, our approach was multidisciplinary with different disciplines working together. Since 2005 we have been used a trans-disciplinary approach, which involves closer co-operation between professionals and where boundaries between professionals are blurred as they acquire a fuller understanding of each other's assessments and methodology and begin to acquire skills from each other.

We aim to use teaching and learning to enable pupils with specific learning difficulties to overcome barriers to learning and to fulfil their potential. However, potential is not seen as immutable or as limited to that which can be measured by psychometric testing. By teaching pupils to problem solve and to think and by developing metacognitive strategies, we believe that we increase their potential to learn and give them skills to enhance lifelong learning.

We are committed to a high staff: pupil ratio and to offering individual work, small groups and small classes. This enables us to give pupils a high level of support with their learning, maximizing the progress they make. It also offers pupils rapid feedback on their responses and increased opportunities to respond in learning situations, compared with the opportunities offered in larger classes.

Individual needs are identified through a trans-disciplinary assessment, conducted while the child attends the school for three days. The child is seen by the Educational Psychologist, Speech and Language Therapist and Occupational Therapist and is observed by the class teacher and/or the assessment team in normal school situations (lessons, playtime, lunch etc.). In trans-disciplinary assessment, professionals pool information to develop a shared understanding and parents are equal partners in the assessment process. In trans-disciplinary assessment, the view of the whole child is greater than the sum of the individual assessments (Mortimer, 1997). Following assessment an IEP is developed which addresses the child's needs and builds on strengths.

While the emphasis is on meeting individual needs, it is appreciated that learning occurs in a social situation and that children benefit from interacting with each other and exchanging ideas. For this reason, there is a greater emphasis on group work than on one to one sessions with an adult.

A feature of the school is that the average stay is two to three years and children may enter in any of the primary school years from Year 2. Some pupils with more complex needs, typically with a statement, may stay longer. Pupils come from a wide variety of schools and no assumptions can be made about prior learning. We therefore aim to work from whatever starting point a child has achieved.

We appreciate that children have different strengths and weaknesses and that learning styles or preferences may vary. In particular, dyslexic children may be visual learners. Many of our children have a kinesthetic preference and need to move around to learn. We consider that children with specific learning difficulties learn best by multi-sensory methods, which target a variety of learning styles. We believe that children should be aware of any preferred learning style, but should not be encouraged to learn by one modality exclusively. Differing tasks may benefit from particular learning styles and children may be disadvantaged if they have not experienced a variety of ways of learning.

School Climate

Pupils learn best if there are positive and empathetic relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils.

Pupils learn best in a supportive climate where their efforts are recognised. The school makes use of WALT (we are learning to) and WILF (what I am looking for) or for the older pupils, LO (Learning Objective), taken from Assessment for Learning. Pupils are praised and rewarded for trying hard. We hope that such a climate will minimise fear of failure, encouraging pupils to take risks, which is essential to learning. We aim to challenge pupils, but to teach in a way that ensures success.

Pupils learn best in an orderly but stimulating environment and this is our aim in designing classrooms and other learning spaces. Resources are well organised and accessible and displays are attractive and celebrate achievement. Displays may also help those with a visual learning preference to learn. The buildings are well maintained to ensure that they make an attractive base for teaching and learning. Pupils learn best in a well-disciplined environment. We have a Behaviour Policy, which sets out well-specified expectations for behaviour and rewards and sanctions designed to promote good behaviour. The policy is followed as consistently as possible all staff induction new staff members inducted in its use and the policy is regularly reviewed in whole staff meetings.

Pupils learn best if objectives are made clear and learning experiences are well-structured and it is therefore our whole school policy to state a learning objective for all lessons. However, how and when this is done is left to the discretion of the staff. For example, WALT may be more appropriate for use with younger children while referring to the Learning Objective (LO) could be more appropriate for older children. The WALT or LO may be introduced by the teacher at the beginning of the lesson, written by the teacher and pupils together or identified by the children as the lesson unfolds.

Barriers to Learning

Barriers to learning may be within child and relate to pupils' specific learning difficulties.

Examples of such potential barriers are:

- Difficulty understanding and using oral language
- Poor phonological awareness
- Word retrieval difficulties

- Low levels of literacy and/or numeracy
- Poor memory (visual or auditory and working memory)
- Poor sequencing
- Poor fine and/or gross motor skills
- Inappropriate social and/or communication skills
- Poor attention

However, barriers may reside **outside** the child and relate to teaching. Examples are:

- Lack of understanding of pupils' difficulties
- Inappropriate work set (too easy or too difficult)
- Materials with too high a literacy level
- Inappropriate grouping of pupils
- Lengthy instructions that overtax memory

We aim to overcome within-child barriers to learning through sharply focused IEPs, based on initial assessment and reviewed termly. However, by removing barriers, which reside outside the child, we also circumvent within-child barriers and ensure pupils' full participation in learning. By removing barriers to learning, we aim to include all children and to promote their opportunities equally.

Methodology

Multi-sensory teaching uses vision, hearing, movement and sometimes taste and smell. We believe that children learn by *doing*, not simply by *listening*. Providing a visual stimulus and chunking information supports auditory memory and word finding. It tends to make lessons more fun and pupils more engaged. Multi-sensory teaching is used not simply for phonics teaching, but across the curriculum.

Problem Solving, Thinking Skills and Metacognition have always been a part of our teaching.

We have, for example, encouraged children to reflect on strategies they use, developing metacognitive awareness. Children are encouraged to reflect on and evaluate their work. We consider it our role to teach *how* to learn, not just subject matter. This may be addressed through study skills teaching which should be addressed through PSHEE but also through all subjects. We see thinking and problem-solving as fully integrated with the whole curriculum, not as a discrete subject or lesson. Examples of tools to develop thinking:

- Clarifying goals – what are we trying to do?
- Creating a 'think-tank' – how many ideas can we think of?
- Looking at both sides of an idea – what is the opposite view?
- Exploring the consequences- what will happen if?
- Looking all round an idea – what are all the factors to consider?
- Prioritising- which is the most important?
- Consulting others- what do other people think?
- Making the connections – how do the ideas link?
- Hot seating
- Mindmapping

(Adapted from Wallace, B. 2001).

We recognise that some children, particularly those with language problems, will need a greater amount of 'scaffolding' (Vygotsky, 1978) to develop skills for thinking and that some children will show a greater degree of independent, transferable use of such skills. However, transfer is the ultimate goal.

Transdisciplinary work on metacognition (thinking about thinking and becoming consciously aware of strategies) has included therapists working with specialist teachers in Maths to develop memory, vocabulary, word retrieval, motor skills and visual perception (all problems for many of our pupils). Work includes 'Walk the Word' where Maths vocabulary is developed together with strategies for recall. Methods include linking Maths words with a story or linking words to body parts. Therapists have also worked on incorporating strategies into other areas of the curriculum and working with teachers. All subject policies continue an appendix outlining examples of transdisciplinary strategies that could be used within specific subject areas. Children are taught that metacognitive strategies are their 'tool kit' and learn specific strategies for memory and word retrieval, associating them with tools. Classroom displays reinforce this learning.

Resources

The governors of Fairley House School are committed to keeping the school well resourced, both in terms of human resources and materials for teaching and learning. We aim to provide children with high quality; attractive materials e.g. clear photocopies, access to ICT, materials to provide multisensory learning, visually stimulating displays. Resources should reflect and celebrate cultural diversity.

Links with Other Policies and Statements

The Teaching and Learning Policy links with subject policies. It links with the Curriculum Policy, Special Provision Policy and the Equal Opportunities Policy. It also links with our document 'What Makes an Excellent Lesson?' and with the marking policy.

Monitoring

Monitoring of whether teaching and learning conforms to the policy is achieved through lesson observations by the Leadership Team and subject leaders and through staff appraisal conducted by the SMT and Leadership Team.

References

- Mortimer, H. (1997) 'Pre-school assessment'
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, M. Cole et al (eds.) Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Wallace, B. (2001) *Teaching Thinking Skills Across the Primary Curriculum*, David Fulton Publishers