

Teaching and Learning Policy

1. Please read this policy in association with the following policies and documents:

- Curriculum Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Ambitious about Autism Model of Practice
- TreeHouse School Education Practice Statement
- TreeHouse Group Skills Framework
- Personalised Curriculum documents e.g. current programmes checklists, Individual lesson plans, wider curriculum lesson plans

2. Our values and beliefs about teaching and learning in the TreeHouse context:

- all of our pupils can learn. We have high expectations for their progress and need to teach in a way that they can learn most successfully
- in order to overcome the barriers to learning associated with their autism and realise their potential, our pupils need outstanding teaching, learning and support through a behavioural model of practice
- a carefully personalised curriculum, planned and delivered using an evidence based behavioural approach, has the potential to remove the barriers to learning faced by each of our pupils
- teaching and learning activities should be age appropriate, whatever level a pupil is working at
- every pupil is an individual, with their own abilities, needs and aspirations
- pupils learn from each other as well as from adults
- pupils with autism may require more repetition than typically developing children in order fully master concepts and skills
- just like typically developing children, our pupils have different learning styles (e.g. auditory, visual or kinaesthetic)
- effective, robust assessment procedures are a crucial foundation of effective teaching and learning
- implementation of sound planning practices are necessary if teaching and learning is to be outstanding on a day-to-day basis
- outstanding teaching and learning always incorporates practical, functional application and it is vital for our pupils to generalise the skills they learn, particularly as they start to prepare for life after school
- outstanding teaching and learning practice should be identified, celebrated and shared.

3. Our aims for teaching and learning

In addition to providing the planned school curriculum and promoting pupils' knowledge and understanding, we also recognise through teaching we also promote the development of pupils' attitudes and attributes.

As such through our approach to teaching we aim to:

- Transform, through outstanding teaching and learning underpinned through an evidence based behavioural approach, the lives of children affected by autism and those of their families
- Develop the necessary pivotal skills as building blocks for future skill acquisition and independent learning in other settings
- Enable every pupil to achieve their academic potential and aspirations
- Enable our pupils to develop knowledge, skills and understanding
- Ensure that each pupil is motivated to maintain, apply and generalise the skills that they have learned, beyond school and in the natural environment

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- Nurture each pupil's functional independence with self-help and daily living skills
- Equip each pupil with the tools necessary to positively influence and manage their own life, with as great a degree of independence as possible
- Enable each pupil to develop the skills and strategies needed to participate in and meaningfully contribute to their local community
- Develop in each pupil an awareness of self and others
- Ensure that each pupil is equipped as fully as possible for adult life: including confident use of a functional communication system; self-management of any behaviours that act as a barrier to learning or participation; development of vocational and careers skills and a portfolio of independent life and leisure skills
- Make the ordinary possible.

4. Our Behavioural Approach

An evidence-based, Applied Behavioural approach underpins all teaching and learning at TreeHouse School. This approach is based on our values and enables learners to access learning opportunities across their personalised learning plan and to achieve their full potential. The focus of all behaviourally based intervention is on the individual and their learning needs. Every person is unique, and has a unique experience of the world. We work closely with the child or young person and their families to identify the things that are important to them, and use these aspirations, in combination with a robust assessment of their abilities, interests, prior learning and experience, to plan an appropriate learning programme. It is this personalised and collaborative approach which enables us to provide the highest quality teaching, learning and support.

We support the pupil to identify the eventual outcome he or she wants to achieve, and then we break the learning process down into a series of smaller tasks. Individual or group learning plans underpinned by behavioural teaching methods are then designed for each pupil or group of pupils with behavioural principles used to strengthen the successful achievement of appropriate learning goals. These teaching plans set out important information such as particular teaching techniques, prompt levels, reinforcement schedules, materials and generalisation requirements. These plans ensure that consistency in teaching approaches is achieved for all learners which research indicates is important for successful learning for children and young people with autism. This consistent and evidence based approach draws on knowledge and understanding about how children and young people learn.

It is important that the appropriate teaching style is employed for the appropriate learning event, so that each pupil's personalised goals are most effectively met. Behavioural approaches have been successfully used to support learning across the lifespan and as such provide us with a myriad of evidence based teaching strategies which can be matched to each pupils learning style and the individual goal being taught. Each task is analysed and considered along side the pupil's learning style (identified through assessment of learning) in order to identify the most appropriate and effective teaching technique to use for each target.

As the curriculum focus changes for pupils at different ages and stages of their school career, so does the teaching and intervention support strategies designed to enable curriculum access. For example, we would expect to see more structured and intensive teaching in the **Lower school** as pupils develop their learning to learn and pre-academic skills. In the **6th Form** we would expect to see less intensive and structured teaching as pupils move towards adult life involving work, leisure and independent living skills, and in the **Upper school** we would expect to see a clear progression in the balance of intensive teaching and more flexible teaching approaches underpinned by behaviour analysis as pupils move towards the 6th form.

For example, in the Lower School we may use less verbal prompting in order to encourage independent skill acquisition without prompt dependency, whereas in the 6th Form we may prioritise the ability to respond to verbal prompting within vocational teaching sessions, given that this is how support will generally be delivered for our young people in the 'real world'. Teaching

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techniques should be both context and age appropriate and are therefore, individualised for each pupil taking into account their chronological and developmental age, their personalised curriculum plan, evidence of what is and isn't working for them and their aspirations for the future identified through a person centred planning process. Some examples of teaching tools and methods are shown in the table below however, this is not exhaustive.

Teaching Tool or Method	Description	Examples of learning opportunities for which these tools would be used
<i>Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT)</i>	A teaching sequence with a clear beginning (antecedent), middle (the response required) and end (consequence).	Teaching very specific skills such as receptive identification of colours
<i>Positive Reinforcement</i>	Anything that immediately follows a behaviour/response that increases the likelihood of that behaviour/response re-occurring.	Social praise for correct responding, gaining tokens for being calm.
<i>Negative Reinforcement</i>	Anything that is immediately removed following a behaviour/response that increases the likelihood of that behaviour/response re-occurring.	Appropriately asking for a break and having demands withdrawn.
<i>Schedules of Reinforcement</i>	The specific planned delivery of reinforcement based on either the number of responses (ratio level) or length of time (interval level).	Teaching usually begins with reinforcing each response (continuous reinforcement) before fading to (for example) reinforcing every third response – ratio level reinforcement. A pupil may receive a token for sitting calmly for one minute – interval level reinforcement.
<i>Task Analysis</i>	Identification of each component part of a skill sequenced from first to last.	Teaching tooth-brushing, a complex skill comprised of many component parts
<i>Chaining</i>	The sequential linking of a number of component skills e.g. from a task analysis. These can be forward chained where the first component skill is taught first or backward chained when the last component skill is taught first.	Teaching shoe lacing steps by forward chaining each new component skill; teaching making a cup of tea by backward chaining where completion of the last step(s) is intrinsically rewarded by immediate access to the cup of tea.
<i>Shaping</i>	The process by which closer and closer approximations of the target skill are reinforced.	Reinforcing the verbal utterance 'ba' in response to the question 'what is this?' when holding a ball.
<i>Prompting</i>	Any procedure that increases the likelihood of a correct response. Prompts can be mediated by individuals by the environment.	Immediate hand-over-hand prompting from a teacher to touch an object when asked 'touch <i>object</i> '; arrangement of teaching materials in such a way that the object to be touched is closer to the individual. All prompts are carefully and systematically faded.
<i>Imitation</i>	An essential prerequisite skill for learning.	Teacher says 'do this' and performs an action like waving.

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<i>Extinction</i>	The removal of reinforcement for a particular behaviour	No longer giving attending to an individual who is having a tantrum – assuming the attention has been found to be reinforcing the tantrum behaviour.
<i>Functional Behaviour Assessment</i>	The process by which the reinforcers for specific behaviours are identified.	Identifying attention as the reinforcer (maintaining variable) for a tantrum.

5. Our Delivery of Teaching and Learning

5.1 Personalisation and Differentiation

In accordance with statutory inclusion guidelines, each pupil’s curriculum at TreeHouse takes account of the type and extent of any difficulties associated with their SEN. The statutory Inclusion statement stipulates that ‘teachers can modify, as necessary, the National Curriculum Programmes of Study to provide all pupils with relevant and appropriately challenging work at each key stage.’ All pupils at TreeHouse are working at a National Curriculum level below age-related norms. This means that pupils are working towards targets drawn from Programmes of Study relevant and meaningful to them; below those accessed by their typically developing peers. Where this is the case, such skills and knowledge are taught using age-appropriate resources and learning opportunities. Each pupil’s curriculum is personalised. Learners who are able to learn successfully from group-based teaching contexts will have more of their Teaching and Learning delivered and accessed via group lesson plans with Individual Lesson Plans supporting access to group teaching. This will not be appropriate for all pupils. For example, some early learner pupils learning may be delivered largely through Individual Lesson Plans that run concurrently and specify teaching goals identified as priorities for each pupil as a result of assessments, observations and parental comment, supplemented by wider curriculum opportunities. The breadth and weighting of individual, paired and small group teaching is individually planned for each pupil based on on-going assessment of their learning style and specifically where they individually sit on the TreeHouse Group Skills Framework. The school ethos is that all learners should be enabled to participate in small group settings as their learning skills develop and therefore, the acquisition of group skills forms part of each learners personalised curriculum.

In addition, there are planned opportunities for pupils to learn to cope with change, to make choices and problem solve within daily routines, school events and specific lesson plans.

5.2 How we decide what and how to teach each individual pupil

Each pupil’s progression and the appropriate model for meeting their needs is identified through a person-centred planning process. Decisions are driven by the TreeHouse School curriculum, individual assessment outcomes and what is important to the family and pupil concerned. On-going assessment and data analysis mean that the question “Is this working for the individual?” is consistently asked and personalised access to the core and wider curriculum schemes of work to move towards a pupils annual targets and broader learning goals is consistently reviewed based on the answer to this question.

5.3 When and Where is Teaching and Learning planned?.

Routines: A pupil’s personalised curriculum also includes incidental learning opportunities, both through regular routines within school and through introducing new learning opportunities. Routines include assemblies, morning registrations, lunchtime, snack time, outside break, displays, moving around the school, and access to the school, use of ICT, participation in community trips, homework and many more. Lunchtimes and break times are recognised as key opportunities for pupils to be involved in activities that further develop content related skills as well as providing opportunities to generalise pivotal skills to novel settings. As such a range of clubs and enrichment activities run during these times.

Events: All events create opportunities for pupils to rehearse skills, learn curriculum content, generalise mastered skills into different contexts and/or develop their personal characteristics.

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Events include the Christmas Show, Sports Day, Healthy Eating events, Red Nose Day, Pancake Day, visitors, reverse inclusion, vocational placements and residential. For example residential educational visits provide secondary pupils with opportunities to learn about their environment, develop new skills, generalise existing skills to a new setting, practice their self-care and independent living skills and learn to spend time with other people in a different setting. It is important to note that pupils participate in school events as part of their work towards their personal targets. For instance, whilst one pupil may participate in Sports Day with the target of self-managing his behaviour in a novel situation, another pupil may be participating with the target of generalising her imitation skills through sports activities. The balance of learning events and learning contexts alters as pupils get older; with secondary pupils having increased opportunities to learn vocational skills on regular placements, opportunities for regular community trips and residential opportunities.

Contexts: Learning does not have to take place at a desk, indeed much of the best learning occurs beyond the classroom. At TreeHouse we plan for learning to take place and be generalised at internal and external locations across the school, in the community, locally or further afield, on regular trips and on occasional educational visits.

Audiences: In supporting pupils in recognising the purpose of a skill and being able to apply the skills appropriately, it is important that they have opportunities to employ their skills with a variety of clear audiences. For example, a communication book may be used with a teacher to request help with a task, with a parent to request help with bathing or with a shop keeper to request an item to purchase. For this reason, natural environment teaching is highly valued at TreeHouse. Pupil understanding of audience is also essential when teaching awareness of public versus private space, and associated behaviours.

6. Who plans, leads and supports teaching and learning?

We believe that the quality of the pupil's experience is largely determined by the quality of interaction between individuals and the staff who support them and therefore we commit significant investment to the expertise of our practitioners. Our highly skilled teachers, behaviour analysts and allied health professionals work closely together to provide specialist, integrated and appropriate teaching, learning and support. All staff regardless of their professional background are committed to working within a behavioural framework and as such all staff achieve core competencies in Applied Behaviour Analysis and use such principles within their work.

How?

Each member of the teaching staff is aware of the preferred learning style of each pupil in their class. Programmes and pupil's personalised targets are taught through individual direct teaching, and also through small group work so that pupils can generalise the skills they have learned on an individual basis. Activities such as exercise (physical education), music and art are incorporated into individual programmes and lesson planning so that functional and appropriate targets are integrated into all daily activities.

Relationships: Building a positive rapport between each pupil and teacher underpins the success of any educational programme, and a pupil's motivation to learn. During the very early stages of a pupil's education at TreeHouse, it may be that physical interactions such as tickles on the arm and hand squeezes are the only immediate and tangible means by which a teacher can make a pupil want to interact with them. The pupil's desire to interact with and have the positive attention of their teacher is critical in establishing their motivation to learn; removing one of the barriers to learning associated with a pupil's autism. By the time a pupil is in upper Primary, physical interactions are ideally faded back to minimal (other than for the purposes of prompting) and have been replaced with more age-appropriate social interactions such as giving a 'High Five' or a hand-shake. The developmental level of many of our pupils may mean that there are some times when language alone does not offer the reassurance that they may need, for example when they are particularly distressed.

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Progression to less restrictive ratios of support: Although our pupils require the educational support of a 1:1 pupil:teacher ratio, there are many planned and incidental opportunities to work with others throughout each day. For example, at lunchtimes pupils learn to eat with peers; respecting their peer's personal space and meal; asking for help from their teachers; and waiting for their peers to finish eating before leaving the lunch table and hall. It is our aim that for pupils for whom it is appropriate, dependence upon adult presence as a determinant of success is reduced over time and is eventually withdrawn e.g. learning to self-manage their own time or behaviours.

Learning environments that encourage appropriate relationships to be fostered are carefully planned in order to give each pupil the best learning potential. Whilst being mindful of a pupil's academic year and chronological age, TreeHouse designs classes and teaching groups with peer groups in mind. For example, a secondary class may comprise of pupils in Year 7, 8 and 9 because that group of pupils provide appropriate and meaningful learning, language and social models for each other.

Careful consideration is also given to pupil:teacher interactions in order to support pupils in developing an awareness of 'public' and 'private' space and appropriate associated behaviours.

Home interventions: Research indicates that children diagnosed with autism make optimum educational gains where intervention is consistent between different environments. As such we aim to work closely with parents to enable them to continue teaching their child, to manage any behaviours that challenge learning and participation and to generalise their mastered skills to the home and community environments. We may deliver this support in a pupil progress review with parents and carers, in a pupil's home or by accompanying a parent on a community trip or to an appointment.

We recognise that the aims of the school will be achieved through lessons, routines, and events and they can be achieved more successfully if all of these are planned, used well and carefully managed.

7. What are the key considerations when designing a personalised curriculum within TreeHouse School?

We acknowledge that lessons, routines, events, incidental teaching opportunities and home interventions provide the learning contexts for each pupil. As such it is important that each pupil is educationally supported to be able to access these learning opportunities through their personalised curriculum.

8. Teaching and Learning Environment and Resources

Pupils learn well when the environment in which they find themselves is well ordered and well managed, where there is discipline and clarity about expectations. Environments will vary depending on the curriculum content or the characteristics that are being developed. Environments change from being the classroom, a 'quiet space', school corridors, school halls, the community, the home, or play equipment in the school grounds. Every environment has to be carefully planned in order to give each pupil the best learning potential. Classrooms are differently and appropriately furnished and organised for the different age groups, and then further modified and designed to meet a pupil's individual needs within their work areas.

9. Space and specialist spaces:

TreeHouse does not specifically aim to teach within a low arousal environment because it is difficult for pupils to generalise skills taught in a low arousal environment to other more natural environments. The classrooms at TreeHouse are, therefore, deliberately not low arousal environments and look much as one would expect from a typical (mainstream) class. There is, however, considerable emphasis on teaching new pupils essential 'learning-to-learn' skills (sitting, attending, eye contact, waiting etc.) within the classroom as these are essential prerequisites for learning within any environment.

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- Our building is equipped with specialist teaching areas such as teaching kitchens and sports facilities, a 6th Form common room, a pupil garden and allotment, cycling tracks, a dentist room, an Occupational Therapy Gym, and a Laundry Room - providing an even greater range of contextual and meaningful learning opportunities for our pupils
- We believe that learning opportunities can take place in all environments, as such, where meaningful and relevant to a pupil's individual targets, teaching is planned in outside spaces and in the community, for example at local tennis courts, parks and swimming pools
- Space is used flexibly throughout the school.

10. Furniture:

- Wherever possible, life skills are taught and learned in context, in rooms and with furniture that reflect those in the natural environment.
- The 6th Form Common Room and multi-purpose rooms are equipped with age-appropriate furniture, to support further older pupils in developing their self-help skills, both at leisure and during lessons. Some pupils also use the laundry room.

11. Rules and Consistency: We want our pupils to work for different purposes, with different audiences, using different skills and different approaches. It is therefore obvious that appropriate rules and behaviour are to be expected in each of the range of environments that they pupils use. Rules and behaviour are consistently and rigorously applied through thorough staff training and pupil Positive Behaviour support Plans. (Please refer to Behaviour Policy)

12. Resources to deliver and support teaching and learning

Time:

- In order to maximise learning and teaching opportunities, we operate an extended school year (43 weeks).

People:

- Many of TreeHouse staff are graduates (often with Psychology degrees), with many additionally having post-graduate qualifications, Teaching Assistant diplomas, and some with Teaching qualifications,.
- We run a two year tutor training programme with a new intake each July. All trainee tutors receive a robust programme of competency based training using the UK Autism ABA Competency Framework. The framework consists of four strands: Autism, ABA, Education, Professional practice.
- All staff in the organisation receive a thorough induction training, including an Introduction to Autism, Introduction to ABA, Curriculum trainings and practical training on our approaches to teaching and learning. Appropriate training and opportunities for professional development are on-going for staff in all roles
- There is a robust cycle of performance management which allows all staff to set targets and review and evaluate their practice.

Materials and apparatus:

- The provision of age-appropriate materials and apparatus is always a consideration.
- In order to best meet the learning needs and preferred learning style of each pupil, we design many of our own teaching resources.
- Adapted equipment is provided as necessary to meet pupil's needs e.g. cutlery, support cushions.

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