



whinfell school see things differently

Curriculum Policy

Curriculum Policy Statement

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Cambian Whinfell School Vision and Mission Statements, the Statement of Purpose and the Autistic Spectrum Disorder policy which outlines the vision, aims, roles and responsibilities of the school. It also needs to be read in conjunction with individual subject policies, safeguarding, SMSC, careers and assessment policies and in conjunction with the Whole School Literacy Policy.

Across the curriculum British Values are promoted and all individual policies and practice are such that they do not impede the Equalities Act 2010. Rights of protected groups as identified in the Equalities Act are duly recognised and catered for.

The Curriculum policy supports the framework of Cambian Whinfell as being a school for young people on the autistic spectrum who may have associated learning or emotional difficulties and who will benefit from the high level of support, the structure and the therapeutic milieu that we offer. The policy recognises the importance of Intent, Implementation and Impact as described in the Education Inspection Framework.

We see the curriculum as a progression model which is continuously evolving and which is regularly subject to critical re-evaluation.

Curriculum intent

At Whinfell School it is our intent to provide each of our learners with a bespoke curriculum experience which is matched carefully to their academic, social, emotional, therapeutic and physical needs.

The curriculum at Whinfell School is designed to help each young person to achieve their full potential both **academically** and **socially**. Whinfell school believes that it has a dual-purpose role in not only helping young people to reach their academic potential but to also provide an education which will help prepare them to live independently in adulthood.

We are committed to the principle that all of our young people regardless of ability, need, race or cultural background have a right to the highest quality of education and support we can provide.

Our curriculum intends to provide:-

- An individual creative, broad and balanced curriculum
- Appropriate levels of expectation and genuine challenge based on extensive individual assessment
- A flexible approach which aims to match teaching delivery to individual learning styles
- A holistic, therapeutic approach for maximum progression
- Relevance, continuity and progression in learning
- Development of our learners critical thinking skills to prepare them for the future and the risks of disinformation
- Opportunity for young people to progress in academic, personal and social domains
- Tailored to an individual's EHCP outcomes, through detailed Individual Development Plans (IDPs) which are tracked daily.

By providing courses of study tailored to the needs, interests and aspirations of our young people through cross curricular, or topic-based programmes and using a huge variety of teaching methods to suit individuals, students will be given the opportunity for making good progress. Many features of the curriculum are common to all students but the support and scaffolding is individual. None of our young people are denied access to any part of the curriculum on grounds of ability. The curriculum is intended to facilitate learning that is retained and can be applied across all aspects of life.

Access and Inclusion

The principles above present us with a responsibility to find ways of ensuring that our young people are engaging in learning, motivated and able to succeed. Education staff are expected to ensure that young people who are having difficulty or becoming de-motivated are identified early and provided with appropriate support, encouragement and different teaching styles and work so that they may continue to participate at the most appropriate level for them. This may mean their curriculum design and plan is altered to enable them to be successful. Although we strive to engage our young people in their learning as much as possible, **we will always put their emotional state first as if this is not right, progress will be limited** and it would certainly not be conducive to reaching maximum potential. Our young people have the right to access a happy and positive experience in the learning environment and all staff at Cambian Whinfell are expected to provide an unconditional positive experience for every young person. Young people will access their curriculum by offering strategies and systems appropriate for each student.

Special Educational Needs

It is expected that all education staff plan, prepare and support each young person who attends Cambian Whinfell and to be able to access the curriculum, regardless of their ability or needs. All of our young people have special educational needs but are encouraged to become independent and to take responsibility within the school.

All of our young people are being continually assessed and sometimes with the aid of assessment carried out internally and / or externally by the Clinical Therapy Team and external specialists. Targets for the Individual Development Plan (IDP) are put forward and agreed during review meetings where parents / guardians, social services and educational authority representatives have an input. Strategies to help achieve these quantitative targets are developed and inform the whole waking curriculum. They are evaluated in lessons and tracked throughout the education day in the young persons tapestry journal. Progress with targets is monitored in half-termly meetings and IDP's are updated on a termly basis as a joint staff effort, including residential staff input. Formal review meetings are held on an annual basis.

Each young person has a named key teacher, who is there for the young person as an additional support.

Curriculum Implementation and Delivery

Organisation of the school day

The school operates a nine teaching-period day, each session lasting 30 minutes. We have six teaching periods in the morning. This is broken up by a break of thirty minutes and a lunch period of one hour.

Assemblies occur once a week and themes are delivered which are often further worked on in class throughout the day. They provide opportunity to develop social skills as well as moral, spiritual, cultural, religious education, citizenship, PSHE (personal, social, health and economic education) which includes RSEMH (relationships and sex education and mental health) and fundamental British values.

Our before and after-school meetings (including time at the end of breaks) includes all education and care staff on duty and is a time of reflection and celebration, but also provides opportunity for evening care staff to share each student's success plus an opportunity for them to get a feel for how their day has been, therefore being better prepared for the evening.

Once a week we hold a news quiz which lasts for 15 minutes. The news quiz:

- covers a wide range of subjects and connects to all areas of the curriculum
- builds language, vocabulary, critical thinking, problem solving, oral expression, and listening skills
- develops informed citizens and lifelong newsreaders. By studying current events it helps students understand the importance of people, events, and issues in the news; it stimulates students to explore and learn more about the news, and to pay attention to the news they see and hear outside of school

This means that total formal contact time is 32.5 hours per week, in-line with government recommendations for all key stages.

Students are educated in groups of no more than three

Curriculum Content

Due to the bespoke nature of the curriculum design for each of our students, it is important to recognise that not all of our students will be following the National Curriculum programme of study meant for their chronological age. Gaps in knowledge will be assessed upon arrival at the school and the individual will begin their personalised learning journey at their own starting point, wherever that may be. For these reasons, terminology such as 'KS1' or 'KS2' will not feature on any documentation shared with the young people – instead students will follow a pathway

Pathways (From September 2024) -

Foundations pathway (incorporating the KS1 programme of study)

Stepping Stones pathway (incorporating the KS2 programme of study)

Discovery pathway (incorporating the KS3 programme of study)

Building my future pathway

Preparation for Adulthood pathway

Whinfell Schools foundation, stepping stones and discovery pathways are intended and designed to cover the National Curriculum for England and Wales (2013).

The building my future pathway is a bespoke route towards a range of formal qualifications, including GCSES, functional skills, unit awards, entry level certificates and vocational awards across a range of subjects. Each young person will have a personalised programme of qualifications, suited to their ability and future aspirations.

For those learners who stay with us to undertake their post 16 provision, they will follow the Preparation for adulthood pathway. This highly individualised, independence focused pathway incorporates preparation for adulthood qualifications in conjunction with a bespoke range of curriculum activities, such as work experience and college courses appropriate to their level of need and future aspirations. Young people on this pathway will continue to develop their numeracy and literacy with support of specialist teachers, and continue to receive input from our in-house MDT team.

Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural Education (including 'Britishness' and 'radicalisation').

Elements of SMSC are delivered across the curriculum and within discrete lessons such as RE, citizenship and PSHE. Tolerance and harmony between cultural traditions is encouraged and promoted along with an appreciation and respect for both their own and other cultures. For example visits are made to church for Christmas service and to other religious institutions such as a local Buddhist temple. In addition morning meetings cover SMSC themes and make use of guest speakers such as local religious figures, the police, charity representatives and the local MP. Charity involvement is encouraged and pupils contribute to the Christmas Shoebox appeal, sports relief, bake for charity coffee mornings, collect for the food bank.

The school actively promotes fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance. This is done whenever the opportunity arises within lessons and in conversation with young people. A member of the police visits to discuss the 'Prevent' programme gives presentations on anti-extremism and exploitation. We also visit council offices and the magistrates court and hold elections during 'Democracy Week'. We have regular visitors (e.g. local MP) and go on school trips to museums and places of worship.

For further information on our PSHE and SMSC delivery please see our PSHE policy document.

The Learning Environment

Learning Environment Policy: Therapeutic and Homely Classroom Design

Purpose:

We aim to create a supportive, safe, and therapeutic learning environment for all students. Research consistently shows that a well-designed learning environment that promotes emotional well-being is essential in fostering academic success, particularly for students who may experience anxiety or emotional difficulties. Our classrooms are intentionally designed to promote a sense of calm, belonging, and emotional safety, helping to reduce anxiety and support positive learning outcomes.

1. Therapeutic Approach to Classroom Design:

The therapeutic design of our classrooms is informed by research on the relationship between environment and emotional well-being. Studies indicate that a thoughtfully designed classroom can have a significant impact on reducing stress, enhancing focus, and promoting positive emotional and behavioural outcomes (Maxwell & Evans, 2000).

- **Calm and Safe Space:** Research by *Elliott, et al. (2005)* highlights that a calm, structured environment is critical for students who are at risk of emotional or behavioral difficulties. The reduction of sensory overload and a predictable, low-stress environment allow learners to feel safe, which in turn supports their ability to concentrate and engage with learning materials.
- **Flexible Layouts:** According to *The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2017)*, flexible learning spaces encourage autonomy and active participation, which are key to reducing anxiety. The ability to choose where to sit or how to engage with materials can enhance a student's sense of control, decreasing feelings of vulnerability and promoting self-regulation.
- **Sensory Considerations:** Studies, such as *Ainscow et al. (2013)*, show that sensory-friendly classroom environments can help mitigate the effects of anxiety and sensory overload, especially for students with neurodiverse conditions like autism. By considering sensory needs, we create an environment that is inclusive and accessible to all learners, reducing potential triggers for anxiety.
- **Therapeutic Resources:** *Schutz and Zukoski (2016)* assert that incorporating therapeutic resources such as mindfulness tools and emotional regulation supports students' mental health and resilience. These resources not only promote self-soothing techniques but also help students manage emotional challenges in a way that fosters a sense of autonomy and coping strategies.

2. Homely Atmosphere:

A homely classroom design has been found to be an effective way to support anxious learners. *Baker and Kuntz (2016)* conducted research on the effects of classroom environment on student anxiety and found that learners who felt "at home" in their classroom had lower stress levels and exhibited more positive engagement in academic tasks. The key is to create an environment where students feel a sense of belonging and emotional security, essential factors in reducing school-related anxiety.

- **Personalised Spaces:** The opportunity for students to personalize their space has been linked to increased emotional attachment and comfort within the classroom. According to *Cohen and Smerdon (2018)*, students who are given ownership over their environment are more likely to feel empowered and less anxious, leading to greater academic and social success.
- **Comfortable and Inviting Design:** *Barrett et al. (2015)* argue that environmental factors such as natural light, comfortable seating, and aesthetically pleasing spaces contribute to students' emotional well-being, leading to improved concentration, mood, and social interaction. These elements support the homely atmosphere we aim to foster in our classrooms.
- **Low-Stress Visuals:** Research by *Zhang and Barrett (2013)* supports the use of calming colours and visually uncluttered spaces in classrooms. Such environments help reduce anxiety and encourage a more focused, peaceful atmosphere. This approach aligns with the principles of environmental psychology, which emphasise the role of aesthetics in emotional regulation and cognitive performance. For this reason, there are very few display boards around the school.

Safe Spaces for Emotional Regulation: According to *Perry (2009)*, offering students a space to self-regulate and retreat when needed can significantly reduce anxiety. Quiet areas within the classroom provide students with a safe space to manage their emotions and return to learning when they feel ready. Our learners have access to the snug throughout the school day.

Schemes of work and lesson planning

Each subject leader is required to have schemes of work for all their courses / programmes related where appropriate to the national curriculum and examination board requirements. These schemes of work are followed by teachers and their delivery monitored by the Head of Education. Schemes of work set out how the content of the course is structured so that skills and specific knowledge are developed progressively and show how teaching is organised.

Homework

Cambian Whinell recognises the importance and value of homework as an extension of class work and a vehicle to practise skills, acquire new ones and develop good study habits.

Our young people are provided with the resources, and encouraged to further their studies outside of the classroom, but this is not enforced. As self-esteem rises and our young people begin to feel successful in the learning environment, they will often request additional work or time in the classroom. This is both encouraged and practised. They are provided with a time slot of between 15.15 and 16.00, where staff are available for support. This is encouraged especially in Y11 and post-16.

We endeavour to provide a wealth of learning opportunity throughout the waking curriculum by thorough communication between education and care. The evening and weekend activities often provide additional learning opportunities to provide a more enriched understanding. Meal times, evening activities and bed time provide a wealth of learning opportunity for our young people who have difficulties with communication, social interaction and social imagination.

Many of our strategies used in class for helping young people to re-tell stories or events are used by care staff. Where appropriate social stories help provide consistency in our approach as both education staff and residential staff use them with the young people. The therapy team inform our practise through regular weekly meetings which highlight strategies for individual boys.

Monitoring and review of the curriculum

Monitoring of standards, systems, teaching and learning at Whinfell School is the responsibility of the Head of Education and the Principal and is supported by School Improvement Partners, Principals and Deputy Heads of other Cambian Schools/Colleges and their analysis and reports. Each subject has ongoing Quality Assurance throughout the year via learning walks, lesson observations, Head of Education and teacher meetings, work scrutiny, self-evaluation and the student voice.