Curriculum Policy

COOMBE HOUSE
S C H O O L

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Dorset
Centre of
Excellence

"When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower."

Alexander Den Heijer
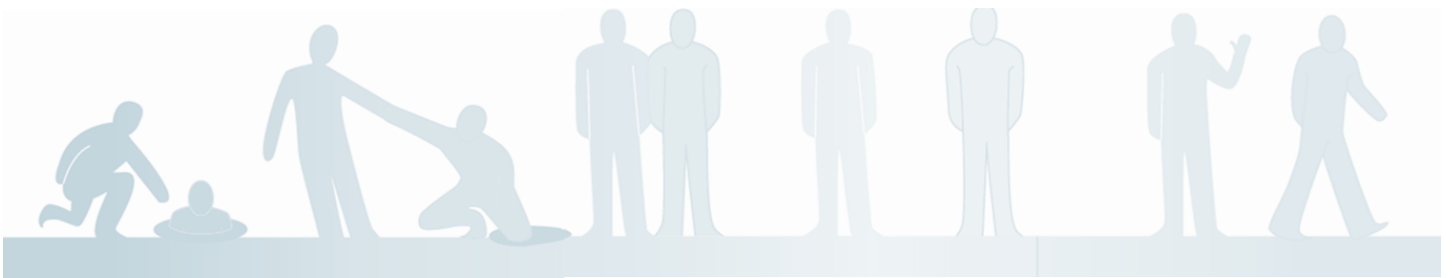
Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Coombe House School ("the School") supports pupils who have typically experienced challenges prior to attending and as a result have not experienced stability or made progress that reflects their potential.

1.2 In most cases these prior experiences have related to the barriers to learning that they experience, typically their special educational needs and disabilities, and/or their early life experiences. In addition, previous educational experiences themselves can often create additional barriers to learning.

1.3 At the School, we believe that:

1.3.1 When a pupil starts, we must accept them where they are and seek to understand their thoughts, feelings, experiences and emotions and build their individual curriculum accordingly.

1.3.2 If we know that a typically mainstream style approach has not worked previously, we must offer something different if we wish to see positive results.

1.3.3 Before a fully broad and balanced curriculum can be experienced effectively, the priority learning outcome for our pupils is to overcome their individual barriers to learning.

1.3.4 Overcoming these barriers in the first instance is often best achieved by developing exceptional relationships, focussing learning on pupils' interests and building trust and resilience over time.

1.3.5 As barriers are overcome, a wider curriculum offer based on individual needs and aspirations can be developed to ensure all pupils meet their potential.

1.3.6 Pupils must learn the holistic skills, knowledge and understanding to prepare them for a successful life in the modern world. This includes gaining accreditation that is relevant to their individual aspirations and developing the independence and life skills that will ensure they are able to transition into onward educational placements, workplaces and society successfully. Having either of these without the other is not enough.

2 Intent

2.1 Our curriculum approach is carefully crafted to support all pupils to progress from their individual starting points, turning an often self-perceived 'cycle of failure' into a 'culture of success.' This begins with them overcoming their barriers.

2.2 Through overcoming their barriers, be it by starting to trust school, attend regularly, build relationships, be safe or show curiosity about learning, we help pupils build the foundations they need to make the progress that reflects their potential.

2.3 Overcoming Barriers

2.3.1 Accepting each individual as they are, whatever their age, needs, prior experiences and starting points and building firm foundations for the journey ahead.

2.3.1.1 <u>Attending</u> - for pupils to progress they must attend regularly. For many pupils this is a significant barrier due to previous negative experiences and complex needs. We aspire for all our pupils to attend each and every day but know that the journey towards this may be different for each individual.

2.3.1.2 <u>Connecting</u> - for pupils to develop connections with the school; early connection may be with an element of the school and not a person. For example, a school animal, a favourite space or an activity.

2.3.1.3 <u>Belonging</u> - for pupils to feel part of our community is a significant step and is important for them to 'overcome barriers.' Feeling accepted and valued for who they are marks a real change.

2.3.1.4 <u>Trusting</u> - for pupils to begin to trust that the adults and the wider school will accept them and help them to progress, enabling them to try new things and to take risks, knowing they will be supported throughout.

2.3.1.5   Being Safe - for pupils to begin the early stages of self-awareness and to recognise the emotions to allow for regulation; pupils identify how 'being safe' looks and feels and accept support from adults regarding their safety so that they can access their curriculum.

2.3.1.6   Meeting Core Needs - for pupils to be able to identify and act upon their bodily sensations so that they can manage their sleeping, eating, drinking, toileting, personal care and hygiene, and temperature regulation so that they can access their curriculum.

2.3.1.7   Right Place, Right Time - for pupils to engage in the personalised curriculum that they have helped to design; be it a cookery session, playing sports or engaging in an activity aligned with a hobby. Being in the right place at the right time allows access to the potential of new opportunities.

2.3.1.8   Curiosity - for pupils to start to develop interest in areas outside of their comfort zone; to take a risk, ask a question or explore a new idea.

2.4   An ambitious, '21st Century Ready', Curriculum Offer

2.4.1   *'Learning carefully chosen skills through new learning opportunities, activities and experiences that ensure our pupils are mastering what they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world; our present is not their future.'*

2.4.2   Once firm foundations are established, we take a fresh look at what our pupils will need to learn to become successful in their lives. We believe in offering a broad range of opportunities so that our pupils can experience the world, and discover their strengths and talents, in ways that have not been available to them previously.

2.4.3   Pupils may have previously been denied access to opportunities to thrive because of their difficulties and challenges but we believe pupils need a broad range of opportunities in order to discover their strengths. We are aware that in some SEN schools, opportunities are narrowed by virtue of their size or by limitations to resources. At our school, we are proud to be able to do things differently.

2.4.4   We are mindful of our rapidly changing world. We know that the education of the past may not have featured all of the components that pupils need for life in modern Britain.

2.4.5   We believe that employment in adulthood is critical and is both a barometer of progress made to date and a catalyst for further lifelong learning.

2.4.6   We prioritise what modern employers say they need from the workforce of the future (communication, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and flexible working skills). We also prioritise developing the skills that will make our pupils safe, happy and fulfilled.

2.5   Preparation for Adulthood

2.5.1   We do not see the outcomes earned by the end of Year 11 or Year 13 as the end but only as the beginning and focus on outcomes in adulthood. We know that our real measure of success is whether the new skills, knowledge and understanding that are learned are sufficiently embedded so that they can be applied independently in the real world.

2.5.2   Gaining accreditation, developing resilience and becoming ready to move onto the next stage in their education or training is at the heart of our approach.

2.5.3   *'There is little point in learning the social and emotional skills to access further education, training or employment if you do not have the accreditation that allows you to access it. Equally, there is little point in gaining the accreditation that allows you access to further education, training or employment if you do not have the social and emotional skills that allow you to access it.'*

2.5.4   Our curriculum complies fully with Part 1 of the Independent School Standards. These can be found here:

The Independent School Standards - Guidance for independent schools (publishing.service.gov.uk).

3   Implementation

3.1   *"Human resources are like natural resources; they're often buried deep. You have to go looking for them, they're not just lying around on the surface. You have to create the circumstances where they show themselves."* Sir Ken Robinson.

3.2   We consider every component of our approach carefully. When considering our curriculum, we are really considering our entire approach.

3.3   Our Relational/Behavioural Approach

3.3.1   It is through relationships that children learn to feel safe, belong, understand themselves, others, and the world. Our approach influences our whole school ethos, systems, and policy as well as everyday practice. It is also a targeted approach to support those children who are most in need.

3.3.2   To be successful at school, all children need to develop secure relationships which enable them to feel safe, secure, and good about who they are. For this to happen, relationships are at the heart of school life.

3.4   Class Groups

3.4.1   We have made a very particular design decision around how our pupils are grouped for their learning.

3.4.2   Based on our overarching belief that relationships are the most important part in helping our pupils to overcome their barriers and to reach their goals, we group our pupils carefully and structure our planning so that they spend most of their time together.

3.4.3   Through this, they develop trust, a sense of security and can develop skills over time through being in a group of people who come to understand and support each other.

3.4.4   This approach contributes to our tight-knit community and leads to pupils developing their skills in empathy, collaboration and problem-solving which is so critical to their success.

3.5   Stage Not Age

3.5.1   We take a more flexible approach to grouping our pupils together rather than simply considering their chronological age. We consider age, educational needs, social and emotional needs holistically so that pupils learn alongside others who have similar needs, shared interests, and whose presentation and skills complement each other. The increased flexibility that this affords the school allows our sense of community to develop.

3.6   Our Staffing

3.6.1   Our staff are carefully selected. We ensure that each new member of the team has a commitment to our approach.

3.6.2   We look for individuals from a range of backgrounds and with a range of skills. What unites them is a commitment to make a transformational difference to the lives of the children we support.

3.7   Leadership Structure

3.7.1   We have invested heavily into our leadership capacity so that our school has the resources it needs to deliver the curriculum that is described.

3.7.2   By investing in our pastoral and therapy team, and through employing specialist therapists, we have created a support network for teachers, classes and pupils that means that when support is required it is there.

3.7.3   Leaders are present, knowledgeable and take an active role in the learning of each individual.

3.8   Our Training

3.8.1   Our training and induction ensure that the carefully selected colleagues that we recruit are offered support to develop their own skills, knowledge and understanding so that they can meet the needs of our pupils.

3.8.2   Through understanding the additional barriers that many of our pupils have, our staff support them to make progress that many had previously thought would not be possible.

3.9   Strong Partnerships

3.9.1   We believe in making partnerships with groups and individuals who can assist us in delivering the best educational experience for our pupils. For example, partnering with providers who specialise in horticulture, animal care or trade skills can assist us in creating our personalised timetables.

3.9.2   Through building these partnerships, we are not only helping our pupils to learn the skills they need but to also make connections with the world outside school.

3.10   Technology and Resources

3.10.1 We invest heavily in technology. Linked to our philosophy of preparing our pupils for a successful adult life, we know that them being technologically literate is critically important.

3.10.2 Every classroom is equipped with an interactive, high-definition screen to facilitate high quality teaching. There is provision for every pupil to be issued with their own laptop that they can use to further their learning, if that is appropriate for their individual needs. We embrace opportunities to learn through modern technology.

3.10.3 As well as the significant investment we make in technology, we also believe in significantly resourcing our curriculum more generally. The school campus has huge potential that is being developed over time to offer specialist resources for teaching textiles, cookery, ceramics, forest school, horticulture, science, art, DT and sports and leisure.

3.11 Specialist Transition

3.11.1 Many of our pupils have experienced significant disruption to their education prior to starting with us.

3.11.2 They may have developed significant barriers to attendance and so require careful planning for their re-integration to school.

3.11.3 Believing in the importance of long-term progression as opposed to short term wins, we believe in a carefully planned, multi-agency informed transition plan for each individual, which sets them their own personalised and ambitious targets for integration.

3.11.4 We acknowledge that we must accept the pupil as they are. Where they have additional barriers, we take responsibility to support them to become a valued member of our community as well as is possible for them.

3.12 Harnessing Passions, Hobbies, and Interests

3.12.1 The acquisition of skills and knowledge go hand in hand; however, we recognise that pupils can sometimes perceive a theme or topic of an adult's choosing, or one that is typically taught in other schools as 'demotivating' or even 'boring.'

3.12.2 This is why we aim to mould and adjust the context to the passions and interests of our young people. This is paramount when re-engaging young people with education and motivating them to develop a love of learning.

3.13 Curriculum Coverage

3.13.1 There are nine subject areas which together offer a broad curriculum that complies with the requirements of the Independent School Standards. The subject areas are influenced by the National Curriculum and allow our pupils to develop a broad base of skills, knowledge and understanding whilst also offering opportunities to specialise.

- Linguistic – English, reading, writing and speaking and listening;

- Mathematical – all areas of maths;

- PSHE – Physical, Social, Health and Economic development;

- Scientific – biology, chemistry, physics;

- Human & Social – history & geography;

- Technological – ICT;

- Aesthetic and Creative – art, design and technology and music;

- MFL – modern foreign languages; and

- Physical – physical education.

3.13.2 All subject areas are based on the National Curriculum, with each building in depth and detail to ensure that our pupils sequentially build upon prior skills, knowledge and understanding over time.

3.13.3 On occasion, we might use different terminology to describe what we are learning on our school timetable if typical subject names act as a barrier to engagement.

3.14 Core / Non-Core Subjects

3.14.1 Whilst we believe in pupils having a broad curriculum, we know that maths, English, and PSHE are often most critical to being able to access learning more generally, to stay safe and to maximise opportunities for further learning and employability in the future. For these reasons, these subject areas are prioritised and are known as 'core.'

3.14.2 We are mindful of the obligations within the Independent School Standards to deliver a 'broad' coverage of subjects beyond this core and so our planning ensures that all pupils experience this breadth during their time in school.

3.14.3 However, in terms of us offering a consistently and evenly *balanced* curriculum, our approach allows pupils to focus and specialise on certain subjects more than others during certain periods, if this aids their 'overcoming barriers' or meets their needs at a particular time. Where this specialism is developed, it is always closely monitored to ensure it offers suitable balance over time.

3.14.4 As a school, we are curious about the generally widespread prioritisation and valuing of certain subjects and skills over others in society but balance this with a research-based view about what subjects are most impactful on securing positive adult outcomes.

3.15 Early Reading and Phonics

3.15.1 We passionately believe in the importance of supporting our pupils with the fundamental literacy skills they need for life. We prioritise resourcing and training for the effective delivery of Early Reading and Phonics.

3.15.2 Our preferred scheme is Read Write Inc, which provides the overarching framework for our interventions. Resourcing and training are managed to ensure this provision is effective.

3.15.3 We understand that for many of our learners, their neurodiversity and prior learning experiences mean that we often must take a personalised approach to offering support and intervention. If there are particular barriers to engaging with our typical/preferred scheme, the school shall create an appropriate alternative plan, which may include using different resources and approaches and/or considering when in their introduction into the school their literacy teaching should begin.

3.16   Our Planning

3.16.1 The School has a planning framework that allow staff to facilitate curricula based on individual needs and circumstances but within a structured framework that ensures that there are clear assessment protocols, progression over time and resilience to the challenge of ensuring a 'smooth' flow of learning opportunities across multiple years at our school.

3.16.2 Robust schemes of work, broadly based on the National Curriculum, sit behind our other layers of planning, which ensure that the often innovative approaches of curriculum delivery are anchored to a clear structure.

3.16.3 This approach allows teachers to have confidence in deviating from typical mainstream approaches and for leaders to have an effective tool for quality assurance.

3.16.4 Teachers and leaders are able to use planning structures to identify barriers to learning, prior gaps in learning and to establish area of strength, or areas where pupils may not have previously had opportunities to 'try' or 'thrive.'

3.17   Our Teaching Approach

3.17.1 We use a variety of teaching approaches that best meet the needs of our learners. Pupils who are overcoming barriers need a very specific approach to allow them to reconnect and engage with learning.

3.17.2 Once barriers start to be overcome, more conventional teaching strategies can start to be used, in order to prepare pupils for accredited learning and a successful adulthood.

3.18   Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Outcomes

3.18.1 All of our pupils have an EHCP. Within these plans, they each have a clear set of outcomes, which they work towards as part of their time with us.

3.18.2 We take care to ensure effective focus upon these long-term targets so that they are more easily achieved using a 'stepping stone' approach.

3.19   Skilled Assessment

3.19.1 We understand that for many of our pupils, summative assessment such as 'tests' has represented a significant factor in what has made school a negative experience for them in the past. In short, we need to ensure that our assessment approach contributes towards a positive educational experience and outcome and should most definitely not detract from it.

3.19.2 While we understand the importance of assessment, we prioritise where possible assessment based on skilled staff observations of our pupils, particularly in the earlier phases of pupils' time at the school.

3.19.3 Where pupils can become more involved in the assessment of their learning, we prioritise formative assessment and look to make the experiences positive for them, so that any previous negative view of education in general can be positively adjusted.

3.19.4   We value all aspects of our curriculum equally and so ensure assessment of the more social and emotionally driven aspects is prioritised similarly to that of our pupils' academic achievements.

3.20   Accreditation / Qualifications / Outcomes

3.20.1   Whilst our curriculum clearly considers outcomes in a broader sense than simply counting how many qualifications are earned, we recognise the importance of accreditation as part of providing a sense of legitimacy for our pupils.

3.20.2   They can demonstrate to them that they are succeeding and can contribute towards them being able to transition on to a successful adult life. Qualifications open some doors and can broaden the range of opportunities that are available in the next stages of their journeys.

3.20.3   We know that due to the often complex prior educational experiences our children have had before they join our school, the accreditation that will be earned by each individual will be very personal to them.

3.20.4   We believe that all of our pupils should leave our school with a minimum of functional accreditation in mathematics and English. We offer these qualifications at Entry Level One, Entry Level Two, Entry Level Three, Functional Skills Level One and Functional Skills Level Two.

3.20.5   In addition, we are keen to encourage pupils who demonstrate a particular capacity to learn at a higher level. Where appropriate, we offer a range of GCSE qualifications, which are reviewed in line with the interests and the motivations of each individual.

3.20.6   To supplement the above, we also offer a range of other appropriate accredited courses either ourselves or through partnership with other organisations to ensure the progress of the pupils is suitably acknowledged and celebrated.

3.20.7   Our first cohort of pupils that shall be ready to engage in externally verified qualifications shall graduate in July 2024. The school has plans to ensure it has suitable arrangements in place with JCQ and the relevant awarding bodies within these timescales.

3.21   A typical timetable

3.21.1   We are often asked what a typical timetable might look like for a pupil at our school.

3.21.2   The answer to this question is not as simple as people often expect. We can offer a genuinely personalised curriculum for each individual, where they are accepted for who they are, and we begin from their particular starting point.

3.21.3   A pupil who is working predominantly overcoming barriers will have a timetable that is considerably different to one who is predominantly working towards earning externally verified accreditation.

4   Impact

4.1   *"If we wish to predict which children will lead satisfying adult lives, the best indicator is their emotional health at age 16. This is more important than their academic qualifications right up to the age of 25 - and more important than their behaviour in childhood."*

Schools Policy Appraisal Handbook, June 2021, Department for Education

4.2   The impact of our curriculum will go beyond the time that pupils attend. By thinking with adult outcomes in mind, we form a foundational stepping-stone on a journey of positive and lifelong transformational change.

4.3   So many educational institutions measure their success through exam results achieved by the time they leave that institution. We believe in taking a longer-term view. We know that the work we do with the pupils we support is often measured best when assessing the impact it has on their lives in the longer term.

4.4   In the School's first year we have already had a very positive impact on our pupils. For many, they have made excellent progress towards overcoming their barriers and have transitioned onto a curriculum that helps them to prepare for accreditation and adulthood beyond.

4.5   Assessment which assesses both academic and social, emotional and independence development is working well and helping to identify next steps.

4.6   As the School matures, we will continue to track and monitor the progress they make beyond the school as they progress onto their next steps in education, training or employment, to help us to understand the life-long impact of our curriculum.

5   Version control

Date of adoption of this policy, by or on behalf of the Proprietor	March 2023
Date of last review of this policy	
Date for next review of this policy	February 2024
Policy owner (Proprietor)	Dorset Centre of Excellence