

## PMLD curriculum rationale

The curriculum offer to pupils and students at The Beacon Folkestone is designed around the school's triple focus on learning, support and development.

The curriculum they receive is constructed to enable them to become:

- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve;
- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives;
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

Our approach to learning for our most physically challenged and for our least academic pupils follows that of the late Penny Lacey, a senior lecturer in education whose work concerned the best teaching methods for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. She argued for a more developmental perspective, with communication and cognition being the central focus, and the National Curriculum being employed in contexts where it is best placed for the pupils' particular special needs, rather than in itself being the central focus.

At The Beacon Folkestone we recognise that children and young people with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) have unique abilities and ways of learning that are likely to remain within developmentally early intellectual parameters for the whole of their school lives: therefore, the curriculum needs to be approached in a different way than for those who have higher cognitive ability.

Our pupils with the lowest academic attainment levels are placed in 'needs based' classes which can accommodate the 'spikey' development profiles that many of them have, and which can provide for any 'bridge' between their informal curriculum and the semi-formal curriculum followed by their peers in other classes. Following the school's general ethos of providing a personalised curriculum experience for all our pupils, we strive to give a uniquely blended timetable of learning opportunities throughout each day.

## **Routine-based learning opportunities**

### **Communication, language, literacy:**

Library skills/access

Visual development and or compensatory skills

Assemblies

Object/sound/body cues

Story time/books/bags

Expressive/receptive activities - intensive interaction/story comprehension

### **Cognition:**

Preparation for learning

Body awareness

Positioning

Physio

OT input

Sensology

Sensory rooms & sensory play activities

Most pupils will also have a 'learning box' type session, which has activities designed to be covered every day to focus on some specific areas of learning for them, whether academic/cognitive, sensory, physical and/or emotional.

### **Personal, social, emotional, well-being:**

Toileting

Eating/feed

Drinking

Body awareness/sense of 'self'

Life skills

Play/socialisation

Accessing facilities - making links for later life

### **Physical development:**

Mobility

MOVE

Wheelchair dance & movement

(Rebound therapy)

Swimming/hydrotherapy

Special yoga

## **ECT/ICT:**

Physical access/SALT switch assessments

Switch access and use/positioning/control of switch

Motivation of effects/cause and effect

Control for independence

Communication/control

## **Cross curricula learning opportunities**

- Therapy is integrated across the curriculum areas
- 'Learning boxes' + 'activity schedules' designed on an individual pupil basis
- Social skills/interaction
- Visual development
- Hearing development
- Compensatory skills development
- Music therapy
- Play therapy
- Eye gaze technology
- PHSCEE
- TAC PAC
- Dark rooms (including light stimulation/eye 'exercises')
- Soft play
- Resonance board activities
- Sensory garden
- Community access/experience
- Skills for life
- Planned visits out
- Planned visitors in
- music - various types and reasons (eg gross and fine motor skills, cause and effect, topic connections, "singing phonics" and "poems and percussion", etc)
- PE/sport/play for some pupils (including in ground trampoline, adapted bicycles/tricycles)
- sensory story/sensory literacy
- Write Dance (multi purpose - writing, gross motor skills, sensory/tactile sensitivities, etc)
- collective worship
- Combined Arts Awards + art therapy style sessions
- cooking/horticulture/sensory science
- creative movement (multi purpose - MOVE, PE, music, gross motor skills)
- floor time (for whatever purpose)
- Special yoga

## Assessment

Many assessment models do not recognise all the progress and development that we know that those with PMLD can make. Currently, the most lauded planning and/or assessment tools nationwide (sometimes being used as 'curricula') appear to be MAPP (developed by The Dales School in North Yorkshire) and (Welsh) Routes for Learning, together with some bespoke tools developed within individual schools, and at The Beacon Folkestone these are being used alongside the Pupil Asset system in Kent's special schools, as well as our own bespoke systems to form a 'basket of indicators', an approach favoured by Penny Lacey, and by Peter Imray (Special Educational Needs Training and Advice consultant) who suggested adopting "the 'basket' approach" using whichever tool(s) is/are appropriate to the pupils in any given class. We believe this has been the most appropriate way for us to show the intricacies of development we see in our very special young people.

**The Beacon Folkestone's current 'basket of indicators' includes:**

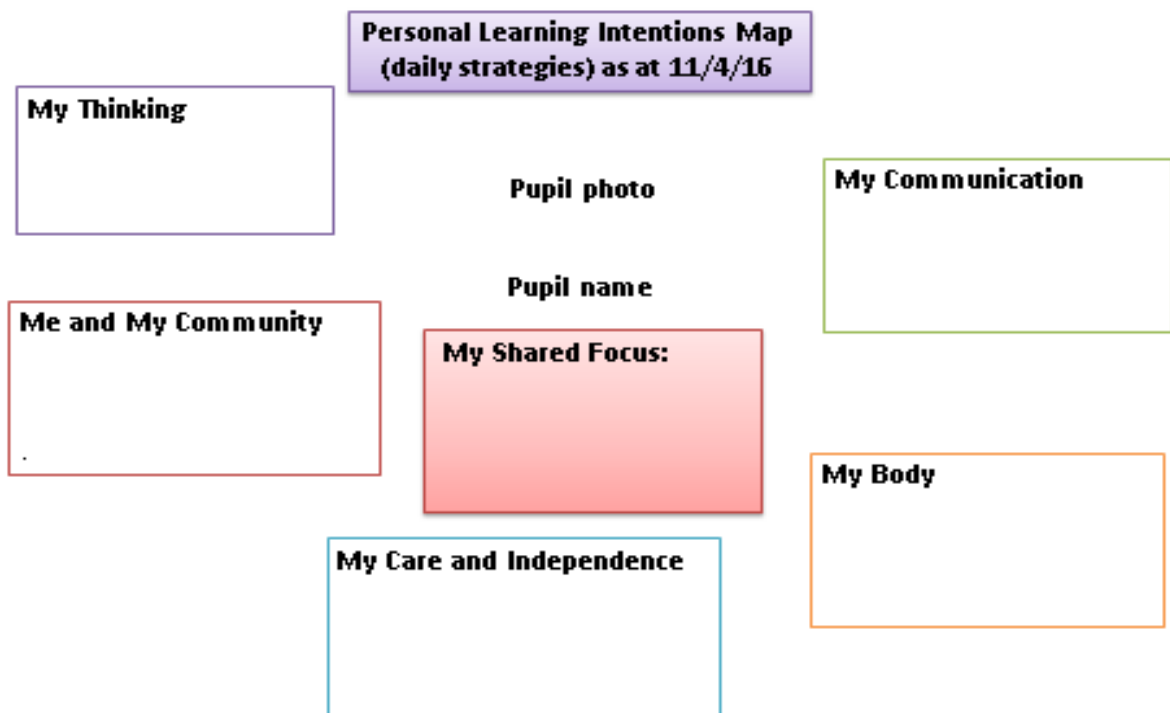
- MAPP (Mapping and Assessing Pupil Progress), including the CSD (Continuum of Skill Development which is also used to record progress in miscellaneous learning strategies/skill developments)
- RfL (Welsh Routes for Learning) - with progress recording using the MAPP CSD
- MOVE (Mobility Opportunities Via Education)
- ABLLS (Assessing Basic Language and Learning Skills)
- AFLS (Assessing Functional Living Skills)
- OCR Life and Living Skills
- Trinity Combined Arts Awards
- Bespoke communication and 'learning box' observation recording
- Pupil Asset (progression of skills/P Levels)

## Planning

Our informal (and semi-formal) curriculum structure is based around this personalised approach to learning. Many of our pupils need to acquire the thinking skills so often taken for granted in "neurotypical" development, such as the ability to recall information, link cause and effect or anticipate another person's wants. Such skills are most effectively learned as part of an ongoing process throughout the school day. For our young people experiencing our informal curriculum, special attention is paid to the particular range or combination of sensory, physical and communication challenges each one of them faces.

The focus of our teachers, therefore, is not to 'teach the class', but to personalise planning for each individual pupil, addressing the next key steps that they need to achieve to make progress. This is done by sharing the planning process with those most important to the pupils, including their families, therapists (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and language therapists), specialist teachers, medical professionals, respite providers, and anyone else closely involved with them. In conjunction with the developmental frameworks of our selected assessment tools, our teachers use that trans-disciplinary knowledge and expertise to help guide their planning for the 'next steps for learning', ensuring adherence to best practice, current developmental theories and so on, for each pupil's particular complex needs. This collaborative approach is also essential for ensuring that everyone working with the young person has the same 'shared focus' on functional skills and general welfare needed to optimise their independence and quality of life both now and in their future, and essentially that the young person has the chance to practise these skills as often as possible each day.

There are a number of ways in which schools are setting out what their pupils will be working on - in effect, their 'daily/weekly curriculum'. Popular terms are: learning intentions, (shared) goals, outcomes, and individual education plans (IEPs). At The Beacon Folkestone, we have been using the Personal Learning Intention Map (PLIM) design promoted by Swiss Cottage, but with the term 'shared focus' for what the individual learning/development strategies are working towards. (We prefer to use the term 'strategies' rather than goals or outcomes or intentions, because there may be areas of focus for an individual pupil that might not be the end in itself - rather a method of working, or an activity to be undertaken, as a means to an end (ie, the 'shared focus').

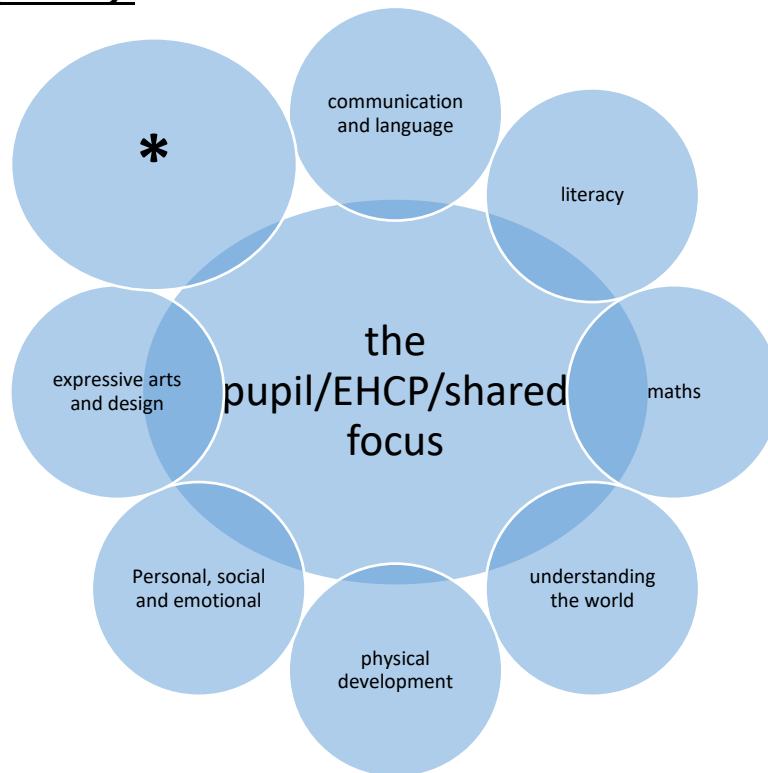


This model co-ordinates well with the EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans), in that outcomes within the EHCPs focus on the areas of Communication and Interaction, Cognition and Learning, Sensory and Physical, and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

### **Curriculum structure**

At The Beacon we have decided to use the following 'curriculum structures' for our pupils with profound and multiples learning difficulties, and with our pupils with the most severe learning difficulties.

## EY/KS1 (Zone 1):



The focus of provision for our youngest PMLD pupils (Early Years and Key Stage 1) is from a sensory and social curriculum approach within the structure of the EYFS framework.

### **Prime Areas:**

#### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

Making relationships  
Self-confidence and self-awareness  
Managing feelings and behaviour

#### **Physical Development**

Moving and handling  
Health and self-care

#### **Communication and Language**

Listening and attention  
Understanding  
Speaking

## Specific areas:

### Literacy

Reading

Writing

### Mathematics

Numbers

Shape, space and measure

### Understanding the World

People and communities

The world

Technology

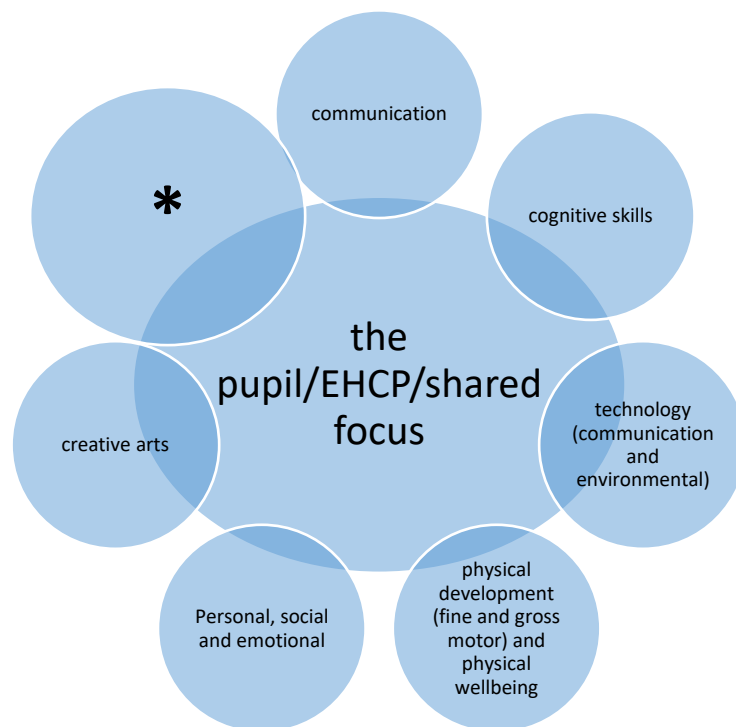
### Expressive Arts and Design

Exploring and using media and materials

Being imaginative

+ EHCP outcomes

## KS2/3 (Zone 2):





Provision for our pupils in Key Stages 2-3 is as follows (being based on the personal learning intention maps introduced by Swiss Cottage School):

- my communication
- my thinking
- my body
- my care and independence
- me and my community
- +
- creative/combined arts
- play-based skills

+ EHCP outcomes (shared goals)

### **Curriculum opportunities**

My communication =  
Communication, Language, Literacy

My thinking =  
Cognitive (incl play skills)+  
Creative/Combined Arts

My care and independence + me and my community =  
Personal, Social, Emotional, Well-being      PSHCEE, Citizenship, RE

My body =  
Physical Development  
(including play skills)

ECT/ICT

### **Equivalent National Curriculum subjects**

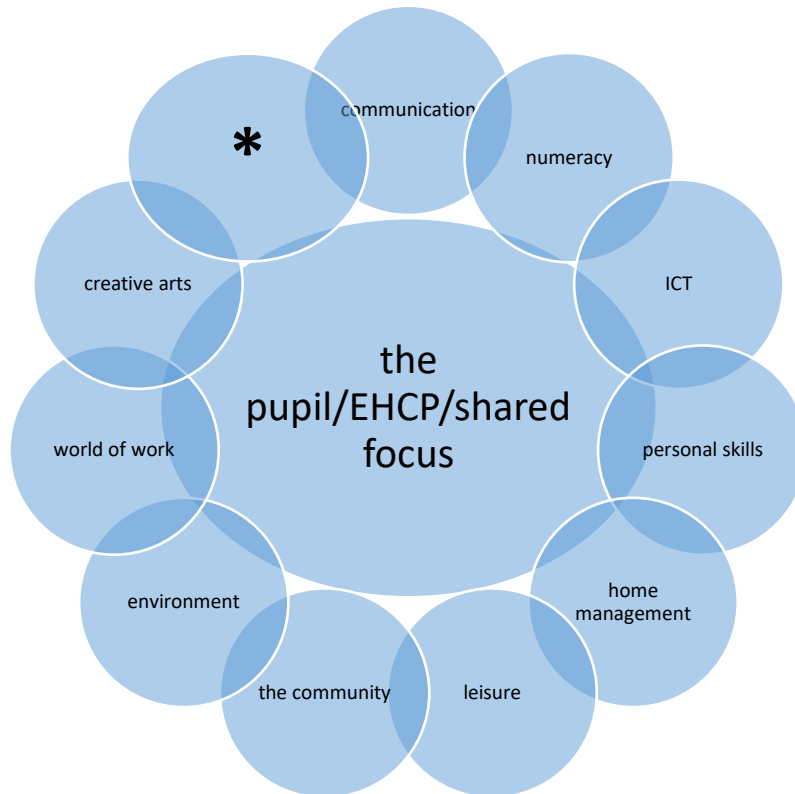
English Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening,  
ICT

History, Geography, Science, RE, Art,  
DT, Music, Problem Solving, Reasoning,  
Number

PE

ICT/Computing

### KS4/5 (Zone 3):



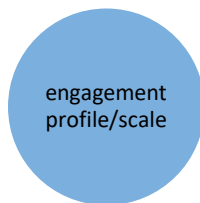
For our older pupils (Key Stage 4-5), the focus is on functional life skills, taught via the OCR Life Skills modular programme of study, and cover the areas of:

- communication
- creative arts
- environment
- home management
- ICT
- leisure
- numeracy
- personal skills
- the community
- world of work

+ EHCP outcomes

Although there is a move towards more functional skills learning as pupils progress through the school, there will, of course, will be considerable overlapping of the opportunities and experiences offered within each of the three age groupings, due to the inherent nature of the pupils in this cohort, and their particular special educational needs. As mentioned earlier, although there is some separation due to age, the needs of many of the pupils remain very similar throughout their lives, and so certain activities and opportunities might be shared with pupils from other age groups when this is appropriate: for example, sensory room sessions, social curriculum outings, hydrotherapy, Tac Pac, sensory literacy, music and wheelchair dance, and so on.

## \* Engagement Profile and Scale



As mentioned within "assessment" above, it is our general belief that we should be finding ways to show whatever and however our pupils are progressing, not necessarily restricting our planning to match any one particular assessment tool. However, we are continually reviewing our provision, sharing good practice and pedagogical development with other educational and health professionals, and as a result of this we are considering if/how ImPACTS might be introduced as our prime curriculum framework and assessment tool. ImPACTS has been developed by the Rosewood Free School in Southampton and recently introduced elsewhere within our Kent special schools network. We are also investigating how the Engagement Profile and Scale developed by Barry Carpenter might be incorporated into our curriculum provision.

