



Teaching and Learning Policy

Great teaching is defined as that which leads to improved student progress.

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Date approved by Management Committee:	December 2020
Signature of Chair of Management Committee:	<i>A. Cunningham</i>
To be reviewed:	Annually

This policy gives guidance to staff on Teaching and Learning and should be read alongside the Assessment, Marking and Feedback Policy.

Introduction:

The Link School, helps young people aged 4 – 16 overcome their difficulties and achieve their potential by building their confidence and self-esteem. The schools provide a positive, caring environment with an exciting, individualised curriculum for our vulnerable learners. Learners work towards academic success whilst developing social and emotional skills, preparing them to lead an active and fulfilling part in society. Staff are highly skilled, dedicated and determined to help the young people who attend the school.

Staff aim to promote a culture that effectively breaks down the barriers to learning by creating a safe and stimulating learning environment based on individual need. Learners are taught in smaller groups, with a high staff ration, primary staff apply the Nurture Principles to their environments.

6 Principles of Nurture Groups: (Benathan and Boxall)

- Children' learning is understood developmentally
- The classroom offers a safe base
- Nurture is important for the development of self esteem
- Language is understood as a vita means of communication
- All behaviour is communication
- Transitions are significant in the lives of children

All staff support learners who present with emotional stress and challenging behaviour. Individual pathways are identified for learners based on academic and emotional assessments, this can include a return to mainstream, an alternative vocational setting or a more specialised educational setting.

All staff will promote the re-engagement of learners and help them to achieve their full learning potential. This is underpinned by staff working in partnership with parents/carers and other stakeholders to achieve the very best for learners.

Learner referred to The Link School present with the following characteristics:

Characteristics:

- Low self-esteem
- Poor self-image
- Inadequate attachments to others
- Lacks positive friendships
- Resistant to boundaries
- Oppositional
- Aggressive
- Disruptive
- Poor communication skills
- Low verbal ability
- Poor understanding
- Slow processing of language
- Undeveloped expressive language
- Developmentally delayed

Rationale:

The Link School is committed to delivering high quality teaching & learning, for all learners, on all sites. All learners have the right to access a broad, balanced curriculum that also recognises their need for a more individualised and personalised curriculum. To ensure all learners have access to this personalised curriculum, they should all experience a variety of teaching & learning that engages, encourages and enables them to achieve good or outstanding outcomes during their time at the school. The Link School intends to allow all learners to fulfil these outcomes through successful and effective teaching and learning. The staff at The Link School have a collective and individual responsibility to strive to deliver lessons and learning experiences of the highest quality within the confines of a broad, and balanced curriculum. To continue to maintain our very high standards, The Link School identifies the need for continued professional development, professional mentoring and strong systems of support and analysis to empower staff to achieve these ambitions.

Aims and objectives:

- to ensure high quality teaching and learning experiences for students of all abilities and aptitudes;
- to provide a framework for teaching and learning within which there is flexibility and scope for creativity;
- to provide coherence of approach and consistency of expectation;
- to make explicit the entitlement of all learners;
- to raise attainment by increasing levels of student engagement, motivation, participation and independence;
- to promote reflection on, and sharing of, good and outstanding practice;
- to promote an understanding of how learning takes place;
- to make explicit a baseline for monitoring and evaluating the teaching and learning that takes place;
- to provide practical guidance and clear procedures;
- to provide a focus for development;
- to inform teachers, learners, parents/carers, Management Committee and the wider community about the aims and processes of teaching and learning;
- to identify specific areas of responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy.

Effective teaching:

Highly effective teaching is seen when the following components are evident:

- A clear plan/outline for the lesson with its objectives and success criteria communicated to learners at the start of the lesson. It puts the learner at the centre of the process and allows for personalisation. It takes account of the needs of all learners. Stimulating resources are ready for the class, with the inclusion of extension tasks and hands on learning. Lesson objectives are clear and specific and, linked to the Foundation and National Curriculum. Students' learning is reviewed with them at the end of the lesson and at regular intervals during the lesson, allowing prompt intervention or reshaping of learning where needed.

- Expectations of learners are high. Learners are encouraged to have high standards of effort, accuracy and presentation. Lessons are tailored appropriately to challenge all learners. Strategies are varied to motivate different students. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning; they are given opportunities to acquire skills, knowledge and understanding, (including literacy, numeracy and IT basic skills), in a variety of relevant contexts;
- Resources, including the use of ICT, are appropriate for the age and level of learners, well prepared and support learning outcomes; engaging lesson starters are employed to grab attention and motivate participation.
- Effective questioning is used to encourage discussion, challenge ideas and develop independent thinking; assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies are used effectively throughout the lesson;
- Support staff are an integral part of the teaching team providing support for learning,(including 1-1 mentoring), building good relationships and reinforcing good learning behaviours;
- Learners' successes are celebrated at every opportunity. Strategies include verbal and written praise by all involved in The Link School, work displays, performance and sharing events, reward systems and sharing good news throughout the school.
- Parental/carer involvement in celebrating success is fostered through telephone calls, meeting and letters/postcards home.

Effective learning:

Highly effective learning is seen when:

- Relationships are good;
- Learning environments and resources are stimulating;
- Pupils learn in relevant contexts;
- Learners have some choice in their learning;
- There is consistent and high quality feedback;
- Learners understand how they can improve;
- Learners have time to complete and reflect on their work;
- Learners have appropriate levels of challenge and support;
- Learners good work is recognised and celebrated;
- Learners are encouraged to work both independently and co-operatively
- The environment is secure, stable and stimulating;
- The classroom and school environment has high quality displays that showcase learners work and provide prompts and guidance to support them in their learning;
- Learners' self-esteem is high;
- Learners understand the purpose of the learning and see relevance to their own experience;
- Learners understand the ways in which learning takes place;
- The learning builds on prior knowledge and understanding;
- Success criteria are explicit and models are provided;

- The learning is active and collaborative;
- Learner questioning, reflection, and discussion are encouraged;
- Independent learning and thinking is facilitated and encouraged;
- There are opportunities for creativity and utilising different learning styles;
- Learners can self-assess, know what they need to do to improve and are able to set appropriate targets;
- Learners have opportunities to transfer skills, knowledge and understanding to other contexts;
- Learners understand the wider context that learning takes place in e.g Post 16 experience etc....

Inclusion:

The Link School recognises its responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all its learners and in so doing acknowledges that teachers will need to modify, as necessary, the National Curriculum to provide learners with relevant and appropriately challenging work at each key stage.

Setting suitable learning challenges:

At The Link School we believe in setting suitable learning challenges. Many of the learners have large gaps in their education due to long periods out of school. As a consequence programmes of study will need to fill these gaps but at the same time remain suitably challenging for pupils who are often still very capable.

For less able learners who may have other special educational needs, work will invariably need to be drawn from earlier key stages so that learners can show what they can achieve. In some cases this may mean learners not being able to receive all their age related programmes of study.

Of particular concern for learners who have moved schools regularly or have been excluded, is continuity and progression. There is a danger that learners in these circumstances find themselves repeating previous learning which, although offers some immediate success and is 'safe', provides little challenge with no evidence of progression. It is important, therefore, that programmes of study for these learners are monitored and reviewed regularly to provide both regular opportunities for success as well as suitable challenges and progression routes.

Responding to learners' diverse needs:

Learners from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are often over represented in The Link School. These include children looked after by the Local Authority, on Child Protection plans, with Mental Health difficulties (for example those supported by CAMHS), as well as those with other Special Educational Needs including autism and language difficulties. Based on this understanding, school staff continually adapt and modify their teaching to ensure all learners can take part in lessons fully and effectively.

The Link School believes that to effectively respond to diverse needs and backgrounds of its learners it needs to personalise, as much as possible, the target setting and assessment process. To this end, each learner has the opportunity to participate in their own planning and assessment process at regular intervals throughout the year, which includes self-assessment and reflecting on progression lines and targets set each term.

Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individual and groups of learners:

For learners whose needs are not adequately supported through the teaching strategies outlined above and in our Teaching and Learning guidance, more intensive approaches may be necessary to overcome potential barriers. Some pupils with severe and often extreme behavioural difficulties (Hard to Reach learners) these may include support from classroom assistants or even individual sessions from specialist staff in one to one tuition at home or in alternative providers.

In addition, The Link School understands that there are a significant number of learners where support may also be required from other agencies such as Educational Psychology, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Speech and Language Therapy and Learning Support. In all cases specialist support from within the school or from external agencies, needs to liaise closely with the classroom teacher to take account of the impact on the pupil's learning and on the preparation of programmes of study.

Curriculum:

The Link School provide an exciting and relevant personalised curriculum with a strong emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy skills as well as helping young people understand their emotions, build confidence and resilience and improve their behaviour. Primary classes base their schemes of work around topics of interest to learners to give skills and knowledge a more meaningful context.

Learning is divided into three distinct categories which re-engages, motivates and supports young people towards their learning and employment goals. These are:

Developing skilled, reflective learners:

Learners follow much of the Foundation and National Curriculum and there is a strong emphasis on the development of English, maths and science, as well as cross-curricular themed topics which help them gain skills, knowledge and understanding about the world around them. Learners are encouraged to be active, self-reflective and to develop their thoughts and opinions on a range of topics which are relevant to them. The practice and ethos within the classrooms encourages independence, questioning and a sound understanding of the curriculum.

Developing confident, resilient young people:

Learners can take full advantage of our exciting and varied activity, outdoor education and forest school programme. Everyone has the opportunity to take part in activities which encourage the development of physically active, curious, confident learners who take pride in their achievements. These include mountain biking, den building, mud kitchen, football, music, art, food technology, water sports, swimming and many more.

Developing active, responsible young people:

Learners are given lots of opportunities to develop their personal and social knowledge, skills and understanding. These include lessons in citizenship, social and emotional aspects of learning and personal, social and health education. The school is enriched through the work it does developing the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all. Learners take part in various projects and activities for example, gaining Platinum in the Anti-Bullying awards, charity events such as Macmillan Coffee Morning, food collections, Operation Christmas Child and taking part in Remembrance Commemorations. The promotion of British Values is at the heart of the schools' work.

Developing skilled, reflective learners:

Learners are taught in small, well supported groups and highly trained and experienced staff plan and prepare individual learning programmes for learners so that they can achieve to their full potential, with their gaps in learning addressed. The school is one of the highest achieving alternative providers in the country and offers a broad range of GCSEs and other valuable qualifications that give each learner the best possible opportunity for a successful transition to post-16 education, training or employment. GCSEs include English, Maths, Literature, Statistics, Science and Humanities as well as Functional Skills qualifications in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT. Alternative and vocational qualifications are offered in Hair and Beauty, Construction, Art and Food Technology as well as many others such as Health and Safety at Work and First Aid at Work.

Developing active, responsible young adults

The Link School is an exciting place to study and there is always something fun and interesting going on. Learners are encouraged to take part in our vibrant activities programme that helps to develop engaged and active citizens. They widen their experiences by taking part in activities such as mountain biking, trampoline, water sports, ski-ing and climbing as well as visiting local, national and international areas of interest. Trips and residential include Derwent Hill, Ski-ing in France, the Birmingham Clothes show and Krakow in Poland to name a few. The school is also an active participant in the Sunderland Work Discovery Week and STEM activities held at local universities, as well as having close links to further education, training, apprenticeship and employment providers.