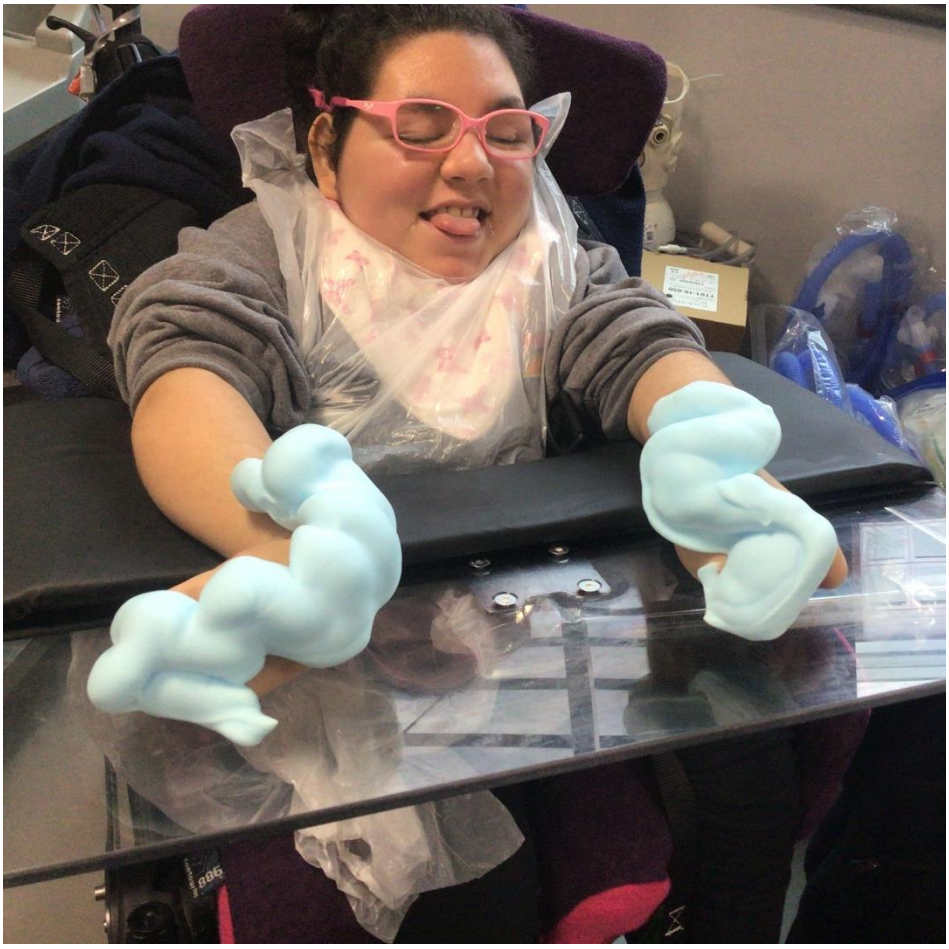
The PMLD Curriculum
Charlton Park Academy

For those with a profound learning difficulty, learning is best done when the learner is placed at the center of the Curriculum.

“Let’s focus on the things that matter.”

(EQUALS Pre-formal Curriculum)



Tara Howarth February 2023

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Rationale:

The pupils within the PMLD classes at Charlton Park Academy are working at the earliest developmental levels. Most of these pupils will remain working at these early levels for the duration of their time at Charlton Park Academy.

Raising the Bar PMLD Standards identifies the definition of PMLD as:
The term profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) is a description rather than a clinical diagnosis. Whilst there is no definitive set of characteristics for PMLD it is widely acknowledged that there are a heterogeneous / diverse group of people with learning disabilities who have a complex range of difficulties (cf. Raising our Sights How to guide for Commissioners, 2013).

Students and adults with PMLD have more than one disability, the most significant of which is a profound intellectual disability. These individuals all have great difficulty communicating, often requiring those who know them well to interpret their responses and intent. They frequently have other, additional, disabling conditions which may include for example:

- physical disabilities – that limit them in undertaking everyday tasks and often restrict mobility; risk to body shape.
- sensory impairments
- sensory processing difficulties
- complex health needs, (e.g., epilepsy, respiratory problems, dysphagia and eating and drinking problems)
- “coping behaviours” (to their communication or other difficulties for example) which may present as challenging
- mental health difficulties

(Doukas, T. Fergusson, A. Fullerton, M. and Grace J. (2017) Supporting people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Core & Essential Service Standards).



The curriculum for pupils with PMLD at Charlton Park Academy focuses on developing pupils understanding of the world around them, social interactions and relationships. It is delivered through a half termly topic in an integrated cross curricular manner incorporating therapy and health needs.

We recognise that each of our learners have unique ways of learning and their own unique barriers to learning. Learning can be idiosyncratic and unpredictable. No two learners progress at the same rate, respond to stimuli in the same way, or begin to understand in a similar recognised pattern of responses and behaviours. Some areas of learning may be relevant to one learner and not to another. For this reason, our PMLD curriculum is not like other curriculums.

There is not a prescriptive menu of learning outcomes, targets and teaching activities, as there is no one curriculum which could possibly fit all our pupils. The curriculum will not tell you what to teach now and what to teach next. It will not give you a list of skills and knowledge that it is essential for learners to learn because there is no such thing. In our curriculum it is our learners needs which will dictate the direction learning must take; teachers (and LSAs) need to be able to identify needs, build routines, facilitate change, offer opportunities, scaffold learning and guide. This is a curriculum of ideas; which ones you use are up to you, but their success will depend on you identifying the appropriate goals, activities and strategies for the pupils and students you teach.

It is important that we build into our teaching opportunities to generalise learning at every opportunity to avoid isolated learning and ensure that learners consolidate their skills. Although repetition is essential to learning, it is important to vary the situations in which learning takes place.

When planning for development, it is important to consider the complexity of each learner's individual needs and conditions when assessing the suitability or viability of proposed teaching strategies and methodology. It is important that we strive to present the curriculum in an age-appropriate way, while still matching experiences and events to learners' level of development and personal preferences.



Learning activities are supported using the thematic units from the Northern Ireland Curriculum. These were written to be used alongside Quest / Routes for Learning. Our CPA P Steps / CPA Milestones 1-3 are based on these assessment frameworks.

Teachers use professional judgement and knowledge of their learners to restructure the thematic units and adapt the ideas and activities within them to meet the diverse within their class. This enables us to deliver a curriculum that, through careful selection, focuses on individual and / or group needs.

Students experience first-hand a range of activities and events to enable them to acquire, practise and establish the early skills of learning and active involvement in everyday experiences. This can be in the classroom, the wider school environments or the local community where possible.

Learning experiences should be fun. Many of our learners can have difficulty with emotional or sensory regulation and may need a transition time at the end of each session before moving onto the next activity or regular opportunities for activities to support sensory integration throughout the day. In addition to this students will need time to manage physical transitions, medical needs and personal care during the day.

Curriculum Intent.

The purpose of the PMLD curriculum is to enable our students to have the best quality life during their school years and in preparation for adulthood by:

- Supporting students to develop strategies to form a positive and engaging relationships with a range of people for emotional and mental wellbeing.
- Maximising the students' own personal communication strategies to enable them to make informed choices and to have control within their lives.
- Enabling students to interpret and understand the world around them creating a sense of safety and wellbeing to promote meaningful engagement with aspects of daily life.
- Promoting physical independence across a range of abilities to maximise independence into adult life.
- Supporting students to take an active role in their own personal care and medical procedures at an appropriate level for them to allow them to develop an understanding of their own bodies and needs.

While we understand that our pupils will always need support throughout their lives our curriculum is planned to maximise their individual level of independence in all areas in preparation for adulthood.

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The PMLD Curriculum is based around 6 core areas of development.

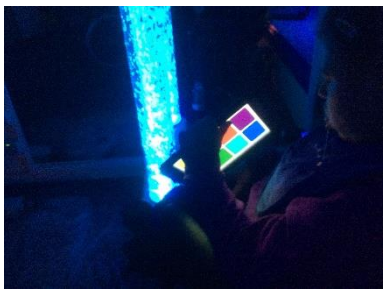
1. Cognition (including maths, science and ICT).
2. Communication and literacy
3. Relationships and sexuality education and health education
4. Independence and life skills (ILS) including work related learning.
5. Creative and cultural learning
6. Physical development

1. Cognition

This incorporates the appropriate elements of Maths and Science curriculum areas.

Developing sensory awareness in modes appropriate to the learner to develop heuristic play leading to self-engagement and awareness of their environment.

- Sensory awareness.
- Development of attention skills – looking, listening, etc.
- Awareness of their environment.
- Concept development – big and small, long and short, wet and dry, hot and cold, heavy and light, forwards and backwards, up and down, light and dark, etc.
- Exploratory behaviours – using different methods to explore materials such as feeling, shaking, squashing, banging, stroking, throwing, dropping, rolling, stacking, construction.
- Play – dolls, cars, skittles, peekaboo, etc.
- Joint interactions – Intensive Interaction.
- Sorting and matching.
- Developing skills for problem solving – letting the student get things wrong, fitting things together, finding hidden items, getting an item they want.
- Early number work – experiencing lots, some and all gone, number songs, more and less, early counting.


Developing skills for problem solving.

Lacey (2009) points out that thinking and problem solving is almost always going to be more difficult for those with SLD because of the likelihood of poor attention and memory skills, as well as difficulties with language and communication. Hulme and Mackenzie (1992) regard memory difficulties as placing additional strains on other cognitive skills, particularly reading and mathematics. Lacey also points to research conducted by Wishart (1998) and Jarrold, Nadel and Vicari (2008) with students and adults with Down syndrome, through which we might reasonably safely draw the conclusion that those with severe learning difficulties will learn better when they can see and touch things related to their learning. For these reasons it is important that learning planned to be taught in a concrete manner, through real actual experience, rather than in an abstract manner.

Every-day routine in the classroom, although important, may restrict opportunities for learning, because it restricts opportunities for pupils to think and to solve problems. When faced with problems and difficulties, as inevitably they will be, pupils who have learned only to rely on routine, order, structure and certainty will have limited skills or strategies to fall back upon. Teaching students with PMLD to think and problem solve as independently as they possibly can is essential for development. Students at early developmental levels" may seem to lack interest in the world generally. It can be a challenge but providing exciting activities can help to provoke interest. We need to introduce students to different kinds of animals, let them experience the weather at first hand, create art, visit unusual places, people and things and experience a range of physical movements. There is a big wide world to be discovered beyond the routine, although we must be careful not to provide a catalogue of unconnected experiences. The connection is thinking and problem solving, and we need to make that very explicit or the students may not notice.

Teaching becomes not only a process of ensuring that students possess a range of possible responses to a given practical problem, but also that they are aware of this repertoire and the need for its practical use. They must come to understand which learned strategy is appropriate for which situation (Lacey, 2009).

Developing mathematical thinking.

The secret to teaching mathematics successfully may be to teach it through other areas, any areas, so that maths is something that is "interesting and relevant for pupils and enables all to participate and grow" (Higginson, 1999). The point is that mathematics is all about us, so why not teach "all about us"? Both academics and practitioners argue that for those teaching pupils with a characteristically slow rate of learning it is defensible to "concentrate on the basics", and that teaching maths in terms of practical, everyday situations makes it both relevant and understandable (Robbins, 2000; Stewart et al, 2000).

2. Communication and Literacy

- Reading – sensory stories, sharing books, looking at pictures, recognising objects, symbols and photos.
- Writing – using hands to feel and explore materials, being able to hold and release items, mark making such as in art lessons, making patterns in sand, using pens.
- Speaking and listening – **intensive interaction**, using individual communication styles to make choices (e.g., eye blinks or vocalisations), core words, following instructions (remember to give enough time for the student to understand and respond), vocalisations, spoken word, use of objects of reference, photos or symbols or sound cues to support understanding.

Developing intentional communication to maximise learners' abilities to exert autonomy, exercise control and express choice.
Communication is determined by the person, intentional or otherwise. The individual's personal communication style receives universal respect at all times. Those seeking to communicate with the person do so using their unique communication style.
A means of communicating (that is acknowledged), a reason to communicate and an opportunity / available communication partner are crucial - all three aspects are needed for communication to be effective (Coupe O'Kane and Goldbart, 1998).
"A person's ability to communicate is not dependent on their being able to master certain skills, it is dependent on our ability to listen and communicate responsively" (Jo Grace, The Sensory Projects).



Developing an enjoyment of literature, drama, storytelling and poetry.
The best literature has a power that goes beyond words... literature is too important to restrict to those who can read (Grove, 2005).
Park (2010) explains that the principle of interactive storytelling recognises the "music of words" and that "apprehension precedes comprehension". He argues that we should "see it feelingly" and "read with the ear" so that we and those we are working with, engage directly with the "affect" (emotion) of the words, which can be directly translated through the teacher's voice and manner. Typically developing students start to listen to stories from a very young age and begin to tell their own stories soon after they learn to talk. These skills are continually refined as the child grows up, particularly as they learn to write. Our students with PMLD need for us to make stories accessible to them by developing a range of interesting and stimulating sensory stories. The use of sensory stories for those with PMLD is a long-established method of delivering literacy and are excellent for delivering topics in a developmentally and age-appropriate way.
A story has a beginning, a middle and an end. It has purpose and meaning to both the teller and the listener: it teaches us to listen carefully; it teaches us about structure, and about the natural rhythms and flow of language; it teaches us about emotions (fear,

excitement, anxiety, heartbreak, happiness, love, for example) in a safe and secure setting, not only other people's (the characters in the story line), but, most importantly, our own.
Once devised, the same story should be repeated weekly for at least half a term, so that the students have a real opportunity to become familiar with it. They can practice sequencing, turn-taking, and improve their anticipatory and memory skills – all essential base elements of communication.
Through these activities students will develop skills of:

- Sensory awareness.
- Anticipation.
- Language comprehension.
- Interactions.
- Signalling.
- Vocalisation and speech development.

3. Relationships and Sexuality Education and Health Education

Relationship and Sexuality Education
At Charlton Park Academy, all students have access to a comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum. The main aim of RSE is to promote student safety and to develop student's confidence in understanding and dealing with situations that relate to their own health and wellbeing. RSE is not taught as a separate subject, but it is part of our activities throughout the day.
Key goals of any Relationships and Sexuality Education program include supporting students to develop:

- Skills to ensure their personal safety is maintained
- Knowledge around the physical, social and emotional changes that occur during puberty
- Ways to develop and foster relationships and friendships
- Ability to manage their own health and hygiene
- Develop a healthy appreciation for themselves and others

For students in PMLD, teachers and staff engage students through a range of programs daily that together allow for students to be immersed in learning that aims to develop their skills and understanding of important aspects of these key goals.
Programs taught at Charlton that positively contribute to students understanding include:

- *Sherbourne, TacPac, MOVE and Intensive Interaction, attention autism*
- *All curriculum areas*

Therefore, an integrated approach to teaching RSE has been adopted and through these tactile, kinaesthetic pedagogies students are becoming aware of their bodies, how to move and be with others (Relationships Education) and developing a common language when communicating with others about their bodies. (Sexuality)

Incidental and ongoing teaching episodes delivered by familiar staff using familiar and repetitive language can help to consolidate students developing understanding. Therefore, a range of activities are suggested when delivering RSE to help gain students interests and attention. These activities should be incorporated into the daily lessons and routines of the students, to support the development of the correct context for this learning.

RSE Key Skill	RSE Topics
Families	Hygiene routines, positive mental health, personal care routines, independence skills
Respectful Relationships including friendships	Relationships with self, self-advocacy, making choices, personal strengths and weaknesses, likes/dislikes, self-esteem, resilience. Friendships, types of touch, rules for touch, saying NO, interactions with peers. Relationships with staff, interactions with familiar adults
Online and Media	Making choices, monitoring access, devices set up ready, engagement alongside choices, cause and effect, sensory stories
Being Safe	Public & Private, feelings of safety and unsafety, warning signs, familiar adults
Intimate and Sexual relationships including sexual health	Relationships with self, correct terminology for body parts, naming parts of the body, functions for body parts, body changes during puberty

Health Education

Health Education is embedded into daily life within PMLD. It is important for students at Charlton Park academy to learn how to keep themselves safe with contexts linked to their lives now and those as they grow up into adulthood. Students learn how to become confident and responsible citizens.

For students in PMLD, teachers and staff engage students through a range of programs and activities daily that together allow for students to be immersed in learning that aims to develop their skills and understanding of important aspects of the Health Education curriculum. Therefore, an integrated approach to teaching Health Education has been adopted and through these tactile, kinaesthetic pedagogies students are becoming aware of how to make choices including healthy choices, using technology including the internet, keeping clean and taking ownership of hygiene routines and environments, taking part in personal medical routines, experiencing economic wellbeing and being a good citizen.

Health Education Key Skill	Health Education Topics
Healthy Lifestyles	Hygiene routines, positive mental health, personal care routines, independence skills, making choices, PECs, AAC devices, snack time, food technology, sensory food play, taking part in medical routines
Online safety	Making choices while using technology, asking for help, sharing technology with adults, understanding the reliance on adults to log-in and access favourite sites / apps / programmes
Citizenship	Friendships, snack time, tidy up time, teamwork, group work, sharing sensory play, assemblies, choir, following class and school rules, following rules in the dinner hall
Economics	Shopping, handling money, making shopping choices, determining favourite products. Visiting a range of shops including supermarkets, local newsagents, pharmacies, cafés, leisure centres

Incidental and ongoing teaching episodes delivered by familiar staff using familiar and repetitive language can help to consolidate students developing understanding. A range of activities are suggested when delivering Health Education to help gain and maintain students' interests and attention. These activities should be incorporated into the daily lessons and routines of the students, to support the development of the correct context for this learning.

4. Independence and Life Skills (ILS)

Students have opportunities to develop their skills through either Independent Living Skills specific sessions or targets that are worked on throughout the curriculum and routines of the school day. Within lessons and throughout the week, students will be supported to gain essential skills in preparation for adulthood, and opportunities are created for students to develop their confidence and become as independent as they are able to for their futures. ILS links to Career Related Learning for students in PMLD.

The learning contains themes such as:

- Understanding Myself and Others - Emotional wellbeing, building relationships, social rules, social skills, understanding of self and other, self-advocacy.
- Mini Enterprise and Economic Wellbeing - Enterprise skills, understanding money, buying and selling, teamwork, enjoying the benefits of their enterprise.
- Looking After Myself and My Environment - Healthy cooking and eating, keeping fit, independence within personal care (washing hands, brushing teeth, dressing, etc.), cleaning (washing up, sweeping, laundry, etc.), laying the table.
- Understanding My Environments - Community access, road safety, travel training, staying safe within the community, accessing community facilities.

Career Related Learning
Within the PMLD curriculum Career related learning is undertaken as undertaken as part of ILS. Our aim is to support and empower our learners to experience jobs and develop independence as well as self-developing through their passions, self-exploration and the acquisition of new life skills. Activities may include:

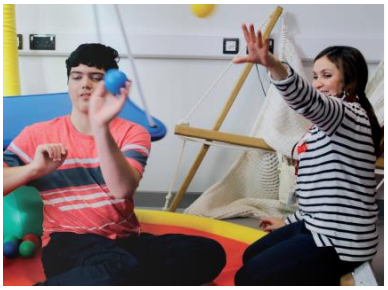
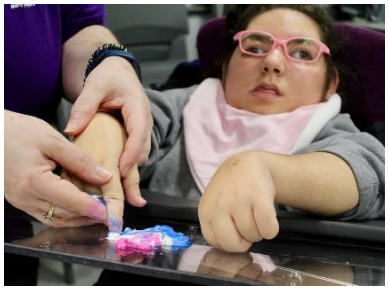
- Feeling part of and belonging to the local community
- Completing jobs to help people (with support)
- Meeting new people
- Making links with other classes
- Supporting local charities and organisations
- Local community visits

5. Physical Development and Motor

For our motor curriculum we following programmes written by the physiotherapists or OT for many students. Physical activities are devised as appropriate to the student to maintain and develop physical skills such as head control, arm and hand use, sitting, walking, etc. Many students need regular changes of position for comfort throughout the school day.
Activities may include:

- Medimotion bike
- Walking and standing frames / slings or independently
- Bench sitting
- Stretches on Acheeva beds

- Use of the hammock
- Happy hands programme
- Hydrotherapy
- Using the gym
- Independent movement on the floor

6. Creative and Cultural Learning.

Includes celebrating festivals and cultural events, art and music, leisure activities, cooking, gardening and games, etc. Work in this area covers the statutory requirements for RE in the Greenwich Local agreed Syllabus.

Lessons and daily routines

Students with PMLD have the opportunity to experience first-hand a range of activities and events that aim to engage them in the learning process. A process-based, interactive approach is used to support learners to acquire, practise and establish the early skills of communication and active involvement in everyday experiences. Process based learning (Collis and Lacey, 1996; Hewett and Nind, 1998; Nind and Hewett, 2001; Hewett, 2006; Imray et al, 2010) is a holistic approach where the process of teaching becomes the objective. The entire process of learning is taken as a whole, as opposed to teaching to specific individualised targets. This is in the classroom, the wider school environments or the local community. These learning experiences should be enjoyable and enhance learners' opportunities for communication and learning.
Lessons have a clear beginning and finish to enable students to understand what is happening. Sound, visual and touch cues along with objects of reference and where appropriate symbols throughout the day and week enable students to anticipate and understand their routines.
Many learners can have difficulty with emotional regulation and may need a transition time at the end of each session before moving onto the next activity. This gives learners time to relax, prepare for transition and integrate the sensory experiences from the session.

The Learning Environment

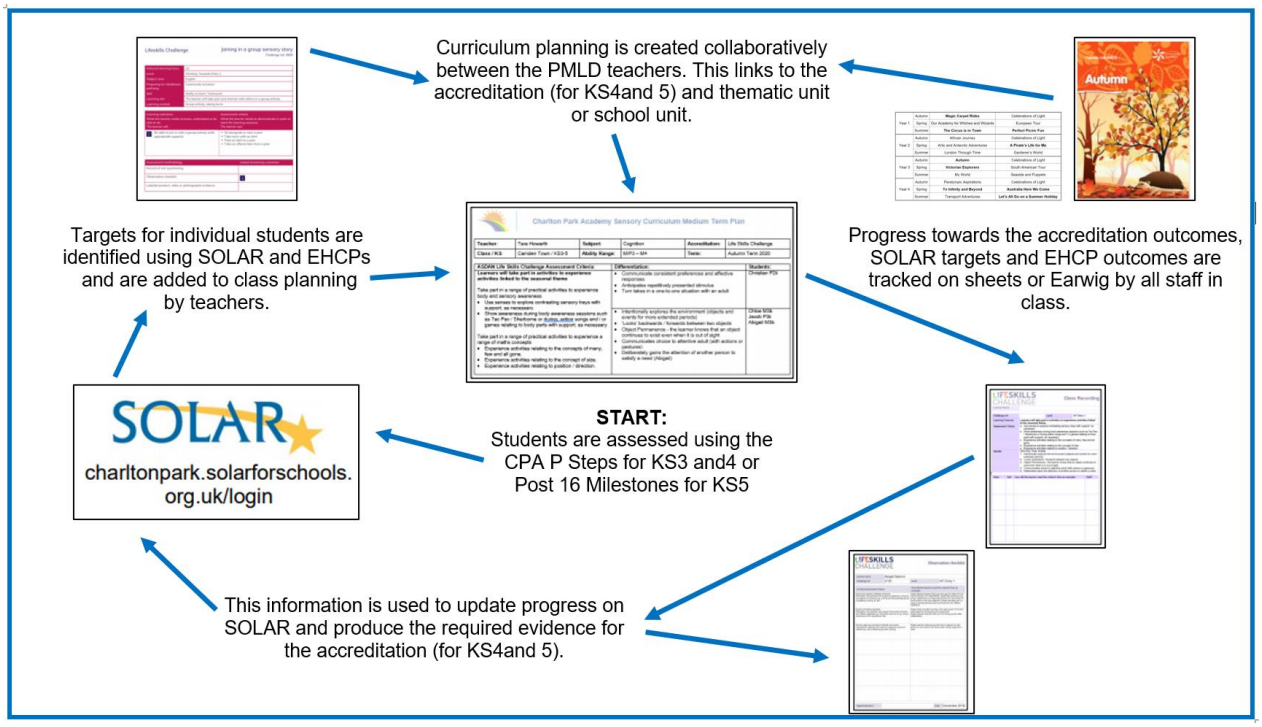
Creating an effective environment for learning and teaching is a crucial aspect of PMLD teaching. Where possible the present the curriculum is presented in an age-appropriate way, matching experiences and events to your learners' level of development although consideration is also given to developmental appropriateness and the interests of the individual students.

The learning environment can affect the development and delivery of quality experiences for learners. A learning environment where learners can experience and explore the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures of a theme can help to develop and enhance their learning.

Accreditation:

Students follow a range of appropriate accreditation. Over the 2 years in Key stage 4 and 3 years in Post 16 students complete a range of ASDAN Life Skills Challenge awards. In addition to this they may complete ASDAN Towards Independence Awards, AQA unit awards, Arts Award and other relevant accreditation.

Cycle for Assessment and Planning:



Assessment and Progress:

Student progress is monitored with targets set in line with school procedures. within Key Stage 3 and 4 Students have their achievement recorded within the CPA P Steps and their progress within this is monitored regularly against their annual target. Within Post 16 the same process is used with achievements recorded within the Post 16 Milestones. Targets are set at each students' annual review towards the student's EHCP outcomes. For KS3 these are related to the areas of SEND from the code of practice and for KS4 and 5 they link to the areas within preparation for adulthood. These are recorded using Earwig tracking software. Within this students' engagement is linked to the 5 areas of engagement from the DfE Engagement model (July 2020). Each area can provide a focus on how well pupils are achieving a specific outcome or individual development target. The 5 areas are not hierarchical, so there is no expectation that pupils need to demonstrate progress in all 5 areas. Instead, each of the areas represent what is necessary for pupils to fully engage in their development and reach their full potential. The areas also provide the scaffolding to enable pupils to become independent in developing a new skill or concept.

The Areas of Engagement (from the DfE Engagement Model July 2020)

Exploration This shows whether a pupil can build on their initial reaction to a new stimulus or activity; for example, whether they display more than an involuntary or startled reaction to the activity. Additionally, the pupil may be interested in and curious about the stimulus or activity; for example, they may notice it or reach out to it. Exploration becomes more established when the pupil is still responsive to the same stimulus or activity when it is presented in different contexts or environments, for example, a different time of day, a different place or with different people. Exploration is important in identifying which stimuli or activities interest the pupil and motivate them to pay attention and investigate them further, so that they can develop new knowledge and skills.
Realisation This shows how the pupil interacts with a new stimulus or activity or discovers a new aspect of a familiar stimulus or activity. They will display behaviours that show they want more control of the stimulus or activity, for example by stopping it or trying to make changes to it. The pupil will often show what familiar adults consider to be 'surprise', 'excitement', 'delight', 'amazement' or 'fear'. Realisation becomes more established when the pupil uses the newly developed skills or knowledge in new ways and in different contexts or environments. This is important as it can keep the pupil excited in their education and prevents an activity from becoming routine.
Anticipation This shows how much the pupil predicts, expects or associates a stimulus or activity with an event. They may anticipate that a familiar activity is about to start or finish by interpreting cues or prompts such as auditory (what they hear), tactile (what they feel) and visual (what they see). Anticipation becomes more established when the pupil shows awareness that a familiar activity is about to start or finish, even when cues and prompts are reduced. Anticipation is important in measuring the pupil's understanding of cause and effect; for example, if they do this, then something will happen. This prepares the brain and helps with the pupil's memory and sequencing.
Persistence This shows whether a pupil can sustain their attention in a stimulus or activity for long enough that they can actively try to find out more and interact with it. Persistence becomes more established when a pupil shows a determined effort to interact with the stimulus or activity. They will do this by showing intentional changes such as changes in their gaze, posture and hand movement. Persistence is also important so that the pupil maintains the activity long enough to develop, reinforce and apply their skills or knowledge so that they can achieve their desired outcome.
Initiation This shows how much, and the different ways, a pupil investigates a stimulus or activity in order to bring about a desired outcome. The pupil will act spontaneously and independently during a familiar activity without waiting for direction. Initiation becomes more established when the pupil shows they understand how to create an impact on their environment in order to achieve a desired outcome. Initiation is important to establish how well the pupil is developing independence, which is required for more advanced progression.

PMLD Curriculum 4 Year Overview:

Year 1	Autumn	**Magic Carpet Rides**	Celebrations of Light
	Spring	Our Academy for Witches and Wizards	European Tour
	Summer	**The Circus is in Town**	**Perfect Picnic Fun**
Year 2	Autumn	African Journey	Celebrations of Light
	Spring	Artic and Antarctic Adventures	**A Pirate's Life for Me**
	Summer	London Through Time	Gardener's World
Year 3	Autumn	**Autumn**	Celebrations of Light
	Spring	**Victorian Explorers**	South American Tour
	Summer	My World	Seaside and Puppets
Year 4	Autumn	Paralympic Aspirations	Celebrations of Light
	Spring	**To Infinity and Beyond**	**Australia Here We Come**
	Summer	Transport Adventures	**Let's All Go on a Summer Holiday**

Topics in bold link directly to the Northern Ireland Curriculum Thematic Units for PMLD. Topics not in bold are crated by PMLD teachers and either reflect our local community or ensure coverage across a range of foundation subject areas. There is a mixture of topics that are related to students' life and experiences and topics that are related to more abstract concepts to create a balance between every day life and novel experiences. The thematic units can be found here:
www.ccea.org.uk/learning-resources/pmld-sensory-thematic-units

Practical resources to support developing a sensory curriculum for learners (aged 3-19)

We have developed these thematic units to support you in delivering a vibrant and motivating curriculum for learners aged 3–19 with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). These units are aligned with the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

You can use them to enhance the learning experiences of this unique group of learners and deliver all aspects of the curriculum at a level appropriate to your learners' cognitive ability.

To help your learners to make relevant connections, we have integrated the primary and post-primary Areas of Learning into these units. The units help embed information technology, along with communication and assistive technologies, to enrich your learners' experiences.

The Thematic Units include:

Activities

These activities adopt a process-based interactive approach with the aim of best supporting learners in acquiring, practising and establishing the early skills of communication and active involvement in everyday experiences.

“A person’s ability to communicate is not dependent on their being able to master certain skills, it is dependent on our ability to listen and communicate responsively”.

Jo Grace, The Sensory Projects