

The TreeHouse School Curriculum

Ambitious about Autism's mission: We stand with autistic children and young people, champion their rights and create opportunities.

Context

TreeHouse School is an autism-specific school, committed to supporting all pupils to achieve their maximum potential whilst having an excellent Quality of Life.

All the pupils at TreeHouse School have a diagnosis of autism, with the majority working significantly below the levels of their mainstream peers. They have an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) that outlines the outcomes that are to be achieved at the end of each Key Stage.

TreeHouse pupils have a wide range of needs ranging from those who benefit from a more sensory-based curriculum to others who can access aspects of the National Curriculum.

Autistic pupils do not learn in the same way as their peers. They may learn more quickly in some areas whilst finding some skills much more challenging. This is often referred to as a “spiky profile”; this means that we plan teaching and learning with consideration for the individual pupil profile, as well as the outcomes on their EHCP.

Curriculum Pathways

We offer three different curriculum pathways to our pupils:

- Pre-formal
A sensory-based curriculum, with an emphasis on engagement and early development rather than subject-specific study.
- Semi-formal
For students who can access learning through slightly more formal subjects, although not yet at National Curriculum level.
- Formal
Subject-specific study is undertaken (some of which is at National Curriculum level) and Entry Level qualifications are achieved where appropriate from KS4.

The pathways are not necessarily sequential, nor are they linked to chronological age. The pupil follows the pathway that best meets their developmental needs rather than their age.

For example, an 8-year-old pupil could follow the Formal pathway whilst a 15-year-old pupil may follow the Pre-formal pathway.

Each curriculum pathway has elements which overlap and are embedded within each other to allow easy transition for pupils who may transition from one to another.

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The Ambitious Approach

The Ambitious Approach Framework is based upon a person’s indisputable rights to be:

- Treated with dignity and compassion
- Valued
- Listened to
- Supported to have the best quality of life possible
- Empowered to make choices and decide on how they want to live their life.

The Framework provides a core structure for facilitating and developing Quality of Life (QoL) and is based on School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SW-PBS). The Framework incorporates what is known about supportive practice for children and young people with autism.

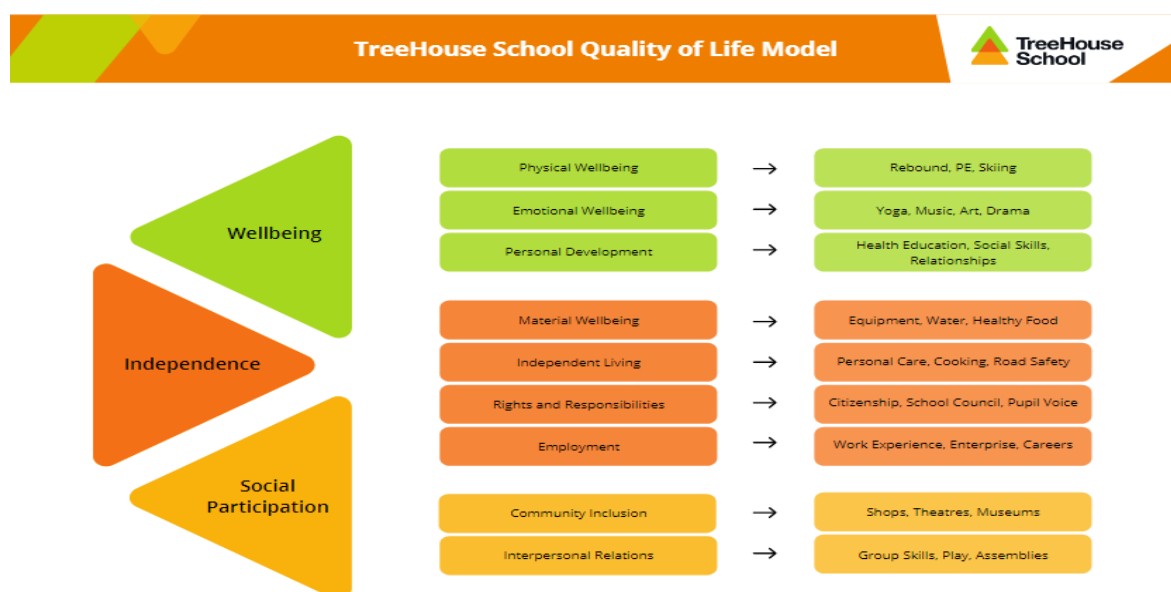
The focus of the Framework is centred on creating and sustaining systems of support for all, across the whole education setting. In SW-PBS terms, this is called the universal offer.

The Ambitious Approach aims to improve a pupil’s Quality of Life through the curriculum. This is best achieved in an environment that understands behaviour and promotes measurable outcomes for children and young people.

This approach means that each individual pupil is placed at the heart of their own personalised curriculum, designed around their strengths, needs and interests. The Ambitious Approach advocates for and delivers learning that is enjoyable, age-appropriate, individualised and designed to respond to the needs, talents, and interests of all pupils. We want them to know more and understand more, and to provide them with the tools they need their objectives whilst being as independent as possible.

Quality of Life Model

The Quality of Life model is at the heart of our curriculum; everything we do is about improving our pupils’ Quality of Life. This has informed the development of curriculum intent and subject intent documents which outline our curriculum end-points for each pathway and which guide teachers in their target setting.



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English and Mathematics

The development of English and Mathematics skills is essential for all pupils; hence they are addressed through all three curriculum pathways.

English

Within the Pre-formal pathway, pupils are exposed to early reading through sensory experiences, such as music, attention autism, TAC PAC ([Tactile Approach to Communication](#)) and story massage within English lessons. They are also exposed to reading within their environment using visuals, signs, and symbols. Pupils within primary will begin to be taught the early stages of systematic synthetic phonics, developing their phonological awareness through daily exposure to environmental sounds, words, actions, songs and stories.

Pupils progressing onto the Semi-formal curriculum pathway will begin by predominantly learning letter sounds and letter formation using a multi-sensory approach. These two fundamental stages will support the prerequisite skills for speech development/communication as well as letter identification and reading.

When teaching the 42 letter sounds, pupils will learn to associate the sounds with an action and explore this through songs and stories. The sounds are taught in a specific order, not alphabetically, which enables pupils to begin to build words to read as early as possible. On the Semi-formal pathway, pupils will continue to develop the skills needed for reading, writing, speaking, and listening through more formal English lessons. Pupils will continue to learn their 42 letter sounds with a greater emphasis being placed on blending the letter sounds together to read and write unfamiliar words as well as identifying and reading tricky words they are unable to decode. Once pupils can successfully identify the 42 letter sounds, they will be introduced to our reading scheme where they will generalise their blending and develop their understanding of language and comprehension skills. Further to this, English lessons within the Semi-formal pathway focus on a different book half-termly. Within these lessons, pupils have the opportunity to engage in whole class reading by reading out sentences from the story. English lessons incorporate a thematic approach through which key texts are selected. Pupils also develop their comprehension skills by engaging in comprehension activities based on these texts. Pupils will develop their understanding of sentence structure through the colourful semantics approach. The use of colourful semantics provides pupils with a visual aid to support their understanding of sentence structure. The incremental nature of using these building blocks supports clear sequential learning, allowing pupils to develop their understanding of the semantic role of each part of a sentence, thereby enhancing their comprehension and expressive language skills.

The Formal pathway sees English taught as a subject-specific lesson to pupils who can access aspects of the national curriculum. As a result, pupils on this pathway will access aspects of the national curriculum programme of study from KS1–KS4 as appropriate for their profile and developmental level. Pupils will also continue to have access to the reading scheme which supports our most confident readers with a selection of longer fiction and non-fiction texts.

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Maths

On the Pre-formal curriculum pathway, pupils are exposed to Maths across the curriculum and through daily functional activities and routines as well as in twice weekly lessons with a sensory focus. An example of this would be the teacher using language such as 'Empty' or 'Full' when pouring liquids from one container to another, or counting 1,2,3 using preferred objects in song or when preparing a meal.

At TreeHouse we have used the White Rose Maths programme to support the development of our Semi-formal and Formal Maths assessment framework on Earwig and to inform our sequencing of learning. The small steps provided within the White Rose schemes of work have informed our outcomes and objectives.

We have used the yearly overview to ensure the topics of number, shape and measurement are effectively covered across the year.

We have also used the programme's schemes of work to inform how we teach maths concepts through the use of the CPA approach (concrete-pictorial-abstract). This enables pupils to build solid foundations in their understanding of maths. Pupils learn new concepts initially using concrete examples, such as counters and objects and 3D manipulatives, then progress to drawing, identifying and using pictorial representations before finally using more abstract symbols and signs, such as a written sum.

The White Rose Maths programme follows a maths mastery approach where the majority of pupils move at a similar pace through the teaching stages. However, at TreeHouse our framework is built around pupil-centred learning and enables any gaps in learning to be filled. Although we follow the teaching stages within the programme, we do not follow a maths mastery approach, as many of our pupils are at different stages in their learning and our pupils therefore move through the curriculum at their own pace with learning appropriately differentiated by teachers and outlined in their planning.

When pupils reach the Formal curriculum pathway, pupils are taught following a programme of study which the teacher will adapt according to pupil need. Teachers will deliver the most relevant aspects of the national curriculum for mathematics depending on the pupil's profile and need.

PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education)

PSHE is a core subject across all pathways. All pupils have PSHE as a stand-alone subject, and pupils learn from key themes including managing feelings, living in the wider world, relationships (including RE [Relationships Education] at Primary and SRE [Sex and Relationships Education] at Secondary), healthy lifestyles, self-confidence, self-awareness and self-care, support and safety. The content and strategies used to deliver the subject varies across pathways, with Pre-formal using a sensory approach, such as sensory stories related to the topic to support their understanding.

Understanding the World

Understanding the World combines the teaching of ICT, Science, History and Geography and is used to develop pupils' familiarity with technology, their understanding of the physical world around them, people, communities and their understanding of time (past, present and future), for example, using visual schedules at first and now and next boards. Understanding the World also develops their understanding of a healthy lifestyle alongside independent living skills and preparation for adulthood in their daily routines and food technology lessons.

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Performing Arts

The Performing Arts at TreeHouse School play a key part in our delivery of a Quality of Life curriculum, by promoting wellbeing, independence and social participation. Everyone has a voice in the Performing Arts, and every contribution is equally valued. We believe that children on all curriculum pathways are entitled to accessing the arts in a way that is right for them, and for that reason the breadth and quality of the classroom practice is at the centre of the provision. In-class provision is supplemented with one-to-one interventions, group music-making, visits by external specialists, trips that expand our cultural capital, and end-of-term shows, as appropriate to each young person's targets, interests and abilities.

Music is a powerful and unique form of communication; for some children, it is one of crucial importance. Work in music allows our young people to engage with learning that simultaneously provides aural stimulation, self-regulation, social interaction, opportunities to develop communication and motor control, artistic endeavour and cognitive challenge. At TreeHouse School, everyone has an opportunity to develop their musicianship and forge a lasting relationship with music, regardless of natural ability. The four strands described in the National Curriculum (namely **performing, composing, listening and applying, and appraising**) are further developed into nine key strands at TreeHouse to create a broad and balanced music curriculum: **Rhythm, Pulse, Pitch, Expressive Elements, Improvisation & Composition, Interactivity, Listening, Literacy and Applying.**

Work in Drama underlines our key values and can be a gateway to taking part in a meaningful way in community groups. It can support key themes of a young person's journey through links with PSHE, Citizenship and Communication, providing a play-based environment in which to explore situations, feelings and difficulties. Progression in Drama is mapped across six key strands, namely, **Improvisation, Storytelling, Acting, Developing Ideas, Rehearsing and Production.**

Dance provides a remarkable way for children to develop control of their own bodies, explore their relationship with the space around them and nurture social interactions with others. It can provide a pleasurable form of leisure and promote an active lifestyle, with all the associated benefits. It may also be a key part of a pupil's heritage and therefore an integral part of developing their identity as a learner, citizen and human being. Progression in Dance is tracked across the following four key strands: **Developing Ideas, Body & Space, Time and Communication.**

Art

At TreeHouse School the Art curriculum has been designed to engage and inspire pupils, giving them the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to express themselves, create art and craft work and develop a love of art. It has been constructed with reference to the National Curriculum and aims to lead our pupils through a wide variety of skills that build over the years to enable pupils to become creative and independent artists. Pupils are given choices at every stage of the curriculum and can explore their ideas and sensory needs as appropriate. Pupils will become confident and proficient in their tool handling skills and develop fine motor skills from a variety of techniques and applications such as painting, printing, weaving.

On the Pre-formal pathway, pupils develop an awareness of art and art vocabulary. They develop their art skills and understanding through exploration, experimentation and experiences. They begin to use different media as a way to express themselves. We focus on play and observing motor skills and pupils' preferences as well as strengths and weaknesses to tailor activities and approaches. On our Semi-formal pathway, pupils develop their confidence in art and craft. They build on their skills to create pieces of art and craft more independently. They are aware of different forms of art and craft and begin to apply their skills more widely and to use external images related to the work, from artists, characters and wider contexts. Pupils are also exposed to more technical language and skills which can be refined over time, and for our secondary and 6th form learners, our lessons begin to be extended to be part of a project, so pupils become more aware of processes and

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continuity.

On the Formal pathway, pupils engage in art and craft activities with confidence and enjoyment. They gain pleasure from making their own art and craft work independently and in experiencing the art and craft work of others. Pupils increase their use of art- and craft-related vocabulary accurately to describe their own and others' artwork and show control in their use of art materials to create finished pieces of work.

Physical Education (PE)

At TreeHouse School the PE curriculum supports pupils to take part in different activities and enjoy being active so that they can become physically confident and develop the skills they need to keep themselves fit and healthy. It also focuses on enabling pupils to experience sports and physical activities in the wider community through regular trips to skiing, horse riding and swimming, and working in partnership with external providers, such as Saracens and Alternative Movement.

On the Pre-formal pathway, pupils develop an awareness of different physical activities. They develop their physical skills and understanding through exploration, experimentation and experiences. They begin to take part in different physical activities individually and with others. They focus on the development of fundamental movement skills, learn to negotiate space, and build core strength and stability through both targeted PE lessons and weekly rebound therapy sessions.

On our Semi-formal pathway, pupils further develop their confidence in PE. They build on their skills to take part in physical activities more independently and improve their performance. They begin to apply their skills more widely in order to take part in a range of physical activities. They begin to take part in co-operative physical activities and games involving simple rules, as well as using a variety of sports equipment with a focus on increased control.

On the Formal pathway, pupils engage in physical activities with confidence and enjoyment. They gain pleasure from keeping fit, increasing their skills and improving on their own performance. They confidently combine movements in different ways, regularly take part in a range of indoor and outdoor physical activities and show they can follow rules to take part in team games successfully. They also focus on developing the use of PE-related vocabulary to describe their own and others' physical activities.

The Sixth Form Curriculum

The sixth form curriculum is based on the SEND Preparing for Adulthood outcomes. The Preparing for Adulthood curriculum is designed to meet the needs of individual learners through practical activities that will enable them to increase their independence and Quality of Life. The programme incorporates individual learning objectives that link to pupils' EHCP outcomes and the Preparing for Adulthood curriculum.

There are four pathways that are included in the curriculum:

- Work-Related Learning & Enterprise
- Independent Living
- Friends, Relationships, and Community
- Health and Wellbeing.

In addition to the above, English and Mathematics are embedded across the Preparing for Adulthood pathways.

For sixth formers working at the Semi-Formal and Formal levels, pupils have English and Maths taught in two ways. Pupils access targeted weekly English and Maths lessons, and also have their targets embedded across the four Preparing for Adulthood pathways, allowing skills to be taught in a functional way. Finally, PSHE is taught to all

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pupils in the sixth form as a stand-alone subject.

Transition and Preparing for Adulthood

Moving to a new school and changing classrooms and teachers each year is especially hard if you find change difficult, as many autistic people do. Transition work forms part of the curriculum offer at TreeHouse School to support pupils when change happens. This support is provided by teachers, Positive Behaviour Support specialists (PBSs) and the Teaching and Behaviour Support team (TABS). An additional focus is the daily act of transitioning from home to school, or from the classroom to another area in the school, which may also be a challenge to some pupils.

Although the Preparing for Adulthood framework is a particular curricular focus in the 6th form, its foundations are developed as soon as the pupil starts school. This means that everyone is working towards the key skills that pupils with autism need to function well and happily in adulthood. This work is in preparation for leaving TreeHouse School and moving to a new placement, whether this be Ambitious College or another setting.

British Values

All schools are expected to uphold British Values and make the teaching of the values part of their curriculum offer. At TreeHouse School we teach pupils about the five values that are encompassed under the British Values framework:

- Democracy
- The rule of law
- Individual liberty
- Mutual respect
- Tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs.

TreeHouse School has adapted and broken down these values to make them accessible to all pupils at their own developmental level. The bespoke Quality of Life curriculum ensures that all the areas are addressed.

Cultural capital

At TreeHouse School we develop our pupils' cultural capital by taking advantage of London's rich cultural diversity, enabling the children to access a wide variety of experiences through community visits and access to the arts, including music, drama, sport, and literature. We celebrate our similarities and differences through cultural and religious celebrations by inviting in visitors, holding festivals and celebratory assemblies. We believe the wider the cultural capital that is experienced, the more opportunity to improve a child or young person's quality of life.

Equal opportunities and Inclusion

The ethos of the Ambitious Approach is that each child has an equal right to an outstanding education that is tailor-made for them. We carefully review, through our provision maps, the learning activities that facilitate the child achieving their EHCP outcomes and other curricular learning objectives. Community visits and experiences are available to all, whatever their starting point, irrespective of their individual self-regulation needs. This is addressed through robust and rigorous risk assessments that keep everyone safe.

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