

## **Curriculum Statement, November 2019**

At St John's the core purpose of our curriculum is to prepare our pupils for adult life and to develop the skills and thirst for learning that will equip them to be lifelong learners. We aim to facilitate positive participation for all through meaningful and engaging learning experiences. Personal development and well-being – both physical and emotional – is threaded throughout the daily timetable as it is only with a high level of well-being that pupils are able to learn effectively. A sense of self and our own talents and achievements is the foundation for ambitious learning.

Pupils join the school at various stages in their education and the vast majority then stay with us until year 13 or 14. As soon as pupils join the school, their curriculum is designed to prepare them for the future so that they are able to begin to formulate their own life plan as soon as possible. A broad and balanced curriculum, which supports language learning through a thematic approach, is provided for all pupils. The majority of our pupils follow semi-formal programmes with a focus on personal development threaded through their curriculum. Integrated subjects such as Art, Design and Craft, and Creative and Performing allow specialist teachers to devise engaging, thematic programs, that address a broad range of skills and knowledge in cohesive learning experiences.

Pupils in our Glen and Rainbow groups, who are working at relatively early developmental levels, follow a termly theme. This approach most effectively provides the consolidation and over-learning that our pupils need in order to further their language knowledge and conceptual understanding of the world. For these pupils, enrichment activities out of school are vital in providing the real-life experiences needed to underpin their learning. Weekly out of school learning includes trips to the village shops to buy ingredients for cooking activities, and visits to cafés and playgrounds, as well as frequent trips to amenities further afield that link with a curriculum focus. Examples of such trips include a ride on a narrow boat to consolidate the concepts of narrow and wide; visiting a Leeds recycling centre; a trip to a local reindeer farm in preparation for Christmas; and a ten pin bowling competition which was part of the Panathlon sports event.

Language and communication are central to the curriculum which, for the majority of pupils, includes 1:1 and group speech and language therapy. Therapists work collaboratively with teachers, learning support assistants and residential care staff to develop the language our pupils need for both their academic and their social learning. Pupils' progress in language learning is assessed termly along with their academic progress and personal development. Any necessary curriculum changes, for example additional booster classes to support the language of Maths or English, are identified and can be quickly put in place.

Learning outside the classroom is key to the curriculum as it provides wide-ranging and rich experiences that foster language development, independence and an

interest in the world. Our curriculum takes advantage of the easy access we have to the large village of Boston Spa, nearby towns and cities and the West Yorkshire countryside. Pupils learn from the many off-site enrichment activities linking to physical development and sports, drama and the arts, and skills for life. At St John's the arts provide an exciting and enriching opportunity to develop language and communication skills and also the self-esteem needed to be successful communicators.

Experience of visual and performing arts is central to the curriculum both in the form of timetabled lessons and also enrichment activities. Our pupils' learning is facilitated by creativity and performance, both in the classroom and as part of enrichment experiences. They participate in performances in school, have attended workshops with the West Yorkshire Playhouse and regularly experience music alongside professional musicians in collaboration with Live Music Now. Our lead teachers for art, music and drama work with pupils throughout the school to showcase their learning both in school and the local community, and by teaching younger pupils from our partner schools.

For all children with language and communication difficulties, the development of literacy is a fundamental part of their curriculum. Learning to read and write starts with knowing the words that describe our experiences and, at the early stages of reading, teachers compose reading texts about the learning experiences our pupils have enjoyed. These texts are then used to develop sight vocabulary and an understanding of sentence structure. As many grammatical markers in the English language are very difficult to hear for a hearing impaired pupil, we use a visual system to support children's growing understanding of grammar and how words work in sentences. This system of shape coding uses distinct shapes to show different word classes, patterns of sentence structure and also verb tense. It helps our pupils to make sense of what they read and also to correctly structure their own writing.

To learn successfully and to lead a fulfilled life, we all need to develop strong personal skills and it's for this reason that personal development features highly on the timetable for every pupil at St John's and also is prioritised through every moment of the school day. Sessions at the start and end of each day facilitate personal development through social interaction, self-reflection and confidence building activities. All pupils have twice weekly PSHE lessons and many pupils follow programmes that have personal development at their core. Where pupils need more support in their personal, social and health education we work closely with other professionals, including for example the Deaf CAMHS team and occupational therapists. We follow a PSHE course devised by Leeds LA, called *You, Me, PSE* and this continues throughout our pupils' time with us including at sixth form. The programme incorporates SRE (sex and relationships education) modules and there is a strong focus throughout the learning on British values, the concept of consent and how to clearly say no when necessary, and keeping safe both in the real world and on-line. Form teachers, who have a close working relationship with each

member of their class, deliver the PSHE lessons, supported by other key members of staff including the school nurse and residential care staff.

Pupil's progress in personal development is monitored termly through the school's own tracking system, Steps to Success.

At St John's pupils of all ages and ability have Food lessons on their timetables as we see the ability to plan and prepare nutritious snacks and meals for ourselves and our families as a vital life skill for all. Programmes range from Plan, Shop, Cook for our pupils with complex needs to the level 2 BTec course in Home Cooking Skills. Success in Food lessons combined with the development of strong social and interpersonal skills has enabled many of our sixth form students to achieve employment in the hospitality industry after successfully completing catering and cookery courses in the sixth form.

Closely allied with our PSHE curriculum is the school's RE curriculum. For many of our pupils, religious education is one of their favourite experiences and this is largely because of the importance placed on learning from others and the practical activities used to illustrate some very challenging concepts. The school has staff and pupils from the five main world religions and, learning about religious beliefs from others enables our pupils to talk about their lives in a spirit of mutual respect, and not to be afraid to ask fundamental questions about life. All pupils participate in assemblies and collective worship, the school's Christmas Celebration, Holy Week and our annual inter-faith week at a level appropriate to their own faith and indeed to those who have no faith.

ICT is central to the curriculum and is integrated into all subjects. The school is well resourced with interactive screens in all teaching rooms, which allow us to create visually stimulating lessons and greater opportunities for interactive learning. Pupils have ready access to desktop computers, iPads and laptops and some pupils use communication apps to augment their spoken and signed language. For all pupils, learning about how their mobile devices can safely support them in today's world is vital and this is done through their PSHE and ICT lessons.

Formal preparation for a working life beyond St John's begins with careers lessons, work experience, careers advice and guidance, visits from past pupils, visits to colleges and support with applications and interviews. For our pupils who will go on to employment the careers curriculum begins with pupils learning about their own strengths, skills and aptitudes and supports them through to vocational courses that are studied in our sixth form. The school provides equality of access to learning opportunities for all pupils.

Our pupils with multi-sensory impairments and complex needs follow an integrated curriculum with the same key emphases on language and communication, literacy, personal development and skills for life ahead.

For all pupils at St John's the curriculum is personalised so that their learning needs are supported and their strengths optimised. Examples of personalisation include the study of a particular area of strength, enhanced provision of personal, social and health education, intensive catch-up literacy programmes, or a curriculum built around skills for life.

For some pupils with physical, sensory and health needs, the curriculum includes therapies such as physiotherapy, a sensory diet and learning to manage their own health needs. Learning takes place throughout the school day and every moment out of the classroom is an opportunity to develop personal and social skills and help pupils to discover a sense of self.

In the residential care groups, pupils enjoy a wide range of activities both with their peers in school and as part of community groups. An understanding of group decision making and democracy is fostered through participation in school and care councils, through which pupils of all ages learn about how key decisions are made.

One of the keys to successful learning at St John's is the close working relationships between staff and pupils. A distinct advantage of our small school is that every staff member knows each child well and has ambition for them. Pupil progress is tracked using the B squared online package and, this year, we have introduced the MAPP progress tracking system to better assess the personal development of pupils who are not following the pathways of typically developing children. Pupil progress reviews are held termly and, as part of on-going review, staff quickly identify any necessary changes to a pupil's curriculum provision to ensure their on-going success.

The curriculum is led by Catherine Baldwin. Any questions or requests for more information about teaching and learning and our curriculum approach should be directed to her.

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