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## Designing a specialist SEND curriculum pathway across trust schools

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## Designing a specialist SEND curriculum pathway across trust schools

### Developing a trust wide specialist SEND curriculum offer

## School/Background Context

This college is part of a multi academy Trust, an educational trust consisting of 25 schools based in a coastal, rural southwest location. It is made up of 24 primary schools and one secondary school. The partnership aims to provide high-quality education with a focus on creating an inclusive learning environment for all pupils. The vision statement and trust ethos focuses on transforming lives through high quality collaboration and innovation. The development of values-based education is the core ethos within the trust.

The trust is also entering a period of change, with plans to merge with another trust to become a 36-school trust spanning a wider geographic area. The second trust consists of 11 primary schools and one secondary school, located in the same town as the other secondary school. The combined age range of the two trusts will be from 3 through to 16.

Both trusts have identified an increasing number of pupils assessed as needing a specialist placement or bespoke individualised curriculum. In response, several schools across both trusts have set up small nurture classrooms to provide specialist provision. Following the process of Trust SEND reviews, data indicated that there wasn't a consistently strong curriculum for pupils within the nurture classrooms, and schools could not always articulate the intent of this offer. An additional challenge identified was that key staff often lack the expertise and training to deliver a specialist curriculum.

At the college we currently have 25% of pupils are on the SEN list, and 6.3% have EHCPs, which is significantly higher than national figures. In addition, the challenge of increasing levels of SEND needs across the trust, coupled with a lack of local special school places, has led to an increase in pupils not accessing the mainstream curriculum. Approximately 45 pupils are already accessing additional provision and an adapted curriculum but these provisions are not able to meet the needs of a very small number of pupils with significant cognition and learning challenges.

Additionally, there are two Communication and Interaction resource bases within the two trust's, one primary and one secondary. Both bases have developed a strong approach and curriculum offer, although this has not yet been effectively articulated by the trust.

A local special school is keen to develop closer working relationships with a view to joining the trust at a future date and has offered to partner in this work so that pupils who may later transition to the school would experience a smoother transition. The special school is a maintained school for 192 pupils aged between 3 and 19 years. It caters at an individual level, for pupils with profound or severe learning difficulties and for pupils on the autistic spectrum. The schools also has a discrete secondary provision 'Pathways' for students with social and emotional needs related to high anxiety. The staff have visited the local special school during the spring term to develop clearer understanding of their curriculum choices.

## The Challenge

The trust believes that all pupils deserve the best educational offer regardless of where they are placed. The challenge will be to develop an adapted curriculum with clear intent. The project aims to develop a consistent offer to all pupils across the education sector, ensuring no pupils are disadvantaged due to a lack of specialist places.

To achieve this, we plan to work with a special school and several of our SENCOs to write a curriculum offer for SEND pupils. This will ensure clarity in the curriculum's intention, provide access for all pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum, and deliver the knowledge and skills outlined in pupils' individual EHCPs.

This will be a trust-wide project that we will trial as a pilot before rolling it out across the rest of the trust if successful. We anticipate spending the Autumn term visiting special schools and mainstream schools with a strong specialist curriculum offer and crafting our own curriculum intent. The curriculum will be implemented in January for the Spring term and evaluated during the Summer term.

This project will also be pivotal in engaging colleagues from both trusts to work together alongside special school colleagues, thereby strengthening the skills and expertise of mainstream school staff. It will also be important to understand how best to measure the impact of the specialist curriculum pathway using metrics such as progress, behaviour, outcomes, and deep dives with staff.

## What They Did

The group was made up of SENCOs from across the two trusts including the two secondary schools. The group met over the course of a term once a month to explore the key challenges and to develop a shared rational and curriculum intent which would then inform the development of a Specialist Curriculum Pathway within the trust schools.

The group then developed a Specialist SEND Curriculum Pathway (SSCP) to ensure every pupil receives a curriculum tailored to their individual needs. The approach is child-centred, offering broad, balanced, and creative learning opportunities that build confidence, skills, and knowledge. The SSCP prepares pupils for future transitions, developing self-worth, responsibility, and aspiration towards employment.

The rational set out the key elements the group felt were important when considering the theory of change and covered the following:

**Access to a Broad and Balanced Curriculum** - the Specialist SEND curriculum pathway (SSCP) allows pupils with SEND to access a broad and balanced curriculum offer in a supportive environment, ensuring they are included in the wider school community whilst accessing a curriculum that prepares pupils for future success

**Individual Need** - The curriculum is tailored to each pupil's individual needs, focusing on their strengths and helping them overcome challenges. Pupils receive personalised support in line with targets set out on their EHCP. This ensures every pupil is provided with the right curriculum delivered in the right environment for them to make progress.

**Developing Expertise** - The SSCP ensures that staff receive the right training to support pupils with physical, cognition and communication and interaction needs. This expertise also supports mainstream teachers, enhancing the school's overall ability to meet the needs of all pupils.



Improved parental/carer satisfaction



Increased attendance of learners with SEND



More inclusive ethos/culture in the setting



Improved transitions for learners with SEND

## What They Did (continued)

**Belonging** – Pupils accessing the SSCP will be able to access mainstream lessons and broader curriculum activities where possible, allowing them to build relationships with their peers, develop social skills, fostering a sense of belonging.

**Whole School Inclusion** – Developing the SSCP encourages an inclusive culture, where all staff are trained to support pupils with SEND. This helps the whole school to value and support every pupil.

**Early Identification and Support** – The SSCP can support early identification of need, providing timely support, and enabling pupils to access the curriculum, thrive socially, and reach their full potential.

**Flexibility** – The SSCP is adaptable, allowing pupils to receive more support when needed, or gradually move into mainstream classes or a special school placement as they progress.

To structure learning effectively, the group developed three curriculum pathways—Pre-Formal, Semi-Formal, and Formal—allowing for personalised progression based on individual development. Practical and interactive learning, including educational visits and culturally rich experiences, are integral to the approach. The group also reviewed assessment systems ensure progress is measured, enabling all pupils to experience success and reach aspirational targets.

The group also reviewed various pre-formal curriculum offers, including Pathfields special school and Cherry Garden school curriculum. Assessment was also considered, including using the Engagement model, Tapestry, Cherry Garden Branch Maps, the AET Progression framework as well as other developmental and profiling tools. As a school, we recognised that although the new provision (outlined below) was the key focus of the project, the clarity of format and the rationale was true for all of the existing provisions within the school. This led to the SENDCO using the same format as was created within the project to map out clearly the existing provisions to ensure whole school consistency of approach.

## Outcomes and Anticipated Impact

As a school we identified a small number of pupils prior to transition into Year 7 who require an alternative curriculum offer to the mainstream due to their cognition and learning needs. We created The Gateway to cater for their significant learning needs, whilst offering a secondary school experience as part of the mainstream school setting. Through the Whole School SEND Professional Development Group we have developed the following areas:

1. A clear rationale for admission to The Gateway Specialist Curriculum Pathway. Assessment criteria include: assessment of need, educational attainment, specialist support requirements and a decision process made by the Senco through evidence gathered from the class teacher and agreed with the Headteacher, external agencies and parent consultation. Pupils hold an EHCP and are identified as having significant additional learning needs, working at Y1 or Y2 academic levels, and require bespoke provision and a highly individualised curriculum and teaching strategies.
2. A semi-formal curriculum pathway. We have developed and embedded a semi-formal teaching approach which reflects the stage and learning style of the pupils involved, with priority given to:
  - Functional literacy and numeracy
  - Communication and language development
  - Personal, social and emotional development

## Outcomes and Anticipated Impact (continued)

3. Personal learning goals and curriculum links to individual EHCP targets. As The Gateway continues to develop and expands in the next academic year, we are embedding personalised targets within the curriculum plans, allowing for EHCP recommendations to be provided within the small group adult-led setting.

### The impact of The Gateway Specialist SEND curriculum pathway includes:

Increased attendance for Gateway pupils. Whole school attendance average is 89.7% whereas The Gateway average is 91.3.

Pupil voice has shown that Gateway pupils are happy to attend school because of the classroom environment, the predictability of the classroom routines, and the clear and consistent behaviour and rewards systems we have implemented.

Increased independence and confidence in the learning environment. The bespoke curriculum and teaching approach allows for pupils to attend the mainstream school setting in a specialised classroom environment, alongside outdoor learning. If pupils are socially able and wish to do so, they have the opportunity to attend mainstream classes. For example, one pupil attends a mainstream tutor group in the morning, and mainstream PE, while attending The Gateway for the rest of his curriculum offer.

Parent views given via EHCP reviews and through regular contact with The Gateway lead have been positive regarding the inclusivity of The Gateway pathway, notably the specialist and the flexible approach of the curriculum.

The Gateway provides a specialist pathway alternative to the mainstream secondary curriculum, within a mainstream setting. Prior to the creation of The Gateway there was no similar provision in Barnstaple, so the provision offers an alternative to attending a Specialist School for pupils who, socially, might feel better suited to a mainstream secondary school.



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More inclusive ethos/culture in the setting



Improved transitions for learners with SEND