

St. Gerard's School & Support Services



Learning & Teaching Policy

Our School is a **Rights Respecting School** and Articles 2, 12, 19 and 28 of **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** underpins this policy:

Every child has the right to:

- Be **protected from discrimination** (Article 2).
- **Express their views, feelings and wishes**, in a supported and accessible way, in matters affecting them, and to have these taken seriously (Article 12).
- Be **protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, maltreatment or exploitation** (Article 19).
- **Education**, with appropriate support to enable them to achieve their full potential (Article 28).

Learning and Teaching Policy

Context

St Gerard's is a catholic co-educational special school that caters for pupils from the ages of 3-19 with a range of additional needs. All students are referred to the school by the Education Authority and have a Statement of Special Educational Need. We provide small class settings with highly skilled and experienced Teaching and Learning Assistant support staff.

We work as part of a multidisciplinary team. Allied Health Professionals such as Speech and Language therapists, Occupational Therapists & Physiotherapists are an integral part of our school team. The team works closely with education staff, other professionals and parents/carers to facilitate each child's development and maximise their potential. We link with a number of other outside agencies to support the students. Our mission statement: Achieve, Believe and Celebrate encompasses everything we do in St Gerard's in helping our pupils reach their full potential: spiritually, physically, emotionally, academically and socially.

Our Staff

The main strength of our school is our hardworking, highly skilled and knowledgeable staff, whom are committed to ensuring every child achieves his/her full potential. We believe in the concept of lifelong learning. While we are professional teachers, we are also learners and as such we continue striving to improve our practice. This means coming to a better understanding of the learning and teaching process and being committed to continuous professional development. We believe that with effective and enjoyable learning and teaching experiences we can help our pupils lead happy, healthy and rewarding lives.

Rationale

As a staff, we aim to provide an education which promotes:

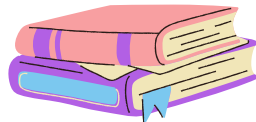
- The development of knowledge, understanding, positive attitude and, above all, enjoyment in the process of learning
- Continuity and progression, including opportunities to consolidate and build upon prior learning
- Achievement of potential, taking account of the needs of the whole child and equality of opportunity for all
- A broad, balanced, real and relevant curriculum in line with NI curriculum which is sufficiently flexible to meet needs of the children
- Use of cross-curricular links to make learning meaningful and facilitate opportunities to develop functional life skills.
- Promotion of personal and social development as well as academic achievements

The aim of this policy is to provide guidance to all staff regarding a universal, coherent approach to learning and teaching throughout all the stages of the school. The onus is on the teaching staff to ensure the advice is applied and adhered to in their class.

EQUALS PATHWAY

The Equal's Pathway is for our pupils with the most complex needs. It is designed to reflect the complex needs of each individual pupil and focuses primarily on the development of early communication skills, emotional and sensory regulation, and personal independence skills. Teaching is characterised by a combination of play based and therapeutic approaches to encourage progressive development towards all of the early learning milestones.

We aim to provide a stimulating, fun and supportive learning environment. To maximise children's capabilities for independence and for pupils to develop effective & functional communication and social skills. This is achieved through the Equals curriculum which includes experiential, intensive interaction, one to one, small group sessions, therapy input & access to sensory & soft play activities to encourage engagement & interaction.



ST. GERARD'S EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

SUBJECT SPECIFIC PATHWAY

The Subject Specific Pathway is designed for pupils who are ready to engage in more structured, academic learning. It typically follows a modified version of the National Curriculum, adapted to meet individual learning profiles, communication styles, and developmental levels. The curriculum is broad and balanced, often covering core subjects, Life skills, social communication, emotional regulation & therapeutic input. Each curriculum area is broken down into small, achievable steps, and progress is tracked using progression frameworks.

We believe every child has the potential to thrive when supported in the right environment. We want them to develop practical and essential skills in a positive and stimulating environment. Through personalized learning we strive to unlock our pupil's potential and maximise their progress. This is achieved through highly motivating activities & development of social skills. Predictable routines, structure, visuals and a mixture of 1 to 1 and group work activities.

ACCREDITATION PATHWAY

The Accreditation Pathway is our more formal accreditation-based curriculum it is designed to provide structured, recognised qualifications that reflect students' achievements and capabilities. As in all other pathways, pupils will continue to work on their social communication, emotional regulation and personal independence skills, but academic progress and the acquisition of subject specific knowledge and skills is also a key focus.

Lessons are adapted and differentiated to meet the wide-ranging needs and abilities of pupils. The Accreditation Pathway has been designed with the long-term perspective and potential future destinations of students in mind. This pathway aims to boost self-esteem and future opportunities.

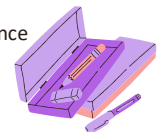
The Accreditation Pathway aims to develop life skills, employability, and independence, tailored to individual capabilities.

There are 4 key focus areas within this pathway:

- Personal Development
- Functional literacy, Numeracy & ICT
- Independent living skills
- Vocational learning & Work experience

Post 19

Options for each student will very much depend on their very individual profile of strengths, interests, needs and abilities. For some students, living independently, having a job and being an active participant in the wider community are realistic and appropriate future aspirations, whereas this may not be appropriate for some of our other students who may require a more bespoke, supported independence package in the future, designed around their specific interests and needs.



Learning Pathways Curriculum

The Learning Pathways Curriculum is creative, differentiated, personalised, nurturing and provides opportunities for students to progress. The learning pathways curriculum is coherent across the school and pupils are supported in achieving their potential through individual challenges during their learning journey. Students will learn about the world we live in and learn to become as independent as possible at a pace appropriate to their individual needs. Teaching teams will know how individual students learn best so that their learning experiences are successful.

The Learning Pathways Curriculum aims to meet the needs of learners in a bespoke and creative style with students accessing a range of learning experiences exploring learning intentions and assessment criteria from the Northern Ireland Curriculum. We know that a one size fits all approach does not serve the needs of the learners in our school community and therefore we have established flexible learning programmes that incorporate personal learning targets for all students.

Our Aims for our Students

These are the values, skills and attributes we wish our students to have when they leave St Gerard's to make their way in the world:

- Communicate effectively, talk confidently and listen.
- Develop functional literacy, numeracy and ICT skills
- Respect themselves and others.
- Have self-worth and self-belief that they have the ability to achieve their potential and something positive in their lives.
- Be good friends, caring family members and good neighbours to others.
- Be hardworking young people who can be trusted to do the right thing.
- Have a sense of humour and fun.
- Embrace Gospel values of love, honesty, compassion, forgiveness and justice.
- Be active members of their local community
- Be proud of themselves and their achievements
- Be generous, compassionate, kind and caring young people
- Be independent and lifelong learners.

There are a number of key factors that promote effective learning and teaching:

The Learning Environment

In order that students achieve as learners to their full potential, their learning must take place in an appropriate environment. While the environment may be physical its defining characteristic is based on relationships and the six principles of Nurture. An effective learning environment is characterised by:

- A welcoming atmosphere, positive relationships between teachers and students and between students and students in a relaxed, well organised classroom that stimulates and inspires.

- Personal qualities: warm, caring, approachable, trustworthy, hardworking, enthusiastic, motivational, fair, sensitive, sympathetic but firm when required.
- Communication of high expectations
- Listen to pupils, show interest in them as individuals and value their opinions.
- Telling students directly that they have the ability to do well. Your belief in them will inspire their success.
- Presentational displays and aids to learning e.g. Learning walls, ASD friendly classrooms and Positive Behaviour strategies are evident in all rooms.
- Pupil work is displayed.
- High quality, stimulating resources, differentiated where appropriate and a range of learning activities to stimulate, engage and challenge learners including the use of ICT to enhance learning.

Effective Teaching

All individuals learn in different ways, and teachers have a number of different teaching styles. This adds to the uniqueness of each class and learning experience for the children who need to be equipped with social skills for dealing with the variety of personalities they will encounter during their lives.

Through our teaching we aim to:

- raise levels of attainment for all pupils, enabling them to achieve their personal best
- develop confident and enquiring learners who are able to make informed choices.
- make learning an enjoyable experience
- build on the pupils' natural curiosity and enthusiasm for learning
- promote self-esteem and self confidence
- involve and stimulate pupils through active, multi-sensory learning,
- set achievable goals and have high expectations for all pupils
- provide appropriate support
- provide opportunities for pupils to apply acquired skills, knowledge and understanding in new contexts
- There is a suitable balance of class, group and individual teaching based on the needs of the children in their classes
- create a climate of praise and positive reinforcement which enables pupils to experience success and feel a sense of achievement.

Characteristics of Effective Learning:

- enable pupils to access all aspects of the curriculum in line with their needs, aptitudes and abilities
- enable pupils to make good progress and show good attitudes to their work
- prepare and plan activities that enable pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding within the holistic curriculum
- have clear learning objectives and outcomes which enable pupils to be actively involved in their learning by helping them to understand what they are learning to do / learning about and to
- measure whether they have achieved the objectives or not

- reflect good levels of teacher subject knowledge
- engage and motivate pupils and encourage them to work independently
- challenge all pupils to achieve their best
- be based on a good knowledge of the pupils' needs using ongoing formative and summative assessment information
- be tailored to the range of pupils' individual needs and to enable success
- be delivered in a professional manner by the teaching staff.

Learning & Teaching Styles

A wide range of teaching strategies are employed to support our students. Learning and teaching styles may include:

- Whole class activities/practical activities
- Group discussions/Group activities
- Team teaching
- Paired Activities/Pupil led activities
- Individual activities
- Activity based sharing/ Topic based activities
- Problem solving activities
- Educational visits/ Class Visitors
- Differentiated questioning techniques
- Target setting
- TAC PAC / Sensory Circuits / Intensive Interaction / Curiosity programme
- Attention Autism / Circle Time / Mindfulness
- Movement breaks

Effective planning for learning and teaching.

Teachers are responsible for creating personalised learning plans (PLP's) for every pupil twice a year. This runs in conjunction with their class planning document for the pupils in their class. Class planners help support the effective delivery of the curriculum and ensures evaluation of pupil's progress.

Our planning identifies learning objectives from the Northern Ireland Curriculum. We transform these into student friendly learning intentions so that students can understand the learning objective and expectation of lessons. Planning success criteria ensures pupil focus, clarifies understanding, identifies success, determine difficulties, provides strategies for improvement and reflects on overall progress.

In supporting the planning and delivery of teaching and learning all teachers will:

- be prepared for each teaching session in advance
- be flexible in terms of the organisation of the classroom, staff allocation, pupil groupings and the level to which the lesson plan is followed according to the changing needs of the pupils on a day to day basis

- plan to provide pupils with inclusive, engaging, meaningful, motivational, purposeful and challenging tasks which promote independence and self-esteem and which are both age appropriate and 'stage' appropriate
- focus on the development of key skills within the areas of: Communication, Using Maths, Using ICT and TSPC
- create opportunities for learners to experiment with ideas, take initiative, learn from mistakes, work collaboratively and become more self-directed in their learning
- design learning so that learners will think more skilful than they would otherwise do
- take account of pupils' individual interests and use these to motivate and encourage pupils learning
- enable pupils to learn in a variety of ways which address a range of learning styles and include; visual, auditory and kinaesthetic tasks and activities
- produce high quality teaching materials which meet the needs of all pupils in the lesson
- use assessment information to ensure that learning builds on previous knowledge, understanding and skills
- utilise resources in ways which encourage pupils to become more independent learners.

Differentiation

Students' progress at different rates and have different strengths. Such differences will be considered when delivering the Learning Pathways Curriculum. All students have access to a broad and relevant curriculum with a different emphasis and pace being provided for the range of ability groups within St Gerard's. As a school we recognise the specific challenges that students encounter when trying to access the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

To ensure all students have the best learning opportunities as possible, we will always endeavour to implement strategies that will facilitate this access. The strategies that we will implement will include some of the following:

- Walt is displayed and discussed at the beginning of lessons and can be adopted for learners using object of reference of picture exchange versions of the learning intention
- The classroom environment is suitable to support the students individual needs
- There will be consistent links to previous lessons and active learning opportunities provided
- Teachers will know the learning pathway for all students and provide personalised learning were required to meet the needs of the learners
- Sufficient workspace will be created for all students
- Sensory approaches will be utilised during lessons
- Collaborative working will be encouraged
- Students will be given clear and singular instructions
- Visual aids, colour and preferential season arrangements will be utilised
- Feedback will be positive and constructive. Sessions will be held after lessons.

In St Gerard's our **Pastoral and Academic role** are intrinsically linked:

- By fostering a School atmosphere based on strong values, mutual respect, openness and trust

- By presenting ourselves as role models for our students in our values, words and actions
- By being a genuine, dedicated, caring staff that value their students and are happy to listen, talk to and work with our pupils
- By having unconditional positive regard for our students
- By empathising, understanding and knowing our students
- By working hard to help each student reach their full potential
- Through quality leadership at all levels and working together as a staff to achieve shared goals
- By recruiting and retaining high quality, committed, well qualified teachers
- By demonstrating our belief in and commitment to Continuing Professional Development
- By striving to create and maintain good working relationships with parents and guardians, our partners, community and parish
- By providing support for those students who need extra help, when they need it
- By regularly celebrating achievement and praising our students.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review:

Role of Class Teacher

- To ensure Learning and Teaching Policy is adhered to.

Role of SLT

- To monitor the implementation of the Learning and Teaching policy
- To ensure it is the focus of departmental meetings
- To provide quality CPD to all staff.

Methods of monitoring, reviewing and evaluating progress:

- Review of Data – SIMS & Evidence For Learning
- Pupil books and work
- Voice
- Observations – formal and informal.

As Learning and Teaching is the core business of St Gerard's, the Learning and Teaching Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Sources of Evidence:

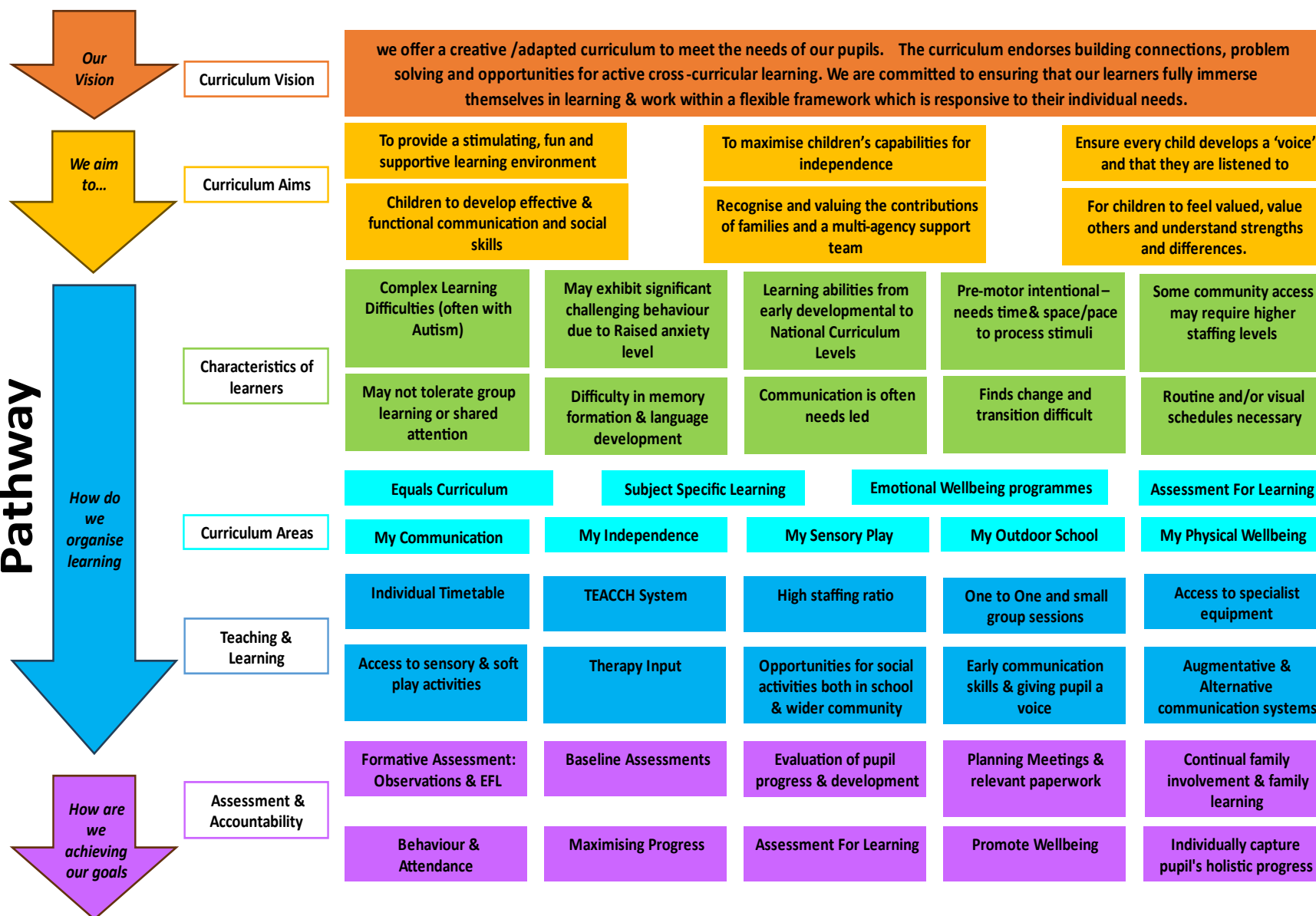
- Learning and Teaching Policy
- Evidence For Learning Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Marking Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Pastoral Policy
- Pupil Work
- Stakeholder Voice – Pupil, Parent & Teacher
- Classroom Observation formal and informal

Appendix:

Our 3 Curriculum Pathways:

1. *Equals*
2. *Subject Specific*
3. *Accreditation*

Equals Pathway



Subject Specific Pathway



Accreditation

Pathway

