# Great Oaks School Policies

**Great Oaks School**

| Teaching and Learning Policy | | | |
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| **Version** | Draft Only | **Approved by** | Great Oaks Governors |
| **Date last amended** | New Policy | **Approval date** | 26.11.24 |
| **Lead officer** | Assistant Headteacher- Curriculum & Assessment & Head of School | **Review date** | November 2025 |
| **Contact** | Andy Vivian/ Geraldine Lindsay | **Effective date** | 01.12.24 |

## 1. Rationale

At Great Oaks School, we aim to provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment that nurtures the individuality of every student. We prioritise growth, creativity, and fun in our teaching approach, fostering a lifelong love for learning which extends beyond the classroom. We nurture resilience by providing challenges and offering support. This approach is designed to help students, at all developmental levels, understand that making mistakes is a natural and important part of the learning journey. Independence is encouraged, empowering students where possible to take ownership of their learning and develop the skills necessary for success in the ever-changing world. Our curriculum emphasises skills, knowledge, and a sense of responsibility, preparing students for successful transitions to adulthood.

To address diverse learning needs, we employ various research-based teaching strategies, encouraging staff to explore innovative methods. We recognise the importance of working in collaboration with all members of our school community. The curriculum at Great Oaks School is intentionally designed to 'wrap around' each student, prioritising a bespoke approach to learning. Recognising differences in cognitive stages, working memory, and literacy and communication levels, our curriculum provides tailored pathways. Additionally, we consider health needs and external factors, offering empathetic and discreet support, ensuring a holistic and adaptable educational environment for all students. This tailored approach ensures that every student can find success in their educational journey.

## 2. Aims

**At Great Oaks we aim to:**

- ✓ Prepare students for adulthood
- ✓ Provide inclusive high quality first teaching
- ✓ Provide an inclusive learning environment
- ✓ Provide an individualised educational provision
- ✓ Deliver an adapted and differentiated National Curriculum
- ✓ Engage students through interesting and tailored lessons
- ✓ Promote communication and independence skills
- ✓ Foster emotional and social development
- ✓ Enhance functional skills opportunities
- ✓ Incorporate therapeutic approaches
- ✓ Provide regular assessment opportunities, so teaching approaches can be adjusted

- ✓ Build strong relationships with parents and external professionals to ensure a holistic approach to education
- ✓ Provide tailored preparation for transition times
- ✓ Provide necessary interventions
- ✓ Provide high quality feedback to students
- ✓ Provide support for sensory needs

## 3. Roles and responsibilities

### 3.1 Teachers

- Apply the principles outlined in the 'Teaching and Learning,' 'Feedback and Marking,' and 'Assessment Recording and Reporting' Policies.
- Contribute to the ongoing development of curriculum planning and adapt school planning and schemes of work, viewing planning as a dynamic and responsive document aligned with student needs.
- Maintain awareness of the diverse range of student needs and required provisions, ensuring tracking through Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs).
- Research and implement a variety of strategies supporting different learning styles, ensuring that teaching methods, resources, and assessment tools are tailored to individual student outcomes. More details can be found in the Great Oaks Approach to Teaching and Learning (Appendix 1).
- Ensure the visibility of the planning folder in the classroom, clearly labelled with copies of long-term planning and annotated medium-term (weekly) planning.
- Ensure that all members of the class team are familiar with the planning folder and have an understanding of the content, planned provisions, and outcomes for each student.
- Implement both formative and summative assessment opportunities, utilising data to refine and improve future teaching methods.
- Stay informed of latest educational research, curriculum and accreditation changes, taking ownership of 'own' professional development.
- Ensure a positive and inclusive classroom environment. Fostering a 'relational' approach to behaviour. Apply principles of the 'Behaviour and Emotional Regulation Policy'.
- Performance manage and direct Support Assistants within the class team.
- Communicate effectively and professionally with all stakeholders.
- Uphold high health and safety standards, following the Health and Safety policy.

### 3.2 Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs)

- Apply the principles outlined in the 'Teaching and Learning, 'Feedback and Marking,' and 'Assessment Recording and Reporting' Policies.
- Assist with planning, delivering, and evaluating learning activities under the guidance of a teacher. This may involve working with individuals, small groups, or the whole class.
- Collaborate with teachers in the development and adaptation of lesson plans and learning materials. Provide input based on their understanding of students' needs and abilities.
- Contribute to the assessment and evaluation of students' progress. This may involve observing, recording, and reporting on individual progression.
- Ensure a positive and inclusive classroom environment. Fostering a 'relational' approach to behaviour. Apply principles of 'Behaviour and Emotional Regulation Policy'.
- Undertake administrative duties, such as record-keeping, resourcing, and classroom organisation, to enhance the efficiency of teaching and learning.
- Direct Support Assistants where necessary to support students.
- Communicate effectively and professionally with all stakeholders.

- Uphold high health and safety standards, following the Health and Safety policy.


## 3.2 Student Support Assistants (SSAs)

- Provide personalised support to students, catering to their unique needs and learning styles. This may involve 1:1 sessions or small group work.
- Collaborate with the teacher to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.
- Assist in the implementation of lesson plans. Ensuring students have all necessary resources required and any further differentiation or adaptive teaching is provided to ensure that the student can access the lesson.
- Take an active role in ensuring any behavioural difficulties are supported in line with both the teachers expectations and in line with the school 'Behaviour and Regulation Policy'.
- Maintain effective communication with fellow colleagues, students, external agencies and parents.
- Assist in the assessments of students under the direction of the teacher.
- Provide support with personal care activities when required. This may include assisting with mobility, toileting, or other daily living activities.
- Provide compassionate and supportive approaches to all students who attend Great Oaks School.


## 3.3 Operations staff

Operational staff, which includes the office team, HR team, finance team, and site team, facilitate the teaching and learning process by ensuring that the physical, administrative, and technical aspects of the school function efficiently. Their aim is to free up teachers to focus on teaching and learning. A key responsibility of operational staff is to provide students with a well-organised, safe, and supportive learning environment.


## 3.3 Subject leaders

- Design and adapt the subject curriculum to meet the diverse needs of students with special educational needs (SEN), ensuring content is accessible, engaging, and tailored to individual learning profiles.
- Provide guidance, coaching, and professional development for teachers in delivering subject content effectively, focusing on differentiated instruction and SEN strategies.
- Oversee the assessment and progress of students, ensuring that learning objectives are met, and support staff in using data to inform teaching practices and individualised learning plans.
- Ensure that appropriate resources, including SEN-specific tools and technologies, are available and used effectively to enhance teaching and learning in the subject area.
- Work closely with internal specialists, therapists, and other external specialists to integrate therapeutic strategies into subject teaching, ensuring holistic support for student development.


## 3.4 Senior leaders

- Define a school-wide commitment to high-quality, inclusive education, ensuring that curriculum design meets the needs of all students at Great Oaks School.
- Foster teamwork across all school sites, pathways and subject areas, promoting shared best practices for supporting all students.
- Celebrate student and staff successes.
- Ensure adequate funding, resources, and professional development, making sure teachers, SSAs and subject leaders have what they need to support all learners.
- Establish systems to track the impact of teaching strategies on students' progress, working with subject leaders to use data effectively.

- Create an environment where staff feel supported to try new methods and strategies to improve learning for all students.
- Monitor implementation and the impact of the Teaching and Learning Policy across the school.
- Monitor systematically and frequently pupils' progress and the quality of teaching within the school.
- Use the information gathered about teaching and learning to inform the school's improvement planning.

### 3.5 Students

- Students are encouraged to take an active role in their own journeys if they are able to by engaging with the learning including participating in classroom discussions, asking questions, using communication aids and seeking help when needed.
- Students work with teachers to set achievable personal goals that align with their strengths, interests, and needs.
- Students are encouraged to develop 'Self-Advocacy Skills'.
- Students are encouraged to engage in collaborative learning opportunities, respectfully with peers.
- Students are encouraged to develop a positive mindset and a 'Yes I Can' attitude.
- Students are supported to develop a sense of self-worth and positive wellbeing

### 3.6 Parents and carers

- Reinforce classroom learning at home by creating a supportive environment and opportunities to apply learning to 'real life' experiences.
- Parents and carers are encouraged to support students to practise skills that develop independence and communication.
- Regularly communicate with teachers allowing parents and carers to stay informed about their child's progress, strengths, and areas for development.
- Work with teachers to set realistic goals for their child and celebrate their achievements along the way.
- Support their child's growth and development by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning and advocate for themselves where possible.
- Promote Positive Attitudes Toward Learning by encouraging a growth mindset and showing interest in their child's schoolwork and achievements.

### 3.7 Governors & Trustees

- Overseeing and embedding the school's vision and values into teaching and learning.
- Monitoring the consistent and effective application of the 'Teaching and Learning Policy.'
- Reviewing data to assess progress, challenging senior leaders to address underperformance, and celebrating success.
- Ensuring staffing, funding, and facilities support effective teaching and learning.
- Consulting with parents, carers, and the community to ensure the policy meets student needs.
- Holding senior leaders accountable for the implementation and impact of the policy while providing support and oversight.

### 4. Planning

At Great Oaks School, we recognise that for students with diagnosed learning difficulties, progress involves not only advancing through a hierarchy of skills and knowledge but also embracing lateral progression, where skills are applied and reinforced in various contexts. We acknowledge that some students may experience regression in their learning journey, which is why planning needs to be

sequenced in a way that revisits and scaffolds content well. When devising plans for individuals or groups at Great Oaks, we prioritise the following:

- Curriculum Pathways: Tailoring the curriculum to ensure an appropriate level of breadth and depth.
- Diverse Learning Contexts: Providing a variety of contexts for learning experiences.
- Total Communication Approach: Implementing a comprehensive communication strategy to support diverse learning needs.
- Varied Teaching Methods: Utilising a range of teaching approaches to accommodate different learning styles.
- Personalised Learning: Tailoring educational experiences to meet the unique needs and preferences of each student.
- Application of Skills and Knowledge: Emphasising the practical application of acquired skills and knowledge in real-world scenarios.
- Ownership of Learning: Whenever possible, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning. They are informed about their individual targets and receive immediate feedback to assist them on their learning journey.

### 4.1 Expectations

At Great Oaks School, it is mandatory for all teachers to maintain a hard copy of their planning encompassing all areas of learning. This documentation should be organised in a clearly labelled folder, visibly placed within the classroom. The folder should be divided into two main sections:

1. Long-Term Planning
2. Medium-Term Planning

Medium-term planning should include annotations on a lesson-by-lesson basis. This involves recording crucial information such as adaptations required for students who may struggle with specific content, identifying follow-up work needed, and noting any future resourcing or provision requirements. The medium-term planning serves as the short-term, weekly planning, removing the need for a separate weekly or lesson-by-lesson document.

In the event of a teacher's absence, the cover teacher will refer to the planning folder to ascertain the necessary cover work. Consequently, it is imperative to keep this folder consistently updated, referencing the appropriate resources needed for each lesson. This practice ensures a seamless transition for both regular and cover teachers and enhances the overall effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. It also ensures all members of the class team know and understand what is being taught each day.

### 4.2 Curriculum Frameworks and Offer

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| Pathway 3 | In Pathway 3 we deliver a subject specific curriculum adapted from the National Curriculum. Medium and short-term plans are developed for each subject which are sometimes linked to a theme and will often relate to topics covered in Secondary Mainstream. Accreditation pathways are available to all students in Key Stage 4, with the curriculum tailored to meet accreditation requirements. However, the focus on preparing students for adulthood remains a priority. Students will continue to develop essential skills, such as literacy and numeracy, through practical activities. |
| Pathway 2 | In Pathway 2 we deliver subject specific curriculum adapted from the National Curriculum. In Key Stage 3, planning is developed for each subject within a thematic unit. In Key Stage 4 the subjects become more directed |

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| | towards accreditation, so plans are not necessarily linked to a theme. A continued focus on preparing students for adulthood remains a priority. Students will continue to develop essential skills, such as literacy and numeracy, through practical activities. |
| SENSORY THEMATIC  Pathway 1 / 2 | Medium and short-term plans are developed from schemes of work linked to a theme. Students primarily follow the ImPACTS curriculum tailored to their individual developmental targets, but they also participate in whole-class subject lessons where appropriate. This flexible approach ensures that students can receive personalised support while benefiting from group learning experiences in specific subjects, ultimately enabling them to reach their full potential in these areas. A continued focus on preparing students for adulthood remains a priority throughout. |
| SENSORY EXPLORATORY  Pathway 1 | Medium and short-term plans are developed from schemes of work linked to a theme. The sensory exploratory curriculum emphasises holistic and personalised learning experiences within a thematic approach. Students engage with a multisensory environment to foster their cognitive and sensory development. The approach recognises each student's unique needs and abilities. This allows them to work on individualised targets through tactile experiences, visual stimuli, auditory cues and other sensory inputs. A continued focus on preparing students for adulthood remains a priority throughout. |

## 5. Inclusive Quality First Teaching

What a "typical lesson" will look like will vary from subject to subject and across pathways. Teachers must have excellent subject knowledge including subject-specific pedagogy. There should be clarity around learner progression, starting points and next steps. Individual teachers may utilise a variety of strategies based upon their professional judgement and knowledge. More details can be found in the Great Oaks Approach to Teaching and Learning (Appendix 1).

### 5.1 Learning Styles

Learning styles refer to the preferred and distinctive ways students acquire, process, and retain information. These styles encompass the various approaches students use to understand and engage with new material. At Great Oaks School, staff should be aware of the common ways students learn, while recognising that these approaches are not definitive or exhaustive methods for supporting effective learning. Some of these common approaches include:

**Visual Learners -** Students grasp information best through visual aids such as pictures, diagrams, graphs, charts, and interactive whiteboard activities.

**Auditory Learners -** Students comprehend information most effectively through listening. Using spoken instructions, discussions, or audio resources will benefit these students.

**Kinaesthetic / Tactile Learners -** Students learn best through hands-on experiences, using manipulation or interaction with objects.

**Reading/Writing Learners -** Students learn best through reading and writing. The use of written instructions, reading materials, and minimal talking will help to reinforce learning.

**Social Learners -** Students learn best through collaborative experiences. Working with others, sharing ideas, and engaging in discussions support learning for these students.

**Solitary/Intrapersonal Learners -** Students prefer to work independently. Self-paced resources and opportunities to reflect support these learners.

## 5.2 Learning environment

Each classroom will have a class folder containing key information for each student, including IBPs, IEPs, and risk assessments. Teachers will also maintain a planning folder that outlines lesson content and objectives, ensuring the staff team has easy access to relevant information. All staff are expected to read and be familiar with this information.

**In Pathway 1**, the classroom is structured to be organised and visually supportive. Symbols, timetables, and visual aids, such as "now/next" aids, help guide whole class and individualised learning. Displays should be student-centred, containing relevant and accessible information, while maintaining a clear and uncluttered space. A designated area for emotional regulation, equipped with sensory aids like weighted blankets and stability cushions, supports students' well-being. Active seating options further enhance comfort and focus.

Important information, such as communication strategies and triggers, must be clearly displayed to guide staff and students. Timers, including sand or digital countdowns, assist with transitions, while resources are age-appropriate and linked to students' interests. PICA-friendly materials should be available for supervised exploration, with a variety of items accessible to engage learners meaningfully.

**Pathway 2** emphasises individualised learning through a structured and visually supportive environment. Visual timetables and IEPs are displayed to guide students, while Zones of Regulation help them manage emotions. The classroom front is kept clear to minimize distractions, and resources are easily accessible. Displays of students' work foster a sense of pride, while personalised storage areas promote organisation and independence.

The classroom includes easy access to sensory tools like fidget toys to aid self-regulation, along with a range of books to promote reading for pleasure. The layout is personalised to students' needs, with calm corners and flexible seating to support diverse learning styles and emotional needs.

**In Pathway 3**, the environment is geared toward fostering independence and practical skills. Organised with clear access to resources, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning. Visual timetables support time management, while uncluttered spaces minimise distractions. Personal storage areas promote responsibility, and quiet zones and sensory tools support emotional regulation.

Displays of student progress and access to vocational resources ensure students are engaged in age-appropriate, purposeful activities that prepare them for life beyond school. All strategies and tools are designed to promote autonomy, emotional regulation, and readiness for adulthood.

**At the Post 16 College**, the environment continues to foster independence and self-regulation. Classrooms are well-organised, with resources that promote autonomy and engagement. Visual supports help students structure their day, while calm, uncluttered spaces enhance focus. Sensory regulation tools and flexible seating options are available to support emotional well-being.

Displays of student work celebrate progress, and access to vocational and reading materials promotes independence and practical learning. The environment is designed to meet individual needs, ensuring that learning remains relevant, age-appropriate, and linked to students' future goals.

**5.3 Lesson Structure**

We place significant importance on affording teachers the autonomy and flexibility to guide student learning in manners they deem most impactful for student outcomes. We refrain from explicitly dictating the structure of lessons, opting instead to encourage teachers to utilise established methods that are particularly beneficial for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Great Oaks fosters an environment that advocates for inquiry-based approaches, permitting students to engage in experimentation, play, and self-directed aspects of their learning journey. In instances where teachers exhibit less experience or necessitate supplementary support, more formal expectations may be established for how lessons should be structured.

**Pathway 1:**

A typical lesson in Pathway 1 begins with a group introduction or activity to engage all students. Learners then rotate through focused work tasks while others are occupied with independent activities. Sensory opportunities, such as touch and sound, are integrated to enhance learning and provide appropriate challenges. Cues like "Ready, steady…(pause)" encourage student responses, fostering active participation. Interaction between peers and staff is promoted, and the lesson concludes with a group session to share achievements and discuss progress. Students are given the chance to lead tasks and express their thoughts, making the lesson interactive and enjoyable.

**Pathway 2:**

In Pathway 2, lessons are structured with a clear routine and personalised timetables to meet individual needs. Support staff actively assist key students and are involved in the lesson. Visual and concrete resources, such as videos and games, are used to make learning engaging and accessible. Lessons start with a recap of previous content and include differentiated input to ensure all students can participate. Marking guides future steps, helping to tailor subsequent lessons and support student progress effectively.

**Pathway 3:**

A typical day in Pathway 3 begins with an introduction to the day's objectives and a recap using retrieval exercises, often reinforced with related games. Lessons are structured with step-by-step, differentiated tasks and include various strategies to support learning. Students frequently return to games or activities to check their understanding. Clear learning intentions are shared, and the classroom environment is calm and respectful. Opportunities for self and peer assessment promote reflection and collaboration, with breaks helping to maintain focus during longer sessions.

**Post 16:**

In Post 16, the focus is on practical and active learning. Lessons are designed to be realistic, reflecting students' experiences and preferences. Students are encouraged to make choices and explore new learning opportunities. Skills from earlier education are applied in practical situations within the college and community. Lessons often incorporate playful elements, such as turning life skills tasks into competitive games. Students also design and lead their own sessions, both individually and in groups, creating an engaging and meaningful learning experience.

## 6. Interventions

At Great Oaks School, we utilise a variety of teaching and learning interventions to support our students. These include small group or one-on-one intervention sessions for Maths and English. We use tailored learning targets and strategies based on each student's individual strengths and needs. Great Oaks provides small class sizes with additional Teaching Assistant support. This ensures each student has appropriate help and on the spot intervention with their learning when required.

For Key Stage 4 students, we implement targeted interventions to help them prepare for exams. These may include study skills sessions, memory strategies, and practice sessions that focus on exam techniques. Regular mock assessments are also used to familiarise students with exam conditions and to help identify areas needing further support, building their confidence and readiness.

Phonics-based interventions support literacy development. We also use a range of reading interventions such as Guided Reading, Vocabulary Development, Reciprocal Teaching, and Comprehension Instruction.

To further enhance the impact of interventions, subject leads offer guidance and support to class teams, enabling them to implement subject-specific strategies directly in the classroom. This collaboration ensures that interventions are seamlessly integrated into daily lessons, allowing students to benefit from consistent support across all areas of learning.

Sensory rooms are available for students with sensory processing challenges or those who need breaks throughout the day. We incorporate visual, auditory, and tactile resources to engage multiple senses and enhance learning.

We also offer group-based interventions to develop communication, interaction, and problem-solving skills in social settings using trained Speech and Language Therapists and specially trained staff. Visual interventions, such as symbol-based communication aids, assist pre- speaking students in expressing themselves, while visual schedules and timetables help students navigate routines and transitions. Additionally, we use assistive technology like speech-to-text software and communication devices for pre-speaking students.


## 7. Marking and feedback

At Great Oaks School, it is important to ensure that feedback is tailored to meet the individual needs of all students. We recognise that every student is unique, and therefore it requires a personalised approach to their learning. Our teachers and staff are trained to provide feedback in a way that is accessible and meaningful to each student, whether it be through verbal, written or visual means.

At Great Oaks, we believe feedback should be provided in the moment where possible. Students should always have time to respond to the feedback and where required, used to revisit the previous lesson so students have time to improve on the area or topic of work. It should engage the student and provide scaffolding to support the students learning journey.

Further information regarding feedback and marking expectations can be found in the 'Feedback and Marking Policy'.


## 8. Assessment, recording and reporting

Great Oaks School's Assessment, Recording, and Reporting Policy ensures a positive learning environment by systematically assessing student progress and setting developmental targets. Staff use both formative and summative assessments, including Earwig, reading/math age tests, and IEP reviews, to track each student's progress and tailor support as needed. Reporting processes involve regular updates to parents and governing bodies, with annual reviews aligning with each student's EHCP. This structured approach

integrates continuous feedback, supports individualised learning plans, and guides curriculum planning, ultimately feeding into school improvement initiatives.

Further information can be found in the 'Assessment, Recording, and Reporting Policy'.

## 9. Health and Safety

It is the responsibility of all staff and where possible students to be aware of possible Health and Safety issues and relevant risk assessments. Any specific issues relating to health and safety that need immediate attention should be brought to the notice of the Headteacher/Health and Safety Lead. All staff should be checking the learning environment to ensure it is always safe. Appropriate and immediate action should be taken by staff if there is a risk to students or staff.

## 10. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitor the termly IEP`s for appropriate 'SMART' targets and consistency among staff.

Senior Managers to agree an 'area of focus' to be formally observed at least twice in an academic year through whole lesson observations or several short 'drop ins. This is in addition to the learning walks programme.

Senior Managers to monitor the quality of teacher planning and record keeping termly and provides feedback including any suggestions for improvements if appropriate.

## 12. Review

This policy will be revised and approved by all teachers and Governors following discussion. The Head Teacher, in consultation with teachers and support staff, will review the policy every two years. During each review, the following questions will be considered:

- Is there clear evidence throughout the school showcasing students' achievements and enjoyment, and are these successes effectively shared with parents?
- Have overall standards improved, and does the policy rationale reflect current school practices?
- Is the school effectively achieving the objectives of this policy, and can the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher provide evidence of robust monitoring practices?
- Are teaching and learning strategies effective, resources allocated to support curriculum implementation, and health and safety procedures consistently followed?

## 13. Links with other policies and documents

Subject Curriculum Offer Documents

Feedback and Marking Policy

Assessment, Recording and Reporting Policy

Continuous Professional Development Policy

Behaviour and Emotional Regulation Policy

Health and Safety Policy and Risk Assessments

# Appendix 1 (version 1)

## The Great Oaks Approach to Teaching and Learning

Great Oaks is a unique school, serving learners across the full spectrum of cognitive abilities, from early years to adulthood. While there are pathway-specific approaches and strategies in place, this document provides a comprehensive, whole-school perspective on teaching and learning, applicable across all pathways. Differentiation is essential to ensure these strategies are effective.

The strategies outlined in this appendix are supported by high-quality evidence from respected theorists and educational psychologists. This document serves as the foundation for our ongoing CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and will be updated annually to reflect our evolving approach to teaching and learning, ensuring it remains aligned with the latest research and practices.
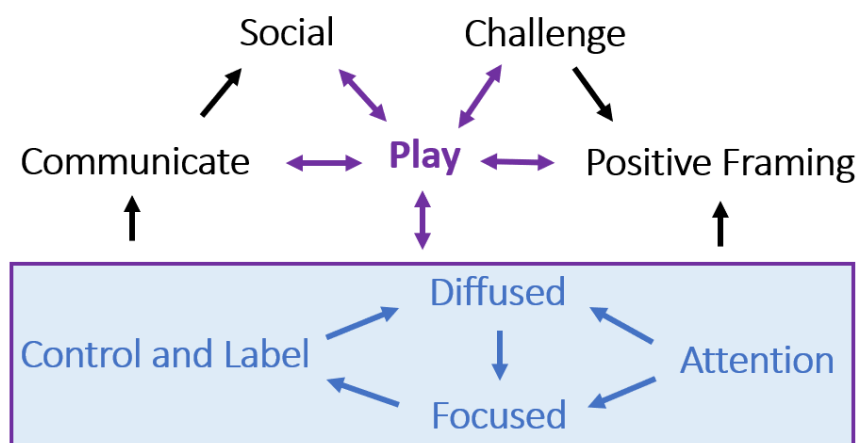


**Challenge (Being in the Learning Zone)**

*Learners grow by stepping beyond their comfort zone, embracing challenges and engaging in productive struggle.*

**Positive Framing (Attitude and Mindset)**

*Learners thrive when they approach challenges with a positive and playful mindset with clear intent.*

**Attention (Sensory Processing and Focus)**

*Sustained attention is essential for effective learning and memory retention. Learners require an environment free from distractions and sensory overwhelm. Opportunities should be provided for both focused, logical thinking and creative, exploratory play.*

**Control and Label (Constructing Knowledge)**

*Developing memory and recall strategies by organising and categorising information. Small, manageable steps create order, leading to greater control of the environment. These structured chunks are labelled, stored, and continually refined or expanded.*

**Communication (Symbols and Language)**

*Communication and interaction empower learners, helping them gain agency. Self-talk helps learners organise and make sense of their thoughts, while interaction with others co-constructs and shapes their sense of identity.*

**Social (Learning Through Interaction)**

*Engaging with the wider world and culture. Collaborating, communicating, and observing to develop understanding and empathy. Building a theory of mind through observing and participating in play with others.*

**Play (Flow and Balance in Learning)**

*Achieving a state of flow where the balance between challenge and skill leads to deep engagement and learn*

# Challenge (Being in the Learning Zone)

*Learners grow by stepping beyond their comfort zone, embracing challenges and engaging in productive struggle.*

**Links to theory**
*This section is grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasises that learning occurs when students are challenged just beyond their current capabilities with appropriate support. It also aligns with Dweck's Growth Mindset theory, advocating that productive struggle and overcoming challenges lead to growth and deeper learning.*

## Overview

In a world of increasing complexity, students must be encouraged to leave their comfort zones to make meaningful progress. Taking on challenges is essential for learning, and maintaining high expectations for all students is vital. Over time, students should be actively engaged in their learning, working harder than the teacher from the moment they enter the classroom. The deeper the effort, the more firmly the learning is embedded. Emphasising the critical role of challenge highlights the importance of productive struggle within a safe learning zone, where students are pushed just beyond their current capabilities but supported to succeed.

The teacher plays a pivotal role as the "knowledgeable other," guiding students through their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Teachers help learners remain within the ZPD, providing the right balance of challenge and support, thus keeping students engaged and allowing for consistent growth.

### *Executive Functions*
*Emotional regulation*
*Goal-directed persistence*
*Flexibility*

### *Links to learning needs*
*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*
*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*
*Dyslexia*
*Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)*



*The Great Oaks Learning Zone based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.*

## Links to Play

It is possible to learn in the panic zone, but it's stressful, unsustainable and potentially dangerous. To be in the learning zone can only be play. There is no other way to safely take on a challenge. Play offers a safe form of challenge where learners can willingly engage with tasks and explore ideas. It allows students to experience productive struggle in a way that feels natural and enjoyable. Play maintains challenge within a zone where learners are stretched just enough to grow without feeling overwhelmed. Unsafe or overly difficult challenges can discourage students, while play enables them to explore and experiment with new concepts in a risk-free environment. At Great Oaks, play-based learning is seen as a vital tool for helping students build resilience, creativity, and problem-solving skills—all through safe, self-directed challenges.

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# Positive Framing (Attitude and Mindset)

*Learners thrive when they approach challenges with a positive and playful mindset with clear intent. .*

**Links to theory**
The section reflects Positive Psychology (Seligman) and Dweck's Growth Mindset, demonstrating that a positive and playful attitude towards challenges fosters resilience and creativity. It is consistent with research showing that framing tasks positively can transform learning experiences, boosting engagement and motivation.

## Overview

A willingness to embrace challenges, alongside clear intentions, is essential for effective learning. At Great Oaks, teachers guide learners to focus on specific goals, fostering self-belief and resilience. A positive mindset promotes focus and creativity, enabling students to balance logical thinking with playful exploration. Teachers play a crucial role in helping students set clear objectives and adopt a growth mindset, viewing setbacks as opportunities for development. Intentional framing can transform tasks into engaging challenges rather than daunting obstacles, empowering students to engage fully with their learning.



*We recognise that mistakes and set backs are positive and help us to learn*

### Executive Functions

*Emotional regulation*
*Flexibility*
*Metacognition*

### Links to learning needs

*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*
*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*
*Anxiety Disorders*
*Mood Disorders*

### Links to Play

Framing learning positively and playfully is vital for how students engage with challenges. Just as play encourages exploration and discovery, positive framing inspires curiosity and confidence in learners. Teachers can turn routine tasks into playful challenges, making learning feel engaging and achievable rather than intimidating. Incorporating playful elements, such as stimulating questions or imaginative uses of everyday objects, helps keep students motivated and open to learning.
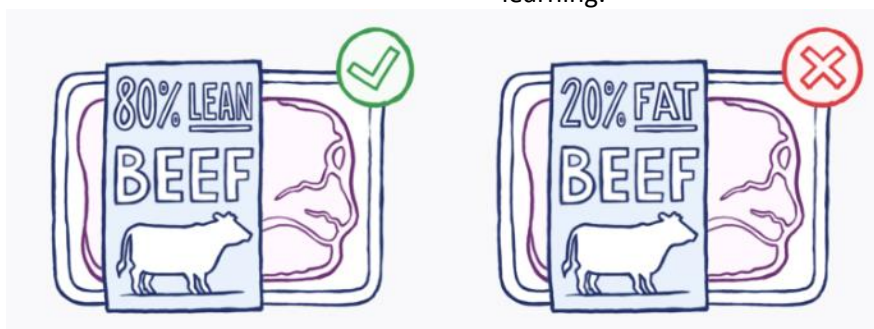


*All situations in life can be framed positively or negatively – at Great Oaks we understand that positive framing promotes learning*

# Attention (Sensory Processing and Focus)

*Sustained attention is essential for effective learning and memory retention. Learners require an environment free from distractions and sensory overwhelm. Opportunities should be provided for both focused, logical thinking and creative, exploratory play.*

**Links to theory**
This aligns with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller), highlighting the importance of managing sensory input and reducing distractions to optimise learning. Vygotsky's emphasis on creating a structured learning environment supports the idea that focused attention enhances engagement and memory retention. Additionally, it reflects the brain's lateralisation, where the left hemisphere is associated with focused, logical, and analytical thinking, while the right hemisphere supports diffused, creative, and exploratory thought. Balancing both hemispheres through varied activities allows for deeper engagement and cognitive flexibility, crucial for comprehensive learning experiences.
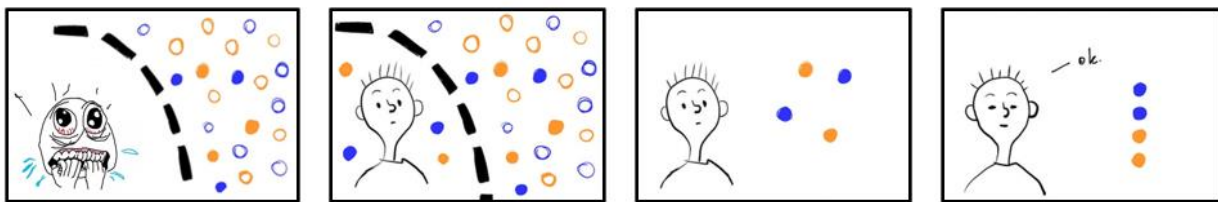


*The world can feel overwhelming; learners need an environment free from distractions to support focus and the development attention control, helping them filter and prioritise the most relevant information effectively.*

## Overview

In the learning environment, attention should be freed from basic needs and sensory overload. Filtering information to direct focus toward relevant aspects of learning is essential for student success. With numerous distractions today, particularly at Great Oaks, helping students manage their attention effectively is crucial. By concentrating on key learning objectives, students can engage more fully with the material. Teachers can use engaging hooks to capture and sustain attention, making learning enjoyable and impactful.

Understanding the importance of sensory processing and attention management is vital for facilitating effective learning. By comprehending how learners process information and filter out distractions, educators can create an environment that promotes engagement and maximises learning outcomes. Attention is crucial for maintaining short-term memory and ensuring that learners remain focused on their tasks.

There should be opportunities for concentrated, focused, and logical cognition, as well as diffused, creative, and playful exploration. Concentrated cognition involves structured activities that promote critical thinking and problem-solving, helping students develop reasoning skills and articulate their ideas effectively. Conversely, diffused exploration encourages imaginative play and open-ended activities that foster creativity and innovation, allowing students to take risks and express themselves in diverse ways.
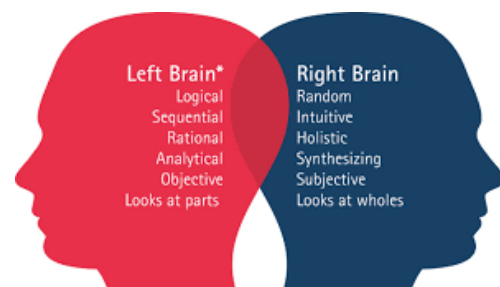


*The left hemisphere excels in focused, detail-oriented tasks, while the right hemisphere specialises in broad, holistic awareness—together creating a balanced approach to processing information.*

## Executive Functions

*Sustained attention*
*Working memory*
*Response inhibition*
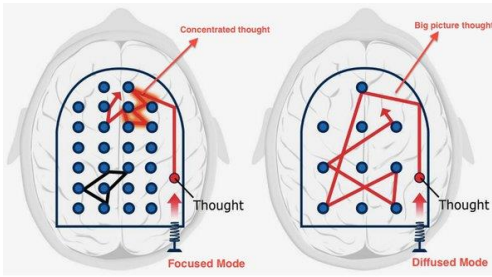


*Attention alternates between precise, concentrated problem-solving (focussed mode) and relaxed, big-picture exploration (diffused mode), enabling creativity and effective learning.*

## Links to learning needs

*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*
*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*
*Dyslexia*
*Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)*

## Links to Play

Framing attention in a playful manner is essential for capturing learners' focus. Just as play naturally draws attention, effective teaching strategies should include elements that stimulate curiosity and enjoyment. By incorporating fun activities or hands-on experiences, teachers can create opportunities for learners to explore topics dynamically, allowing them to stay engaged and motivated. Playful approaches can help manage sensory input and direct attention toward important information, fostering a positive and productive learning atmosphere.

# Control and Label (Organising Knowledge)

*Developing memory and recall strategies by organising and categorising information. Small, manageable steps create order, leading to greater control of the environment. These structured chunks are labelled, stored, and continually refined or expanded.*

**Links to theory**
Based on Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, this section accurately portrays how breaking down information into manageable chunks (chunking) and categorisation aid knowledge construction. The CPA (Concrete-Pictorial-Abstract) approach is an established educational method, supporting long-term retention and understanding.
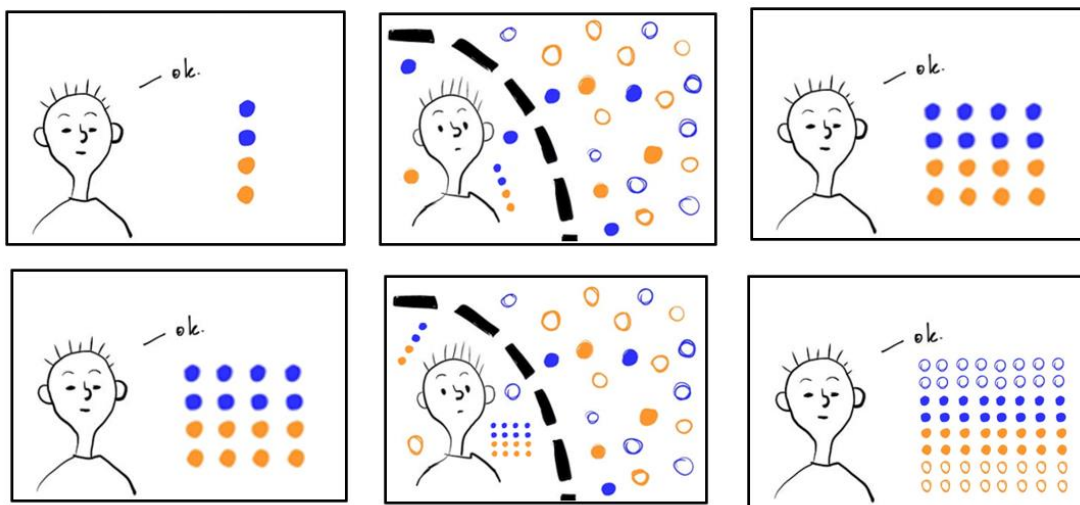


*By breaking information into smaller, manageable units, you reduce cognitive load and enhance memory retention. Each chunk serves as a foundational piece that can be built upon step by step, forming a cohesive and complex understanding over time*

## Overview

Creating order in the learning environment is essential for developing control over information. This involves breaking down complex concepts into smaller, manageable chunks that learners can easily process and label. By categorising information and associating it with symbols or language, students can improve their understanding and enhance long-term memory. Learners benefit from clear, incremental steps in their progression, allowing them to build their knowledge gradually and effectively.

Understanding how learners manage and organise information through chunking, categorisation, and labelling is crucial. Recognising the importance of symbols and language in encoding information into long-term memory is vital for successful learning. By developing these skills, learners can gain better control over their environment and improve their cognitive processes.

Chunking refers to breaking down information into smaller, digestible units, reducing cognitive overload and making it easier to grasp complex ideas. Labelling involves using symbols, words, or categories to represent these chunks, which further aids memory by creating meaningful connections. Together, chunking and labelling enhance memory and empower students to take control of their learning journey.

The concrete, pictorial, and abstract approach is a key teaching strategy that fosters understanding. This methodology encourages learners to manipulate physical objects, represent them visually, and then use abstract symbols to deepen their comprehension. This progression helps learners build a robust language foundation and enhances their ability to categorise and express their thoughts.
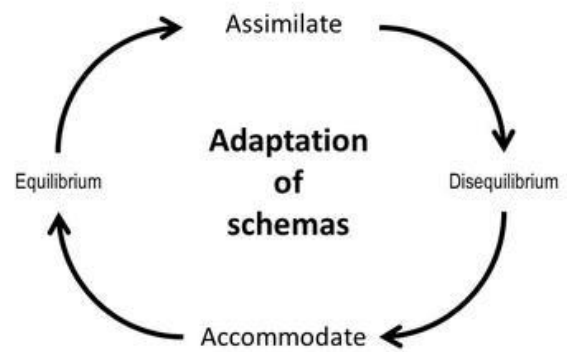


*Jean Piaget's adaptation of schemas: A continuous cycle of encountering new experiences, integrating them, and adjusting our understanding to grow and adapt.*

### *Links to learning needs*

*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*
*Dyspraxia*
*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*
*Dyslexia*

### *Executive Functions*

Organisation
Planning/prioritisation
Working memory

### Links to Play

Play can support the development of organisation and categorisation skills. Through playful exploration, students can interact with materials and symbols, making sense of their environment. Engaging in activities that involve sorting, labelling, and categorising enhances their understanding of concepts while making learning enjoyable. Playful contexts allow learners to experiment with ideas in a low-pressure setting, reinforcing the skills necessary for effective information management and retention.
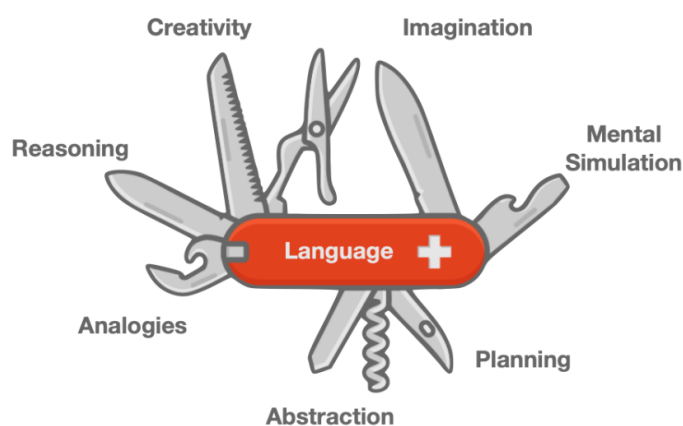
# Communication (Symbols and Language)

*Communication and interaction empower learners, helping them gain agency. Self-talk helps learners organise and make sense of their thoughts, while interaction with others co-constructs and shapes their sense of identity.*

**Links to theory**
This aligns with Vygotsky's belief that language is a crucial tool for cognitive development and social interaction. The inclusion of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods is well-supported

*Language is a powerful tool for higher cognition, enabling abstract thought, problem-solving, and the communication of complex ideas that drive learning and understanding.*



*Through communication and language, we build on each other's knowledge, sharing ideas that help us learn and understand more, as Vygotsky's theory of social interaction and language suggests.*

## Overview

Symbols and language are essential tools that help learners understand the world around them. They serve as cognitive tools for thinking and interaction, allowing learners to label concepts with sensory neural hooks that create a framework for memory and comprehension. This process plays a critical role in building identity and self-understanding.

In a SEN context, communication must be varied and tailored to meet individual needs. This personalisation may include the use of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) systems, visual supports, or tactile methods that facilitate expression. By recognising and adapting to diverse communication styles, educators empower students to express their thoughts, emotions, and needs effectively, fostering a sense of agency and ownership over their learning experiences.

Self-talk is vital for cognitive development, enabling learners to articulate their ideas and emotions. By organising and categorising information, they enhance their ability to communicate effectively. Furthermore, meaningful communication with peers strengthens their sense of identity and helps students navigate their social environments with confidence.

Ultimately, tailored communication strategies not only support cognitive development but also
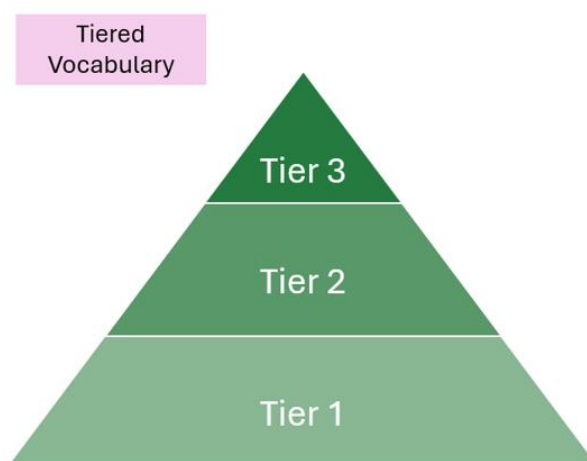


*Tiers of vocabulary: Using a range of word levels (basic, academic, and domain-specific) to support deeper understanding and communication*

## Links to Play

Play offers learners a safe and engaging environment to explore communication. Through imaginative play, students can experiment with various social scenarios, allowing them to "try out" interactions without real-world consequences. This exploration helps them practice labelling and organising their experiences, reinforcing their understanding of social dynamics.

For learners, play is essential for developing tailored communication skills. It provides opportunities to use AAC methods or visual supports in a relaxed setting.

encourage self-advocacy, allowing students to express their preferences and assert their rights within their educational and social settings. This focus on individualised communication promotes independence and builds resilience, preparing learners for future challenges.

### Executive Functions

*Emotional regulation*
*Flexibility*
*Metacognition*

### Links to learning needs

*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*
*Speech and Language Disorders*
*Cerebral Palsy*
*Down Syndrome*

As learners navigate challenges in play, they enhance their cognitive flexibility and self-advocacy, learning to articulate their thoughts and emotions effectively. Ultimately, play supports holistic development, empowering learners to connect with others and navigate social environments with confidence.



*Agree, Build, Challenge: A strategy that enhances oracy by encouraging students to agree, expand on ideas, and respectfully challenge viewpoints, helping them develop critical thinking and communication skills.*

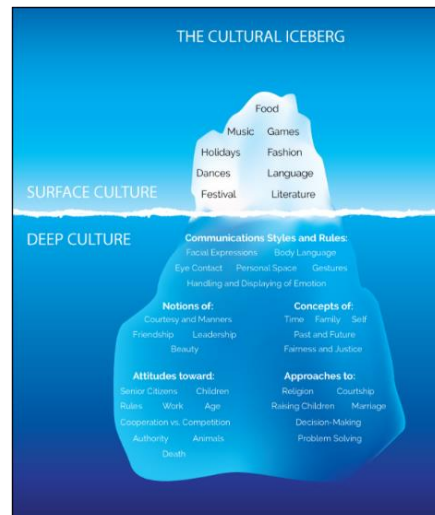# Social (Learning Through Interaction)

*Engaging with the wider world and culture. Collaborating, communicating, and observing to develop understanding and empathy. Building a theory of mind through observing and participating in play with others.*

**Links to theory**
This section is consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which highlights the role of social interaction, observation, and imitation in developing skills. It also fits Vygotsky's theory, which emphasises learning as a socially mediated process, essential for building empathy and understanding.



*Learning thrives through observation and imitation—Bandura's social learning in action.*



## Overview

Social learning is a fundamental aspect of the educational experience, encompassing communication, observation, collaboration, and the influence of social and cultural contexts. Through interactions with peers and adults, including

*Surface culture includes the visible aspects of life—clothing, food, and traditions—while deep culture encompasses the underlying values, beliefs, and social norms that shape a society's worldview. Understanding both helps us appreciate the full richness of cultural identity.*

observing and imitating others, learners develop essential skills such as empathy, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning. They construct knowledge and deepen their understanding of their place in the world while enhancing their theory of mind and capacity for empathy.

Communication is key in learning environments, where learners engage with one another to share ideas, negotiate meaning, and collaboratively solve problems. Social and cultural influences, including those from home and community, shape learners' perspectives and experiences, guiding their understanding of the world.

Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators, modelling behaviours and encouraging learners to participate actively in their education. The "I do, we do, you do" approach emphasises the gradual release of responsibility, allowing learners to build confidence as they engage in social interactions. Through this process, students safely encounter challenges.

### *Executive Functions*
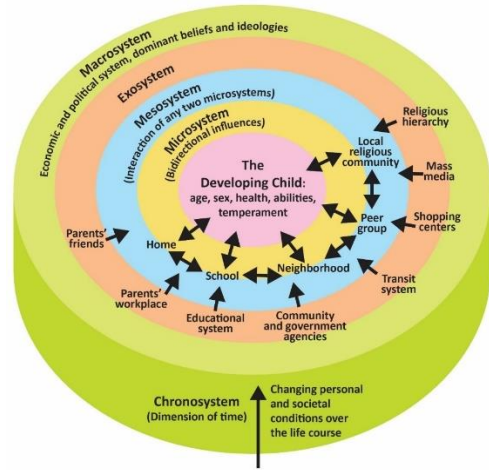*Emotional regulation*
*Flexibility*
*Metacognition*
*Goal-directed persistence*

### *Links to learning needs*
*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*
*Social Communication Disorder*
*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*



*A child's development is shaped by interconnected systems—family, community, and society working together.*

## Links to Play

Play serves as a vital context for social learning, offering learners opportunities to observe, imitate, and interact with others meaningfully. Through play, students engage in role-playing, cooperative games, and group activities that foster collaboration and communication. Observing peers during play allows learners to experiment with social norms and behaviours, facilitating the development of empathy and moral understanding. This playful exploration enhances cognitive skills while strengthening social connections, helping students build character and navigate their social worlds effectively.

# Play (Flow and Balance in Learning)
*Achieving a state of flow where the balance between challenge and skill leads to deep engagement and learning.*

**Links to theory**
Grounded in Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory, this section accurately describes how balancing challenge and skill during play leads to deep engagement. It aligns with Constructivist theories (Piaget, Bruner), which highlight learning through active exploration and hands-on engagement. Additionally, it reflects Montessori's approach, which emphasises self-directed, purposeful play as a means for children to explore their environment and develop cognitive, social, and motor skills. Montessori's belief in providing structured, yet flexible, play activities supports the idea that play fosters independence, resilience, and intrinsic motivation, all essential for holistic development.

# Overview

Play plays a vital role in the learning process, particularly when learners achieve a state of flow where challenge meets skill. This highlights the importance of play in creating a balanced educational environment that enhances creativity, intrinsic motivation, and deep engagement in learning. Play allows students to take on challenges safely and creatively, providing a context for exploring new ideas and strategies without fear of failure.



*Through play and imagination, young people can experiment with ideas and versions of themselves, exploring and developing strategies for adulthood and the real world.*

Through play, learners can experiment with different versions of themselves in low-stakes scenarios. They collaborate and construct knowledge together, engaging in activities that are both enjoyable and educational. The process of play encourages students to challenge themselves just above their current level of cognition, promoting growth and resilience. When learning is framed as fun, students are more likely to embrace challenges, view setbacks as opportunities for growth, and develop a growth mindset.

Play also encourages creativity and divergent thinking, allowing students to explore multiple solutions to problems until they find order and understanding. Structured playtime can be both individual and collaborative, enabling learners to label and organise their experiences and predictions about the world. This playful experimentation helps students refine their understanding and adapt their strategies based on feedback and results.

Through play, learners create mental avatars of themselves, safely trying out different roles and situations. They learn to navigate various social contexts, observe and imitate others, and develop empathy and ethics through their interactions. This process fosters a theory of mind, enabling students to understand and relate to the perspectives of others, ultimately shaping their character and moral reasoning.

Positive relationships are crucial for effective play, as they provide the support and safety needed for learners to engage in challenges. By fostering an environment where struggle can be safely navigated, students can build resilience and self-regulation, essential skills for lifelong learning.



*Through play, children rehearse for the challenges of adulthood, building skills, resilience, and creativity for the future.*

## *Executive Functions*
*Flexibility*
*Emotional regulation*
*Goal-directed persistence*

## *Links to learning needs*
*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*
*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*
*Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)*
*Intellectual Disabilities*



*Play engages both body and mind to inspire growth and learning. Chess and rugby are examples of the strategic and physical elements of battle engaged safely.*