

Core Pathway Curriculum Rationale

Context

At Cleaswell Hill, our Core Pathway curriculum is designed to meet the complex and evolving needs of learners with significant barriers to conventional models of education. These pupils often operate within the concrete operational stage of cognitive development and experience co-occurring conditions that impact their ability to access abstract concepts and retain knowledge through traditional approaches.

Drawing on evidence from classroom practice, assessment data, and cognitive science, including Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, we have developed a curriculum that reduces extraneous cognitive load and supports meaningful learning. By simplifying content, using consistent structures, and embedding repetition, we ensure that pupils' working memory is not overwhelmed, allowing them to build secure schema and deepen understanding over time.

The curriculum is underpinned by a skills-oriented, thematic, project-based approach that is practical and appropriate to prepare pupils for their futures. It promotes engagement, independence, and functional learning, while being informed by therapeutic principles and designed collaboratively by education and therapy teams to support whole-person development.

Intent

The intent of the Core Pathway curriculum is to provide a rich, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate learning experience that enables pupils to:

- Develop essential life skills and functional independence
- Explore identity, relationships, and community
- Engage meaningfully with the natural and digital world
- Build confidence, curiosity, and resilience through hands-on, cross-curricular learning

The foundation curriculum is structured around three overarching themes across both Junior and senior phases:

1. 'Me and my community' (junior) moving into 'Belonging and Beyond' (senior)
2. 'My Experience in the Natural World' (junior) moving into 'Our World Through Time' (senior)
3. 'Preparing for a Connected World' (junior) moving into 'Education for a Connected World' (senior)

These themes are explored through termly focus areas that integrate foundation subjects such as Science, Geography, History, RE, Computing, Music, Art, DT, and

Citizenship. The thematic approach ensures relevance and personal significance, while supporting holistic development and cross-contextual learning.

In addition to the thematic curriculum, core subjects; Literacy, Numeracy, PSHEE/RSE, and Physical Education, are taught discretely. These are carefully matched to each pupil's ability and level of need, ensuring targeted progression and meaningful access to essential learning. This dual approach allows for both integrated and focused development across the curriculum.

Implementation

The curriculum is delivered through a spiral model, where key concepts and skills are revisited with increasing complexity. This supports retention, generalisation, and the ability to apply learning in varied contexts. Pupils engage in project-based learning that is practical, sensory-rich, and aligned with therapeutic strategies.

In line with Cognitive Load Theory, we minimise unnecessary cognitive demands and optimise learning by:

- Breaking down tasks into manageable steps.
- Using visual and sensory supports.
- Embedding routine and repetition.
- Presenting information in accessible formats.

Teaching notes and flexible timetabling support responsive delivery tailored to individual needs. The integration of therapy-informed strategies and play-based learning is central to developing the behaviours for learning that underpin sustained engagement and progress.

Senior pupils also benefit from a growing emphasis on preparation for adulthood, including digital literacy, emotional wellbeing, and community participation. This ensures continuity and progression from the Junior phase, while supporting transition and independence.

Impact

The curriculum was launched in September 2025 and will be monitored closely by teaching and therapy teams. Pupil outcomes, engagement levels, and staff feedback will inform ongoing refinement of the framework, pedagogy, and assessment.

Progress will be measured through a combination of formative and summative assessments, observational data, and therapy input. Teachers will use individual learning plans and EHCP targets to track development across academic, social, and emotional domains.

Regular pupil progress meetings and multidisciplinary reviews will ensure that provision remains responsive and personalised. Feedback from pupils, families, and



staff will be used to adapt curriculum content, delivery methods, and support strategies.

The curriculum is designed to support long-term outcomes, including preparation for adulthood. This includes developing independence, communication, emotional regulation, and community participation. Senior pupils will engage in learning that promotes digital literacy, vocational awareness, and life skills essential for successful transition beyond school.

Ultimately, our goal is to empower every learner to become the best version of themselves: confident, capable, and connected to their world.

September 2025