

LEARNING & TEACHING POLICY

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LEARNING & TEACHING POLICY

Mission

We believe in investing in people. As professionals in the teaching and training professions, we strive to provide a better future for the children, young people and home settings we work with. Success for us means unleashing the potential of each individual so they can grow, develop and reach the potential of which they are capable. Our values are grounded in our determination to be the change we want to see in the world, through passion, commitment and integrity. We strive to plant a seed of kindness and compassion in a generation that will produce resilience and hope and enable them to aspire and achieve productive and fulfilled lives. Our success is measured in the lives we changed.

At the Omnia Foundation, we create a secure and safe environment that encourages communication, self-belief, mutual respect and success. We provide a rich and balanced curriculum that develops every child, allowing them to achieve their true potential.

Aims of the policy:

- to outline the rationale behind the foundation's approach to learning and teaching
- to ensure that the standard of learning opportunities is consistent across the foundation
- to ensure that the needs of our students and their vastly differently learning styles are consistently met, enabling them to achieve to the very best of their ability

This policy is written in light of and should be read in conjunction with the foundation Me, Myself and I Policy, the Curriculum Policy and the Assessment, Recording and Reporting Policy.

This policy recognises

- 1) that each of our students is enrolled at a different point in their educational journey and at different points throughout the year
 - 2) that our students' difficulties mean that their processing capabilities, working memory and expressive language may be compromised and therefore acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding will necessarily take longer than their neurotypical peers
 - 3) that all our students will have had a negative experience of education, where they have been excluded from multiple settings, including mainstream schools, Pupil Referral Units, alternative provisions and residential care
 - 4) that all our students' self-esteem is poor and anxiety levels high around education and that simply having to walk into a "classroom" can be traumatic
 - 5) that whilst our students may be of secondary age and that their physical development may be in line with age-related expectations, more often than not their emotional development and levels of maturity are significantly behind their peers due to their disabilities and the compounding nature of their educational experience
 - 6) that, in accordance with Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, meaningful learning cannot take place until a person's basic needs, such as food, sleep and nurturing, have been met.
 - 7) that, in light of our students' academic history and educational journey, our curriculum must be a vehicle for an education that will be useful in life and that will be time efficient, given that some of our students enrol in Year 10 and Year 11 and may not have the same broad and deep knowledge and understanding that their neurotypical peers in mainstream may have
 - 8) that traditional methods of curriculum delivery have failed these students and that operating under the premise that if "we do what we've always done, we'll get what we've always got," further traditional models of education are likely to fail as well
 - 9) that education need not stop at age 16 and that if students experience success in areas in which they are competent and which they enjoy, and their confidence grows, they will develop a love of learning over time
 - 10) that given all of the above, our approach to learning and teaching will inevitably be flexible and responsive, highly individualised and tailored specifically to the needs, abilities and preferences of the students in our care whose wellbeing is of paramount importance to us as an organisation
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What is learning?

At the Omnia Foundation, we view learning in its broadest possible sense. Given their starting points, we believe that our students have a better chance at self-actualisation if their primary needs are met. Therefore, our main priority is to support students' personal development and build confidence so there is heavy emphasis on learning social and emotional strategies that will underpin their journey towards vocational success and lifelong learning.

We believe that learning continues way past the age of 16 and that our students' needs are best served by promoting a love of learning within contexts that interest and engage them. Socially and emotionally, our students have a great deal of catching up to do and most are disheartened by and consequently disengaged from a wholly academic curriculum.

We aim therefore to rebuild their self-esteem through a well-planned and relevant curriculum that will stimulate them and inspire them to progress further a little later in life, when they feel more ready to face the learning challenges that have led them to their current situation.

Enjoyment and Engagement

Given that our students have in the main had negative experiences of education, it is of the utmost importance to staff at the Omnia Foundation that our young people enjoy their learning experience with us; that they feel accepted; that they feel able to express themselves; that they feel understood and that they want to come to learn every day. Levels of attendance are used as an indicator of student engagement and we strive to improve attendance on-site through provision of exciting, motivating and high level learning experiences.

How are the students grouped?

Students are grouped into hubs of no more than five with up to four adults to support. They are grouped primarily according to optimum conditions for learning and emotional development rather than age or ability and this is assessed as part of the induction programme.

How is learning delivered?

In most secondary provision, lessons are delivered in timed slots by a subject specialist and students move from room to room. We have found that this model is acutely disruptive for our students and causes much emotional upheaval with far too many transition points, thus resulting in a great deal of learning lost.

For some of our students, predominantly those on the autistic spectrum, a primary model works well with a timetabled slot each day for a given subject area.

For most of our students, however, these kinds of approaches take little account of their mood, personal preference or disposition at a given time towards a subject area. We recognise, for example, that many of our students may not be ready for an English lesson first thing in the morning or that, following an episode of crisis, they may not feel up to engaging in intellectual activity of any kind. A timetabled structure therefore is likely to be more of a hindrance than a help to the majority of our students.

With this in mind, we use a model of student-directed timetabling of adult-directed learning. Students have the opportunity to engage in different activities when they are ready for them across the course of a week, rather than enforcing a particular time slot. Similarly, if a student is deeply engaged in a task, there is no expectation that they shift their attention away from it purely because the timetable says they must.

In this way, students have greater control over their learning and as a result are far more productive, enthusiastic, experience a greater degree of success and are therefore more receptive over time to engaging in working towards formal qualifications. Learning is highly tailored with staff planning a range of activities in a number of curriculum areas that will be on offer over the course of a week or several weeks, depending on the topic and the focus for learning. A structure such as this also enables teachers and staff to target specific learning objectives for each individual student and work with them closely to narrow gaps in learning and identify areas that have been lost over time.

Ensuring Progression

Since all our students arrive at different ages, in different year groups and at different times during the academic year, it is important to show how a student might progress through their learning. Our Thrive data shows that on arrival students are very often at the "Being" stage of development. Whilst at this stage, engagement with learning is limited, but once students reach the upper end of "Doing" stage and the lower end of "Thinking", their engagement increases and they can make rapid progress. Staff plan differentiated learning experiences broadly using the table in Appendix VII which is drawn from Bloom's Taxonomy.

How is the provision staffed?

Each hub has a qualified teacher, a Higher Level Teaching Assistant, an Emotional Wellbeing Coordinator and sometimes a Student Advocate.

The SEN teacher is responsible for planning the learning for the hub and will constantly assess and review the needs of each student in their care, adjusting and reshaping activities and learning experiences to ensure that learning is consolidated or extended depending on the students' starting points.

The Higher Level Teaching Assistant provides support for the teacher and consistency for the students in the event of teacher absence. HLTAs will deliver learning, plan experiences and work with students 1-2-1. They will feedback to the teacher who will make judgments on the student's learning based on this information.

The Emotional Wellbeing Co-ordinator is responsible for supporting the emotional and social development of each student. They plan and deliver a programme of intervention based on each student's individual needs and work with the hub team to ensure that experiences are well-matched. They work with other therapeutic practitioners within the foundation to ensure that students' emotional regulation and social skills are constantly developed in order to minimise impact of dysregulation on relationships and learning. They work alongside home settings to ensure that strategies being used in school are supported at home.

The student advocate supports students with strategies that will help sustain concentration or shift attention from one activity to another. Often specific resources are referred to in the Education, Health and Care Plan that are designed to support students' development and student advocates will model these strategies and practise them with students to encourage independence.

What is the role of staff within the hub?

Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and development of each student in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each young person in all areas of experience.

The foundation aims to provide a high-quality environment both indoors and out, which supports students' emotional wellbeing and helps them to be motivated to learn.

Staff are expected to evaluate students' observations of the environment and take these into account to determine how the environment can be enhanced.

Staff are expected to respect students and create a safe environment for them to try out new skills without fear of failure. This will include:

- Establishing boundaries and expectations in line with the Rights and Responsibilities Policy.
- Spending quality time supporting students in accessing equipment and learning helpful routines that will be beneficial in life
- Working alongside students and listening and responding to their learning needs as they happen
- Modelling ideas and language
- Asking questions and making suggestions, which help extend students' learning
- Offering students additional resources to enable them to extend their ideas further

Observing students' learning

The vast majority of students on entry to the foundation lack basic literacy skills. This is often a source of great shame and embarrassment for the students and rebuilding their confidence in this regard forms a large part of the work we do. It does mean that initially written outcomes are limited - staff often scribe for students - and therefore observations of learning are crucial as they provide the majority of evidence of progress.

Findings from these observations will have an impact on what is planned for students' next steps. Through observations, practitioners will be able to identify key elements of students' responses and reactions to learning experiences, their interests and patterns of learning and development. Written and photographic observations are recorded on EFL, an online learning log which enables staff to capture many aspects of students' performance and achievement.

As mentioned earlier, routines can impact negatively on the effectiveness of some learning experiences, especially in regards to high quality assessment. It may be the case that routines disrupt students' learning, curtailing the opportunity to spend quality time exploring their ideas. It is important to establish an environment and culture that enables students to make choices about and direct their learning.

Active Learning

Staff at the Omnia Foundation are expected to plan and deliver tasks and activities that are designed to engage, inspire, empower and motivate learners. Therefore, it is a requirement to prioritise learning experiences in which students are expected to engage as active participants as opposed to passive recipients. The principles of assessment for learning promote active learning as they are based largely around talk-based activities. Active learning also provides teachers and support staff to be creative in the planning process and really think outside of the box rather than relying on worksheets or powerpoint presentations.

Assessment for Learning

Assessing and evaluating our students' achievement presents a challenge as many traditional models of assessment, eg tests, would serve only to demotivate them and further compound their low self-esteem. Full details of how we assess and the tools we use can be found in the Assessment, Recording & Reporting Policy but for the purposes of learning and teaching, all practitioners at the Omnia Foundation must have a good understanding of and be experts at using assessment for learning strategies as an integral part of their daily practice.

Questioning

In order to avoid a culture of "learned helplessness," where students depend almost exclusively on staff intervention and support to accomplish tasks, and promote independence and resilience in learning, questioning is a vital technique.

When students are questioned, information is directed through parts of the brain that necessarily have to process and require students therefore to engage in thinking. For example, using questions such as, "What do you notice about this picture?" or "How do you think we can solve this problem?" is far more effective and offers a richer learning experience than telling a student, "Look at the sunshine reflected in the water," or "We need to add these two numbers together and then subtract from ..."

Questioning promotes enquiry and thinking skills. It is vital that good questioning is modelled by staff as, over time, these skills become internalised and students will begin to pose their own questions and learning becomes more meaningful.

Staff are trained to use a variety of questioning techniques and this forms the central tool for learning in each hub.

Student Talk

Talk – discussion and conversation – is central to learning and teaching at the Omnia Foundation and follows on naturally from good questioning. The optimum ratio of student/teacher talk is 4:1, meaning that in a five-minute chunk of learning time, students should be talking for 4 minutes and teachers for 1. It is important that having asked a question, practitioners allow sufficient time for students to respond, especially as the young people at the Omnia Foundation already have difficulties with processing and executive function.

Student verbal responses are fundamental to assessment, particularly as has already been highlighted, their capabilities with written language are limited, either from a stamina point of view or simply in terms of motor skills. Practitioners can learn a great deal from engaging in meaningful discussion with students on a given area of experience and notes from these observations will be recorded, either by hand or digitally, as part of the student's record of learning.

Talk also enables students to clarify their thinking. Being able to articulate thoughts, feelings, attitudes and preferences is essential in promoting independence and ultimately, for students at the Omnia Foundation, in developing strong emotional regulation.

Self-review

It is important for students to be able to reflect on their own performance at all levels. This is built-in to the Transcend Qualifications and forms part of the assessment criteria but self-review should not be limited to this alone. Self-awareness forms part of the foundation's core value of being Independent and so self-review and being able to identify one's own areas of strength and areas for development forms a central part of our approach to learning and teaching. It leads to more meaningful learning experiences, as, using the student's self-evaluation, staff will plan activities and tasks that will be informed by the student's own understanding of where they are in their learning journey. Students are far more likely to engage in learning if they can see its relevance and impact.

Feedback

It is important for students to be able to respond positively to constructive advice, guidance and support in all aspects of their learning, whether this is intellectual, vocational or social and emotional. Again, this is reflected in the foundation's core values of being Open-minded and Independent.

Staff will give students feedback in a variety of ways – written or verbal – always ensuring that it is given sensitively and using models of language that will be best understood by the students in their care. Students are expected to act on advice given to the best of their ability, always trying hard to improve their performance at all levels.

Monitoring and Review

This policy is monitored regularly by the Head of Foundation and Head of Curriculum and Qualifications and is reviewed annually by the Head of Foundation.

APPENDIX

Progression through differentiation and content design

The vast majority of students who come to us demonstrate very little – if any – readiness to learn. This is evidenced through our Thrive baseline assessments. These are completed as part of the induction process and show that, on arrival, very many of our students, having experienced negative judgments, which have impacted traumatically on their self-esteem, are in the “Being” stage of emotional development (around 0-6 months) where the key foci are safety, having their needs met and being special. As a result of these baselines, we work therapeutically with each student in the first instance in order to build their resilience for learning. Our Thrive data shows that once they have built trusting relationships with us, are gaining confidence and reach the “Thinking” phase of Thrive, their academic progress is rapid: their engagement in learning increases, their self-esteem improves with their academic success and this in turn leads to impact on their emotional development, deepening their understanding of themselves and their capabilities.

In addition to these hugely variable starting points, our students come to us at different points in their educational journey, some as late as Year 11 and are grouped according to optimum conditions for learning rather than age or ability. Planning therefore needs to be flexible to respond to each individual student’s needs and ensure that they make good progress from their starting points. As a result, we plan flexible topics, usually half termly, around the needs of the students at that given point. These are carefully tracked to ensure progression.

In subjects where we offer qualifications, students progress through Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 standards. These are set out clearly in the Appendices to the Curriculum Policy.

In subjects where qualifications are not currently offered by the foundation, notably science, art & design and computing and ICT, progression is addressed through differentiation and content design. This means that progression is evidenced in how well the students “know” the content and what they are able to do with it. As their confidence in themselves strengthens and their readiness to learn becomes more keen, staff plan increasingly more challenging experiences and opportunities year on year, all the while deepening their knowledge and understanding of a given topic. Students progress through this at their own pace, which will invariably be more rapid in some areas than others. For example, it might take a student two years to get to the “Thinking” stage of Thrive, where they begin to engage with and participate actively in their learning but once there, they may sail through the progression ladder outlined in the table below fairly quickly, achieving an Entry Level qualification in as little as 6 weeks. Similarly, rates of progress will differ across different subject areas depending on students’ preferences and capabilities.

Students progress broadly following the trajectory below.

Omnia Foundation Progression Ladder										
Step One			Step Two				Step Three			Step Four
Remember	Understand	Apply with Support	Apply	Analyse with support	Evaluate with support	Create with Support	Analyse	Evaluate	Create with Support	Create
Copy Define Find Locate Listen Google Repeat Retrieve Outline Memorise Search Identify Select Match Bullet-point	Relate Summarise Categorise Sort Predict Paraphrase Compare Contrast Comment Infer Estimate	Reenact Choose Select Judge Examine Experiment Hack Interview Paint Prepare Present Display	Reenact Choose Select Judge Examine Experiment Hack Interview Paint Prepare Present Display	Break down Deconstruct Link Mash MindMap Organise Appraise Deduce Distinguish Illustrate Question Structure Explain Consider	Argue Validate Test Assess Criticise Comment Debate Defend Persuade Hypothesise Measure Pose Rate Reflect Review Edit	Blog Build Animate Adapt Collaborate Compose Direct Devise Podcast Wiki build Write Film Program Simulate Role play Solve Negotiate Lead	Break down Deconstruct Link Mash MindMap Organise Appraise Deduce Distinguish Illustrate Question Structure Explain Consider	Argue Validate Test Assess Criticise Comment Debate Defend Persuade Hypothesise Measure Pose Rate Reflect Review Edit	Blog Build Animate Adapt Collaborate Compose Direct Devise Podcast Wiki build Write Film Program Simulate Role play Solve Negotiate Lead	Blog Build Animate Adapt Collaborate Compose Direct Devise Podcast Wiki build Write Film Program Simulate Role play Solve Negotiate Lead

The student - knows what a hydrocarbon is and can give an example - understands what crude oil is and that it is known as a fossil fuel - knows that crude oil is refined to produce a number of different products and can name some of them - knows that crude oil will run out and is beginning to understand that this means it is a non-renewable fossil fuel - can present this information in a simple form, eg a poster or powerpoint slide	The student - can explain that crude oil is refined by the process of fractional distillation using the correct vocabulary - can recall the names and uses of all fractions - is deepening their understanding of non-renewable fossil fuels - confidently recalls that petrol, kerosene and diesel oil are non-renewable fossil fuels obtained from crude oil and methane is a non-renewable fossil fuel found in natural gas - is beginning to understand and question the impact of crude oil reserves depleting and therefore the need for renewable fuel sources - is beginning to reflect on the impact of fossil fuels on the environment and is able to identify some solutions to the problems - is beginning to identify features of vehicles that make them more "environmentally friendly"	The student - can describe the complete combustion of hydrocarbon fuels as a reaction in which carbon dioxide is produced and energy is given out - can recall that the incomplete combustion of hydrocarbon fuels can produce carbon and carbon monoxide - knows that carbon monoxide is a toxic gas - can describe the problems caused by incomplete combustion, producing carbon monoxide and soot in appliances that use carbon compounds as fuels - can describe how the impurities in some hydrocarbon fuels result in the production of sulphur dioxide - can describe some problems associated with acid rain, caused when sulphur dioxide dissolves in rain water - is able to compare two or more models/ makes of vehicle and evaluate their environmental impact	The student - can recall that when fuels are burned in engines, oxygen and nitrogen react together at high temperatures to produce oxides of nitrogen which are pollutants - can describe how cracking involves the breakdown of larger hydrocarbon molecules into smaller more useful ones and is able to explain why they are more useful - can explain why cracking is necessary - confidently recalls all the knowledge in the unit, eg can produce an educational video for younger students on the subject or produce an information film about the dangers of carbon monoxide and how we can mitigate the risk - is able to construct an argument for and against aspects of the unit, eg the advantages and disadvantages of using hydrogen rather than petrol in cars - is able to participate in a debate around models/makes of vehicles and their environmental impact
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