

Riverstone Academy Curriculum Policy

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1. Introduction

At Riverstone Academy, we believe that our school's curriculum goes beyond subjects taught on a timetable. Learning takes place throughout the whole school day and includes the development of communication, emotional regulation, independence, relationships, social understanding and life skills alongside academic knowledge and skills.

Our pupils have a range of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their strengths, needs and learning profiles may develop and change over time. Our curriculum is therefore ambitious, personalised, flexible and responsive, while remaining carefully planned and sequenced.

We recognise that pupils with SEND may have uneven learning profiles. A pupil may demonstrate relatively advanced knowledge and understanding within one curriculum area while requiring significantly earlier or more developmentally sequenced learning within another.

Our curriculum is therefore built around a fundamental principle:

We identify what each pupil already knows, what they need to learn next and the most appropriate way for them to access that learning.

This enables every pupil to make meaningful progress from their individual starting points while maintaining high expectations and preparing them for their next stage of education and life.

2. Curriculum Intent

At Riverstone Academy, our curriculum is designed to recognise, nurture, and build upon the individual strengths of every learner.

Rooted in our vision "From Strength, We Grow" we provide an inclusive, ambitious and highly personalised curriculum that enables all children to make meaningful progress from their individual starting points.

Our curriculum aims to:

- develop secure and increasingly sophisticated knowledge and skills;
- identify and address gaps in prior learning;
- develop communication and interaction;
- promote emotional regulation, well-being and positive relationships;
- develop confidence, resilience and self-esteem;
- increase independence;
- provide meaningful opportunities to apply learning;
- develop functional skills for everyday life;
- provide a broad range of experiences and opportunities;
- prepare pupils for their next stage of education and ultimately, adulthood.

Our curriculum is underpinned by our core values of **GROW**:

G – Growth:

We ensure every learner makes meaningful progress from their individual starting points through a carefully sequenced curriculum that builds knowledge, skills, confidence and independence over time.

R – Respect:

We create a safe, inclusive environment where every pupil feels valued, develops positive relationships and learns to understand and respect themselves and others.

O – Opportunity:

We provide personalised, engaging learning experiences that enable all pupils to access a broad curriculum, explore their interests and achieve success in ways that are meaningful to them.

W – Wellbeing:

We prioritise pupils' emotional, physical and mental wellbeing, ensuring they feel safe, regulated and ready to learn so they can thrive both in school and beyond.

3. Curriculum Implementation and Pathways

Our curriculum is implemented through a structured, sequential and highly personalised approach.

Learning builds on what pupils already know. Teachers use assessment, observation, knowledge of the pupil, EHCP outcomes and previous learning to identify appropriate next steps.

The curriculum is not organised on the assumption that chronological age alone determines what a pupil should be taught.

Instead Teachers consider:

What does the pupil already know?

What gaps or misconceptions are present?

What does the pupil need to learn next?

Where does this learning sit within the curriculum progression?

What is the most appropriate way for the pupil to access it?

How securely has the pupil learned it?

This allows curriculum decisions to be responsive to individual learning profiles while maintaining clear progression and ambition.

4. Curriculum Reference and Individual Starting Points

At Riverstone, chronological age does not automatically determine the curriculum reference from which a pupil learns. The year group identified within subject planning is a Curriculum Reference. It identifies where particular knowledge and skills sit within Riverstone's planned and sequenced curriculum. It does not label the pupil or determine the curriculum levels they must access across every subject.

Assessment of prior knowledge and understanding is used to identify the appropriate point within each subject's progression.

A pupil who is chronologically in Year 6 may, for example, require:

- Year 2 curriculum reference within Science
- Year 4 curriculum reference within Mathematics

- An age appropriate shared context within History
- Year 6 curriculum content within Art

This is not inconsistency. It reflects the uneven profiles that pupils with SEND may present with and ensures new learning is built upon secure foundations.

Where significant gaps in prerequisite knowledge are identified, teachers may select learning from an earlier point within the curriculum sequence rather than simply reducing the difficulty of age-related content.

Equally, requiring significant adaptation does not mean that a pupil needs an earlier curriculum reference.

Curriculum content and curriculum access are separate decisions.

5. How Pupils Access the Curriculum

Riverstone uses Formal, Transitional and Semi-Formal approaches to enable pupils to access meaningful and ambitious learning.

These approaches are not fixed ability groups, age-related pathways or permanent labels attached to pupils.

A pupil may access learning differently:

- Across different curriculum areas;
- At different points in their education;
- according to the nature of the knowledge being taught;
- as their communication, cognition and independence and learning needs develop.

Pupils are therefore not described simply as a “Formal Pupil”, “Transitional Pupil” or “Semi-Formal Pupil”.

Instead, staff identify the curriculum learning the pupil require and the most appropriate method of access.

Formal Curriculum Access

Formal Curriculum Access enables pupils to engage with subject-specific knowledge and skills from the identified point within the curriculum sequence with reasonable adjustments where required.

Learning is typically characterised by :

- explicit subject-specific teaching;
- carefully sequenced knowledge and skills;
- increasing use of subject-specific vocabulary;
- opportunities to retrieve, apply and connect knowledge;
- subject -specific enquiry and reasoning;
- increasing independence;
- discussion and explanation;
- appropriate methods of recording.

Visual support, modelling, scaffolding, communication support or adult assistance may be required. The presence of these reasonable adjustments does not, in itself, mean that the pupil requires a different curriculum approach.

6. Transitional Curriculum and Access

The Transitional Curriculum provides a developmentally sequenced bridge between early learning and increasingly formal subject learning for pupils who require pre-requisite knowledge, communication, cognition and learning behaviours to be explicitly developed.

It is ambitious and carefully sequenced, rather than being a simplified version of the formal curriculum.

Within areas such as Reading, Writing and Mathematics, the Transitional Curriculum explicitly develops the foundations required for increasingly formal learning.

For example, Transitional Mathematics begins with foundational mathematical understanding and uses practical, concrete and meaningful experiences before building towards increasingly formal mathematics.

Transitional Writing recognises that conventional writing depends upon communication, vocabulary, attention, physical control, fine motor development, mark making and early phonics and therefore explicitly develops these foundations.

Transitional Reading similarly provides a sequenced progression from attention to sounds, pictures and print through phonological awareness, phonics, word reading, comprehension and narrative development.

Transitional teaching may include:

- practical and experiential learning;
- concrete resources;
- visual representations;
- structured routines;
- modelling;
- repetition and overlearning;
- reduced abstraction;
- supported communication;
- carefully scaffolded tasks;
- functional application;
- meaningful real-life contexts.

The Transitional curriculum also provides distinctive areas of curriculum entitlement where these are appropriate to pupils' developmental needs.

These include areas such as:

- Independence;
- Play and Leisure;
- Physical Wellbeing;
- Outdoor Schooling;
- The World About Us

These areas develop communication, interaction, independence, regulation, safety, functional application and preparation for later life.

For example, Riverstone's independence curriculum focuses upon real-life skills including travel, shopping, cooking, decision-making and safety.

Play and Leisure has its own developmental progression and is recognised as a core area of learning rather than an optional enrichment activity.

Pupils are not permanently assigned to the Transitional curriculum across all areas of learning. A pupil may require Transitional learning within one area while accessing Formal or Semi-Formal learning within another.

7. Semi-Formal Curriculum and Access

Semi-Formal curriculum access is appropriate where pupils require learning to be rooted more substantially in concrete experience, communication, interaction, cognition, independence and functional application.

Learning remains purposeful, ambitious and developmentally appropriate.

Semi-Formal learning may include:

- communication and interaction;
- engagement and shared attention;
- early cognition;
- cause and effect;
- matching and sorting;
- sequencing;
- early concepts;
- sensory exploration with a clear learning purpose;
- play and exploration;
- functional independence;
- relationships;
- emotional regulation;
- real-life experiences;
- established communication systems including symbols, signing, AAC, objects and gesture.

Where appropriate, Semi-Formal learners participate within the same shared curriculum context as pupils accessing Transitional or Formal learning.

Practical or sensory experiences are not used as an alternative to curriculum learning. They are used purposefully to develop meaningful concepts and enable pupils to understand and interact with the world around them.

8. Organisation of Curriculum Learning

Riverstone recognises two legitimate ways of organising curriculum learning. Neither model is inherently preferable. Teachers select the approach that provides the most meaningful progression for the pupils being taught.

8.1 - Model 1 – Different Curriculum References or Topics

Where pupils have substantially different prerequisite knowledge, pupils may access learning from different points within the subject curriculum.

For example, within Science:

- one group may access Year 2 curriculum content;
- another may access Year 4 curriculum content;
- another may access Year 6 curriculum content.

A chronological Year 6 pupil may appropriately join the group accessing Year 2 Science if assessment identifies that this is the appropriate next point in their scientific progression.

This does not make the pupil a “Year 2 learner”.

It identifies the knowledge that needs to be secured before subsequent scientific learning can meaningfully develop.

8.2 - Model 2 – Shared Curriculum Context with Different Intended Learning

Where appropriate, pupils learn through a common curriculum context while their intended learning and methods of access differ.

For example, pupils studying a shared historical context may experience common:

- artefacts;
- stories;
- visits;
- vocabulary;
- photographs;
- practical activities;
- discussions.

One pupil may develop age-related historical knowledge and enquiry.

Another may access the context transitionally through structured comparison, sequencing, concrete artefacts and supported communication.

Another may access the same context semi-formally through early concepts such as:

past/present; old/new; same/different; sequence and change.

This allows pupils to experience curriculum belonging and shared learning experiences without requiring identical learning intentions.

Teachers determine which model to use by considering the pupil's existing knowledge and the progression within the subject.

9. Key Features of Curriculum Implementation

9.1 - Personalised Learning

Learning is informed by pupils' individual starting points, strengths, needs, EHCP outcomes and ongoing assessment. Staff use detailed knowledge of pupils to adapt content, communication, teaching approaches, resources and support while maintaining appropriate ambition.

9.2 - Structured and Sequential Curriculum

Learning is carefully sequenced so that new knowledge builds upon prior learning.

Teachers establish what pupils already know before introducing new concepts and identify gaps or misconceptions that may prevent future learning. Knowledge and concepts are revisited where necessary to support retention and application.

9.3 - Communication at the Core

Communication is integral to all areas of the Riverstone curriculum.

A total communication approach may include:

- spoken language;
- visual support;
- symbols;
- signing;
- AAC;
- objects;
- gesture;
- modelling;
- language-rich environments.

Pupils' understanding should not be judged solely by their ability to communicate through speech or conventional writing.

9.4 - Practical, Experiential and Multi-Sensory Learning

Practical, experiential and multi-sensory approaches are used where they improve access to the intended learning. Experiences are purposeful and linked to identified curriculum knowledge, concepts, communication or functional outcomes.

9.5 – Independence and Life Skills

Opportunities to develop independence, self-care, decision-making, problem-solving and functional life skills are embedded throughout the school day.

9.5 - Environment, Wellbeing, Relationships and Therapeutic Support

We recognise that pupils' emotional regulation, sense of safety and relationships can significantly influence their readiness to learn. Classrooms are structured but responsive. Staff use predictable routines, positive relationships, appropriate regulation strategies and supportive environments to reduce barriers to learning.

9.6 - Collaborative Practice

Staff work collaboratively with families and relevant external professionals to support pupils' learning and development.

10. Individualised and Small Group Teaching

Riverstone's small-school structure enables teaching to be highly responsive.

Learning may take place through:

- whole-class shared experiences;

- small groups;
- paired learning;
- individual teaching;
- 1:1 or 2:1 support where identified as necessary.

Grouping is flexible and may reflect the curriculum knowledge being taught, developmental starting points, communication needs or individual support requirements rather than chronological age alone. Where individual staffing arrangements are required, these are informed by pupils' EHCPs, risk assessments, professional advice and discussion with parents/carers where appropriate.

11. Knowledge and Development of Staff

The quality of Riverstone's curriculum depends upon staff understanding both what pupils need to learn and how individual pupils learn most effectively.

Riverstone therefore supports ongoing professional development relevant to pupils' needs and staff roles.

Professional development may include areas such as:

- SEND pedagogy;
- autism;
- SEMH;
- trauma-informed practice;
- communication;
- phonics and literacy;
- mathematics;
- emotional regulation;
- positive behaviour support;
- curriculum and assessment;
- subject knowledge;
- safeguarding;
- therapeutic and specialist approaches where appropriate.

Staff are encouraged to share expertise and work collaboratively to develop curriculum practice.

12. Curriculum Planning

Planning at Riverstone operates at three interconnected levels.

12.1 Long-Term Planning

Long-term plans establish curriculum entitlement and progression. They identify the sequence of significant knowledge, concepts and skills across curriculum areas and provide teachers with clarity about how learning develops over time. Long-term planning provides the reference point from which appropriate learning can be selected according to pupils' starting points.

12.2 Medium-Term Planning

Medium-term plans provide the bridge between long-term curriculum progression and responsive classroom teaching. Where appropriate to the curriculum area, medium-term planning identifies:

- Subject/Area of Learning;
- Term;
- Curriculum Reference;
- Unit;
- Shared Context;
- Prior Learning;
- Anticipated Gaps and Misconceptions;
- End Point/Intended Learning;
- Key Vocabulary;
- assessment opportunities;
- weekly learning sequence;
- subject-specific knowledge, concepts and enquiry/skills;
- approaches for accessing the unit;
- appropriate forms of evidence.

An Ongoing Assessment and Review section provides a live element to medium-term planning, enabling significant misconceptions, secure learning, successful adaptations and learning requiring consolidation to inform subsequent teaching. Medium-term plans do not need to become separate Formal, Transitional and Semi-Formal lesson plans. They establish the curriculum learning and provide appropriate examples of access. Teachers then respond to the pupils they are actually teaching.

12.3 Short-Term Planning

Teachers use professional judgement and detailed knowledge of their pupils to plan day-to-day learning. Short-term planning is responsive to:

- what pupils demonstrated in previous learning;
- current engagement and regulation;
- misconceptions;
- communication needs;
- required reasonable adjustments;
- opportunities for retrieval and consolidation;
- EHCP outcomes where relevant.

Lessons may be broken into manageable learning episodes where this supports engagement and regulation. Planning should support independence and avoid creating unnecessary adult dependency.

13. SMSC and British Values

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development is embedded throughout Riverstone's curriculum and wider school life.

Our GROW values provide a natural framework through which pupils develop:

- self-awareness;
- relationships;
- respect for others;
- understanding of difference;

- participation;
- responsibility;
- confidence;
- belonging.

Riverstone actively promotes the fundamental British values of:

- democracy;
- the rule of law;
- individual liberty;
- mutual respect;
- tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

These are taught in developmentally appropriate ways and reinforced through curriculum experiences, relationships, routines and school culture.

14. Assessment and Progress

Assessment is integral to curriculum decision-making at Riverstone.

Its primary purpose is to establish:

what the pupil knows and can do now → what needs further consolidation → what they are ready to learn next.

A range of assessment approaches is used according to individual need and the area of learning.

These may include:

- observation;
- questioning;
- discussion;
- practical demonstration;
- pupil work;
- photographs and annotated evidence;
- AAC/symbol responses;
- matching, sorting and sequencing;
- subject-specific assessments;
- phonics and reading assessment;
- standardised assessment where appropriate;
- assessment of EHCP outcomes;
- engagement and participation;
- communication;
- independence;
- application of learning in different contexts.

Standardised assessments are interpreted cautiously and alongside wider professional assessment because they may not fully reflect the complex learning profiles of pupils with SEND. This principle is already explicit within Riverstone's assessment approach.

14.1 Emerging, Developing and Secure

Where appropriate, Riverstone uses Emerging, Developing and Secure to describe how securely a pupil has achieved their identified intended learning.

Emerging – The pupil is beginning to demonstrate the intended learning. They may require significant prompting, modelling, repetition or support.

Developing – The pupil demonstrates increasing understanding and can apply the intended learning with some support, although this may not yet be consistent.

Secure – The pupil consistently demonstrates and applies the intended learning, with increasing independence and/or consistently through their usual means of communication and access.

These descriptors apply regardless of whether learning has been accessed formally, transitionally or semi-formally.

A pupil may therefore be:

Chronological Year 6 → Year 2 Curriculum Reference → Transitional Access → Secure

This means that the pupil has securely achieved the identified intended learning. It does not mean that the pupil is working securely at Year 6 expectations. Assessment should establish what the pupil knows and understands rather than being dependent upon their ability to record learning conventionally in writing. Progress may therefore be demonstrated through small but meaningful steps and may be non-linear, as already recognised within Riverstone's assessment approach.

15. Curriculum Impact

The impact of Riverstone's curriculum is reflected in pupils' knowledge, progress, engagement, communication, independence, wellbeing and increasing ability to apply their learning.

We do not judge curriculum success solely by whether pupils reach chronological age-related expectations.

We consider whether pupils:

- know more and remember more within their individual curriculum journey;
- make meaningful progress from their starting points;
- address significant gaps in prior learning;
- increasingly connect and apply knowledge;
- communicate more effectively;
- make choices and express preferences;
- develop positive relationships;
- increase their independence;
- develop resilience and confidence;
- regulate with increasing success;
- participate meaningfully in school and community life;
- apply functional skills in meaningful contexts;
- are increasingly prepared for their next stage of education and life.

Curriculum impact is monitored through a range of evidence including assessment information, pupils' work and learning evidence, learning walks, professional discussion, curriculum review, pupil progress information and feedback from pupils, parents/carers and other relevant stakeholders.

The success of Riverstone's curriculum is ultimately measured by the meaningful progress each pupil makes over time from their individual starting point – academically, socially, emotionally and developmentally – and by how effectively we prepare them for their next stage.

16. Our Curriculum Principle

At Riverstone Academy:

Chronological age does not automatically determine the curriculum reference from which a pupil learns. Assessment of prior knowledge identifies the appropriate point within each subject's progression. Pupils may therefore draw upon curriculum content from different year-group references across different subjects. Formal, Transitional and Semi-Formal approaches describe how pupils access learning and are not fixed labels attached to pupils.

Where appropriate, pupils learn through a shared curriculum context, with intended learning and access matched to individual starting points. Where significant gaps in prerequisite knowledge mean that this would not provide meaningful progression, pupils may access learning from an earlier point within the subject sequence.

Our aim is not to move pupils through year-group or pathway labels. Our aim is to establish what each pupil knows, teach the right knowledge next, provide the access they need and enable them to make meaningful and ambitious progress from their individual starting point.