

CURRICULUM POLICY



Alexander McLeod Primary School

Updated: November 2021
Date of review: November 2024

Mission statement:

At Alexander McLeod Primary School, we are passionately committed to providing our pupils with the best possible start in life. We are driven to equip every child with the knowledge, skills and values they need in order to become resilient, responsible and happy citizens of the changing world they live in. We fervently believe that all children deserve to succeed and our ultimate goal is to nurture articulate, well-informed children who are prepared for life's many opportunities and challenges.

Our aims:

- To deliver a relevant and ambitious curriculum that supports our pupils to understand the world around them and encourages them to form and express educated opinions.
- To provide an inclusive and safe environment that equips all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to unlock their full potential.
- To foster inquisitive minds, providing opportunities for all children to question, choose, evaluate and argue rationally.
- To adequately prepare children for the next stage of their educational journey.
- To maintain high expectations of our pupils' behaviour and attitude towards learning in school.
- To establish and maintain positive relationships between everybody in our school community including pupils, staff and parents, recognising each person's worth.
- To maintain a culture of mutual respect and co-operation.

The role of the curriculum

A curriculum is broadly defined as the totality of pupil experiences that occur in the educational process. Therefore, the curriculum encompasses everything taught, everything learnt and everything lived by the children each day in our school. Priestley (2019) states that 'the school curriculum is complex, involving considerations of how policy translates into practice'. With this in mind, this document is designed to establish key expectations for the curriculum without prescribing exactly how objectives must be covered and is subject to evolve over time in line with the school's changing strengths and needs.

Links to OFSTED's criteria

In January 2019, OFSTED published a draft education inspection framework in which the following were outlined as the key areas that inform judgements of schools:

- **Quality of Education**
- **Behaviour and attitudes**
- **Personal development**
- **Leadership and management**

Within these areas, the statements that relate most strongly to the curriculum are as follows:

- Leaders adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.
- The provider's curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning.

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- Learners study the full curriculum. Providers ensure this by teaching a full range of subjects for as long as possible.
- Teachers present subject matter clearly, promoting appropriate discussion about the subject matter being taught.
- Teachers create an environment that allows the learner to focus on learning. The resources and materials that teachers select – in a way that does not create unnecessary workload for staff – reflect the provider’s ambitious intentions for the course of study and clearly support the intent of a coherently planned curriculum, sequences towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment.
- Learners develop detailed knowledge and skills across the curriculum and, as a result, achieve well. Where relevant, this is reflected in results from national tests.
- The curriculum extends beyond the academic, technical or vocational and provides for learners’ broader development, enabling them to develop and discover their interests and talents.
- The curriculum and the provider’s wider work supports learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy.

Raising attainment for disadvantaged pupils

One of our key considerations at Alexander McLeod is to address the gap in attainment between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. A well-known research study showed that children from lower-income families hear a staggering 30 million fewer words than children from higher-income families by the time they are 3 years old (Hart and Risley, 2003). There is a direct correlation between this gap and the gap in attainment between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children. Therefore it follows that vocabulary is the fundamental missing piece of the jigsaw for disadvantaged children.

For this reason, our curriculum will lay equal emphasis on the knowledge we impart to children and the transferrable skills we teach them. The curriculum map will therefore show a progression in knowledge as well as skills in order to ensure that children learn to recognise and contextualize words based on the way they have been used.

Knowledge

The Prototype Theory (Rosch 1973) suggests that when we encounter words, we use our previous knowledge and experiences to inform our understanding of the word. Furthermore, over time we build up webs or networks of meaning called ‘schemata’ (Anderson 1977) and one prototype triggers another, which triggers another, and so on. In order for our pupils to be able to create these layers of meaning and association, it is vital that they encounter rich and subject-specific vocabulary across the curriculum. In this way, every subject in the curriculum serves to improve children’s literacy, rather than the other way around. Sequencing the curriculum is vital; knowledge must be deliberately and explicitly revisited throughout a Key Stage and beyond.

Skills

Although skills are not as prevalent in the current national curriculum as perhaps they were previously, they are still a fundamental part of what we teach our children. Fleetham (2018) states that ‘skills-based learning provides classroom environments where independence, thinking skills, collaboration and active learning are developed at the same time as knowledge is acquired.’ Therefore, an

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engaging, high quality curriculum should consist of a balance of both knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills are intertwined – being able to effectively use knowledge arguably matters more than just the acquisition of it, which is why skills are equally important. Research indicates that children learn more effectively and remember more when they can use skills to access, process and express their knowledge. An extreme swing to one approach rather than the other leaves a significant gap in children’s learning which is detrimental. (Moore 2017).

Values

At Alexander McLeod, our school values of independence, co-operation, responsibility, self-confidence, respect, perseverance, honesty, effort, friendship, aspiration and equality are extremely important to us and underpin everything that the children learn. By embedding these values into our curriculum and school life, we aim to nurture responsible, resilient and mindful individuals who are well prepared for life in the wider world. We ensure that our values are celebrated in all lessons as well as weekly circle times and children are rewarded for displaying them through our Star of the Week assemblies.

Planning

Planning in our school happens in three stages:

- **Long term planning (LTP)**
This is the whole year overview created by year group teams, which details the overarching enquiries chosen for that academic year and the National Curriculum statements that will be covered in each half term. LTP ensures that our children have a breadth of rich and meaningful learning experiences over the course of an academic year. Please note that - in order for pupils’ learning to be deep and of high quality - not every subject is covered every half term. Some of the foundation subjects are taught in blocks but the long term plan is in place to ensure adequate curriculum coverage over the year.
- **Medium term planning (MTP)**
MTP is completed by year group teams on a half-termly basis. It provides more detailed information about the specific learning intentions and activities the children will complete in different subject areas. Further information, such as educational visits and final outcomes, are made explicit at this stage in planning.
- **Short term planning**
Short term planning takes place on a week-by-week basis. Teachers focus their time and effort on ensuring resources and activities are of the highest possible standard with a focus on impact and progress.

Enquiry Based Learning

In the spring term of 2021, we as a school community set out to establish our shared key priorities for the curriculum at Alexander McLeod moving forwards. Various stakeholders, including Senior Leaders, Class Teachers, Learning Support Assistants, parents and the curriculum governor were consulted and the following strands were common across these groups:

- The curriculum needs to be language-rich
- The curriculum needs to represent the diverse community we serve and promote the consideration of more than one perspective
- The curriculum needs to promote children as independent and active learners

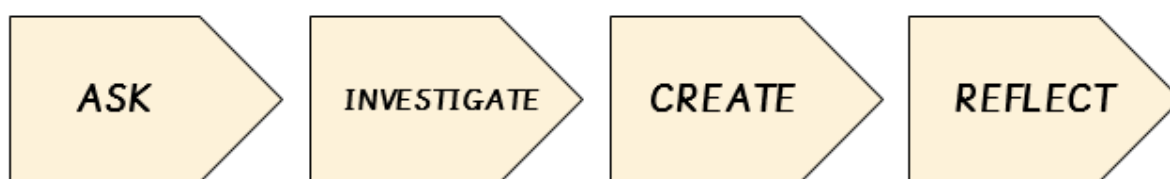
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- When planning the curriculum, teachers should feel empowered to be creative and make professional decisions in the best interests of their pupils' learning

In response to these collective aims, our school adopted an enquiry-based approach in the following subjects:

- Science
- History
- Geography
- Art
- DT

These subjects now include (sometimes alongside discrete knowledge or skills-based lessons) enquiry units that the children actively participate in planning. The model for these enquiry units is as follows:



In the 'ASK' stage, the children are given an overall question or scenario. They are also informed of the agreed outcome of their unit, along with specific stipulations for that outcome. These stipulations are planned carefully by teachers to ensure that the National Curriculum objectives will be met over the course of the unit.

The children help to plan the 'INVESTIGATE' stage, which is the part of the enquiry unit where pupils gain the knowledge and skills they will need in order to create the agreed outcome. This stage could include, but is not restricted to: research, trips, observations and simple tests or investigations.

During the 'CREATE' stage, pupils work on the agreed final outcome of the unit. During this part of the enquiry, teachers and LSAs provide meaningful feedback which encourages children to articulate their ongoing reflections on their learning so far as well as encouraging them to consider whether they are on track to meet the stipulations for their agreed outcome.

Finally, the 'REFLECT' stage of the enquiry is an extremely valuable opportunity for pupils to evaluate their final outcome against the brief they were given, as well as reflecting on the learning process of the enquiry. They are encouraged to answer questions like: 'What do I understand more deeply now, and how do I know that I understand it better?'.

Current issues

In line with our mission statement, we believe as a school that our children have a right to become informed about the issues and current affairs that affect the future of the world they live in. We strongly encourage our pupils to develop informed opinions about the challenges faced around the world and then channel their emotional investment in these issues in a positive and constructive way. It is our hope that all children at Alexander McLeod can make a meaningful and valuable contribution to the world around them.

Inclusion and the curriculum

Alexander McLeod is committed to providing high quality teaching and an inclusive environment as a basic entitlement for all learners. As a school, we value the needs of all learners and foster a positive attitude towards pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. We aim to teach all learners

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how to build on their strengths and minimise their weaknesses by addressing their barriers to learning, so that they are empowered to be the best that they can be. We believe that we have achieved a curriculum model that reaches and develops every child within the school, including children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND.

Our curriculum promotes mastery opportunities for all children, including those who are achieving greater depth in their learning. Our Senior Leadership Team, Subject Leaders, Class Teachers and Learning Support Assistants promote equality of opportunity and celebrate diversity and acceptance. As a school, we pride ourselves on our inclusive attitude; we ensure that everything in our power is done to help all children achieve their very best.

Parental engagement

As a school, we recognise that support from parents and carers is invaluable to a child's education. We believe that communication and trust between home and school is vital for our pupils to reach their full potential in their learning. There are a number of ways in which we encourage engagement from parents and carers:

- When new children join the school, we meet with new parents to go through what the children will be doing. This often involves providing parents with key information and relevant handouts (e.g. phonics handbooks). It also gives us an opportunity to answer any questions that parents may have.
- Parent workshops are often run to provide helpful information and guidance on important events and strategies. Feedback from parents shows that this proves very helpful for supporting children with their learning at home.
- Reception parents are able to observe and track their child's progress on Tapestry. This online programme also allows parents to add their own observations of their child's learning at home and leave comments for the teacher.
- Once a week, Reception parents are invited into school for Story Club, where they can share stories with the children.
- Homework Challenges are sent home on a half-termly basis in order to encourage parents to get involved with children's home learning. These tasks are linked to the children's current topics in school and often provide opportunities for mini-projects and collaborative tasks.
- Meet the Teacher events take place across the school. This is when parents and carers are invited in to watch and take part in a lesson in their child's class.
- Every month, there is a school newsletter that updates parents on key dates, events and information about school life.
- Each year group sends home a newsletter every half term with information, dates and details of the children's upcoming learning opportunities. This is also available on the school website.
- Parents are invited to celebrate with their children if they are awarded 'Star of the Week' in recognition of their contribution to school life. Parents are also invited to other special assemblies, including musical performances and learning showcases.
- The school website is constantly kept up-to-date with important information about the school's ethos and expectations. Parents can find a whole school curriculum overview on the website, as well as more detailed information relating to individual year group topics and tasks.
- The school's twitter pages provide many opportunities for families, friends and other community members to see the purposeful and contextualised learning experiences that our children encounter in school and on educational visits.

An evolving curriculum

In order to ensure that our curriculum remains relevant and engaging for our pupils, we are committed to regularly reviewing the topics that are chosen and the experiences that are on offer. Members of staff in different areas of the school attend regular CPD and then disseminate leading initiatives accordingly. In addition, the curriculum is constantly reviewed and changed in order to best prepare our children to be successful in their journey through life.