

Welcome to The Orchard!

Vision & Purpose

The Orchard is a dedicated space which essentially exists to provide a safe, predictable, and specialised learning environment for pupils whose primary barriers to education stem from Communication and Interaction and Sensory Processing needs. We believe that regular, meaningful access to learning is only possible when a child feels safe, understood, and regulated. Sensory regulation and developmental learning are intertwined, ensuring every child finds their voice, steadies their system and accesses the world around them. We recognise that not all pupils learn in the same way and are at the same stage in their own learning journey. Our mission is to enable all pupils to make progress from their initial starting points. We provide a personalised and flexible curriculum with opportunities and experiences for children to engage in positive and meaningful ways and develop the foundations for learning.

The Orchard Pathway

Our planning in The Orchard is informed by The Equals Curriculum for Semi-Formal learners. Pupils working within the semi-formal curriculum are 'doing' to learn. This pathway is designed to be fun, engaging, practical and meaningful and matched to pupils' learning and developmental needs. Teaching through our semi-formal curriculum captures the interest and imagination of our pupils and learning is grouped into core areas of personal development and functional life skills.

My Communication: Focusing on how your child expresses their wants, needs, and feelings. This might include speech, signs (like Makaton), symbols (PECS) or objects or reference (real objects).

My Thinking and Problem Solving: Allowing your child time to explore, as well as teaching and supporting your child how to figure things out in everyday life, both with support and with growing independence.

My Independence: Practicing essential self-help and daily life skills, such as dressing, eating, personal hygiene and safety.

My Play and Leisure: Learning how to interact with the world, play constructively, and tolerate unstructured time or change.

My PSHRE & Well-Being: Centring on personal, social, health, and relationship education, helping them understand their bodies, emotions, and boundaries.

What does it look like in practice?

Our practice focuses on a combination of approaches:

Meeting a child 'where they are at' - this approach is 'in the moment' where adults recognise 'best time' opportunities and look for child led interest to engage with a child spontaneously.

Coming together - Bringing all children together to develop a sense of belonging and connection. This might be a sensory story, attention session or music time. These are very special times which help develop communication and listening skills...they are also lots of fun!

1:1 activities - We recognise that each child is on their own developmental and learning journey and that each child has their own starting point. We ensure that we challenge each child to reach their full potential through structured short tasks which are visual, practical and engaging. Even if a child's progress is a small step, we recognise that these small steps are incredible achievements from each child. These activities range from art and mark making to number and speech, language and communication.

Overall, our day to day approach is flexible and holistic. We adapt all the time with each child's current and changing interests and focus on the overall development of the whole child. Each day is filled with fun, laughter and very special moments!

Approaches Explained!

Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is a natural, child-led approach designed to help children at the earliest pre-speech stages of communication development. The goal is to build the fundamentals of communication, such as eye contact, sharing personal space, turn-taking, and enjoying being with another person before formal speech develops.

Attention Sessions/Bucket Time

Attention sessions are structured, highly visual, adult-led programs created by speech and language therapist Gina Davies to develop natural attention, communication, and social interaction in children. If you research this, you will find it is called Attention Autism sessions but it is an approach which can be used with any child who has a concentration need. The core aims are to capture attention, encourage sharing and spark communication. These are the stages of the full programme.

Stage 1: The Bucket (Focus Attention)

The adult uses a bright, appealing bucket filled with visually striking or surprising toys. Items are revealed one by one with enthusiastic, simple commentary. Children watch without touching immediately.

Stage 2: The Attention Builder (Sustain Attention)

The adult presents a longer, highly engaging visual activity (like a colorful foaming experiment or giant visual demonstration) designed to stretch attention span for up to 10 minutes with a clear start, middle, and end.

Stage 3: The Interactive Game (Shift Attention and Turn-Taking)

Children transition from passive observers to active participants. Everyone takes a turn in a fun, predictable game, learning emotional regulation and waiting skills.

Stage 4: Transition and Independence (Attention Control)

Children move from a group focus to an individual, repetitive task (such as a simple matching or puzzle activity) and back again, building independence and the ability to shift attention.

EQUALS SEMI-FORMAL (SLD/MLD) CURRICULUM

This unique curriculum has been written and edited by outstanding practitioners throughout the UK in the education of children, young people and adults with severe and complex learning difficulties.

My Communication



My Thinking and Problem Solving



My Play and Leisure



My Independence



My Music



My Dance



My Art



My Drama



The World About Me



Relationships and Sex Education



My Outdoor School



My Physical Well-being



The general principles governing the schemes of work are that they

- are developmental in nature and open to personalisation - they start at the beginning of the individual pupil's learning journey and aim for the highest level of independence possible
- cover all stages of education from 2 to 25 (and beyond) but are not directly related to either age or key stage. Learners fit into them where they will according to their individual abilities, interests and learning journey
- are not related to the National Curriculum, though the common language of the P Scales is occasionally used for ease of understanding.