



Woodend Farm school
Kindness comes in many forms

Holly pathway curriculum intent.

At Woodend Farm School, our curriculum is designed and delivered with a sensory approach that embeds essential skills and knowledge, whilst widening pupils window of social and emotional tolerance. We broaden horizons by exposing pupils to new learning and experience that enable them to have a view and a voice. We want our pupils to have aspirations, be the best they can be, be supportive of others and be proud for who they are. Our vision for our pupils is that they grow from survivors to strivers, to Thrivers, enabling them to become full participant in our community, society and British Culture.

The Holly pathway supports to develop functional communication, emotional regulation, independence and life-long learning skills at a pace that honours their individual cognitive profiles, sensory needs and personal strengths. We believe that every pupil has the right to experience success, connection and joy in learning, regardless of the complexity of their needs. The Holly Pathway nurtures an environment where pupils feel secure, valued and understood, using consistent structure, predictable routines and visual, sensory and communication supports to reduce cognitive load and enable pupils to engage confidently. Staff use a total communication approach - incorporating AAC, Makaton signing, symbols, objects of reference and personalised sensory supports - to ensure that every child has a voice and a meaningful way to interact with the world around them.

Our curriculum emphasises repetition, overlearning, and generalisation, recognising that progress is non-linear and closely linked to pupils' emotional regulation and sensory processing needs. In the Informal stage, pupils access learning through adult-led, play-based experiences in short, structured bursts that promote engagement through sensory exploration. As pupils develop readiness, they move into the Semi-Formal stage, where they participate in short bursts of adult-led learning that blend practical, functional activities with increasing structure while maintaining a strong sensory foundation. Across the stages, learning is broken down into small, achievable steps and delivered through a blend of experiential play, functional skills, physical development and structured academic opportunities, with EHCP outcomes and therapeutic targets woven throughout each pupil's pathway. This integrated and holistic approach enables pupils to develop the essential skills they need to access the world around them now and into adulthood.



Kindness



Belonging



Believing



Achieving



Implementation and teaching styles.

Informal

Informal learning is delivered through adult-led, play-based and sensory-focused sessions that provide pupils with highly supported opportunities to explore, regulate and interact in ways that feel safe and motivating. Teaching is responsive and nurturing, using sensory-rich resources, objects of reference, modelling and co-regulation to develop early communication, engagement and shared attention. Sessions are offered in short, structured bursts with frequent sensory breaks woven naturally into the day to support regulation and reduce overwhelm. Alongside this, child-led exploration is intentionally interspersed, giving pupils space to initiate play, practise independence and develop confidence through spontaneous, interest-driven interactions within a predictable, relational and sensory-attuned environment.

Semi-formal

Semi-formal learning is delivered through short, adult-led sessions that begin with a brief carpet time to introduce key concepts, model language, and establish the structure of the activity. Teaching focuses on clear routines, visual scaffolds and predictable transitions so that pupils can engage with new learning in a calm, supported way. After carpet time, pupils move into independent or semi-independent activities where they can practise skills through hands-on, motivating tasks that are carefully matched to their developmental stage. Staff provide targeted support, modelling and gentle prompting to build pupils' confidence, communication and problem-solving skills while encouraging increasing independence. This balanced approach enables pupils to access learning in small, manageable bursts while developing the foundational abilities they need for more structured learning.

Assessment

Assessment within the informal Holly Pathway is rooted in daily observation across four key developmental domains, ensuring we capture each child's readiness, regulation and authentic engagement. Staff monitor pupils' emotional and sensory regulation through notes, relational observations and sensory-profile checks, focusing on how well pupils settle, access co-regulation and return to regulation after dysregulation. Engagement is assessed through shared attention, emerging turn-taking, proximity seeking and child-led interaction, using play-based tracking, photos and staff

Assessment within the semi-formal stage of the Holly Pathway focuses on how pupils engage with short, adult-led learning sessions and the independent or semi-independent tasks that follow. Staff observe how pupils participate during carpet time, noting their ability to attend to shared input, respond to visual scaffolds and use modelled language in meaningful ways. During follow-up activities, assessment centres on pupils' capacity to apply skills with increasing independence, including how they problem-solve, communicate needs and sustain engagement with hands-on



Kindness



Belonging



Believing



Achieving



Woodend Farm school

Kindness comes in many forms

reflections. Language development is assessed through Natural Language Acquisition (NLA), a developmental framework that recognises that many autistic pupils learn language through scripts or “gestalts” before developing their own original phrases. Staff gather language samples, videos and transcripts to track pupils’ movement through these stages, from echolalia to emerging combinations. Functional participation is captured through daily logs and reflections, noting how pupils initiate preferred activities, respond to low-demand invitations and use functional communication within predictable routines. Together, this provides a holistic, relational picture of each child’s progress in the informal stage.

tasks matched to their developmental stage. Progress in communication continues to be monitored through Natural Language Acquisition (NLA), recognising both scripted language and emerging original combinations as meaningful indicators of development. Staff gather evidence through observation notes, work samples, photos and short video clips, capturing how pupils move between adult-led instruction and independent practice within predictable routines. This approach enables us to build a clear picture of each pupil’s readiness for more structured learning while ensuring assessment remains holistic, relational, and firmly rooted in daily classroom practice.

Impact

The impact of the Holly Pathway is seen in the growing regulation, confidence, communication and independence of our pupils as they move through informal and semi-formal stages of learning. Pupils demonstrate increased emotional readiness, showing greater capacity to settle, access co-regulation and return to regulation after moments of dysregulation, enabling them to participate more meaningfully in daily routines. Engagement becomes increasingly purposeful as pupils develop shared attention, curiosity and the ability to connect with adults and peers through play, gesture, movement, and early language.

As pupils progress, we see clear development in their communication profiles, captured through Natural Language Acquisition (NLA), with many moving from scripts and echolalia toward emerging combinations and original phrases. Pupils also show growing functional participation, initiating preferred activities, responding to low-demand invitations and adapting to predictable routines that support their sense of safety and control. In the semi-formal stage, pupils begin applying skills with greater independence, sustaining engagement during adult-led learning and develop key life skills to support their holistic growth.

Overall, pupils on the Holly Pathway make meaningful, holistic progress that reflects their emotional regulation, communication journey, engagement, independence and ability to participate authentically in the life of the school. They leave the pathway with strengthened confidence, deeper self-awareness and the foundational skills needed for the next stage of their education.



Kindness



Belonging



Believing



Achieving