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Whole Pathway Identity

The Juniper Pathway is a single, continuous offer from KS1–KS4. Its identity is relational, nurturing, and demand-sensitive, built on the understanding that for many pupils, especially those with a Persistent Drive for Autonomy (PDA) anxiety, not refusal, drives demand avoidance (“can’t, not won’t”). Across all phases we prioritise emotional safety, co-regulation, autonomy, and sensory regulation as the bedrock of meaningful learning and accreditation. Our secondary Juniper pathway continues the primary commitment to emotional safety, sensory regulation, and the understanding that anxiety, not refusal, drives demand avoidance. This whole-pathway identity means our language, environments, and expectations stay consistent as pupils move into adolescence, even as learning becomes more conceptual and qualifications enter the picture.

As pupils progress through the Juniper Pathway, this continuity becomes a protective and empowering feature of their educational experience. Many of our learners have faced long-term difficulties accessing mainstream environments due to heightened anxiety, sensory overwhelm, and inconsistent adult expectations. A whole-pathway identity ensures that pupils do not need to repeatedly adapt to new systems or cultural norms each time they transition between phases. Instead, they encounter a familiar relational approach: adults who understand their profiles, predictable communication strategies, flexible and negotiated learning structures, and sensory-attuned environments that reduce cognitive load.

This consistency supports emotional regulation, builds deep relational trust, and allows pupils to generalise success, moving from early co-regulation in Primary to greater independence and self-advocacy in Secondary. It also ensures that the nurturing, autonomy-promoting ethos underpinning the pathway does not diminish as academic expectations rise; rather, it evolves with the pupil, honouring their developmental stage while still offering safety, respect, and genuine empowerment.

Just as in the Primary Juniper Pathway, our secondary phase continues to use the Thrive Approach as the relational foundation for emotional development. Emotional readiness, sensory regulation, and relational safety remain the core drivers of curriculum access and progression.



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Juniper pathway curriculum intent.

At Woodend Farm Secondary, the Juniper Pathway is designed for pupils with complex learning and emotional profiles—most commonly including Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and a Persistent Drive for Autonomy (PDA)—whose access to learning depends on emotional safety, sensory regulation, and autonomy-supportive practice. We explicitly understand demand avoidance as an anxiety-driven response (“can’t, not won’t”), meaning that curriculum access must be negotiated, relational, and low-demand. Our intent is to continue the nurturing, sensory-aware ethos of the Primary phase, while progressively introducing more conceptual learning and qualification opportunities. Pupils access a curriculum that remains broad, rich, and sensory-informed even as academic expectations grow, enabling them to build confidence, curiosity, and meaningful engagement at a pace that protects emotional wellbeing.

The intent of the Juniper Pathway is not only to deliver subject content, but to provide a developmentally attuned, trauma-informed educational experience that evolves with the learner. As pupils enter adolescence, social pressures, sensory demands, and emotional complexity increase. For this reason, the pathway emphasises consistent relational practice, predictable routines, and autonomy-enhancing structures that help pupils feel safe and in control. Learning is offered through flexible pathways—including GCSE, Functional Skills, and highly individualised AQA Unit Awards—which allow pupils to pursue recognised accreditation only when emotionally ready, and in ways that honour their interests, strengths, and regulation needs. This ensures that qualifications never override wellbeing, and that academic progress is achieved through secure relationships, negotiated learning, and a curriculum designed around the whole person, not just their academic profile

Continuity from Primary to Secondary (KS2 → KS3)

The transition into KS3 is deliberately low-demand and relational, preserving Primary routines of co-regulation, choice, and sensory regulation. We maintain consistent language, visuals, and expectations, so pupils recognise Juniper as the same pathway they know—now extended for adolescence with more independence, community learning, and qualification opportunities.



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Implementation and teaching styles.

Informal

In the Informal stage of the secondary Juniper Pathway, teaching focuses on creating a calm, low-demand environment where pupils can engage through interest-led, experiential learning. Sessions are highly flexible and shaped around what feels safe, meaningful, and achievable for each learner. Older pupils who continue to experience high levels of anxiety or significant barriers to traditional learning benefit from sensory-based tasks, relational co-regulation, and thematic exploration rather than formalised subject lessons. The priority at this stage is to maintain emotional safety while fostering engagement, communication, and a sense of control over the learning process

Entering Semi-Formal

As pupils progress into the **Entering Semi-Formal** stage, learning becomes more structured, though still delivered in short, manageable sessions. Teaching typically involves 1:1 or small-group interactions, with frequent opportunities for regulation and breaks. Themes or projects are often chosen with the pupil to sustain motivation and reduce demand-related anxiety. Academic skills—particularly literacy, numeracy, and digital competency—are introduced through practical, meaningful tasks rather than abstract instruction. This stage supports the gradual development of routines and builds readiness for accessing discrete secondary subjects as confidence and emotional availability increase.

Approaching formal

In the **Approaching Formal** stage, pupils engage in increasingly structured learning that more closely resembles traditional secondary subject delivery. Teachers encourage participation in small-group activities and cooperative learning, so pupils develop communication, social interaction, and the ability to share ideas. Sessions grow in length and complexity, often incorporating subject-specific thinking, such as experimental methods in science, enquiry in humanities, or structured responses in English. Support remains highly personalised, using visual structures, negotiated expectations, and explicit teaching of study habits to scaffold independence. This stage prepares pupils for the demands of accreditation pathways by strengthening both academic understanding and emotional resilience.

Formal

At the **Formal** stage, pupils access a curriculum aligned with recognised qualifications, including GCSEs, Functional Skills, or AQA Unit Awards. Learning is delivered by subject specialists, with clear progression, structured tasks, and opportunities for mastery. Pupils may join mixed-pathway classes or work alongside peers in group learning when appropriate, while still having access to regulation spaces, relational support, and individualised scaffolds to manage anxiety. Teaching at this stage emphasises deepening subject knowledge, building exam readiness, and promoting independence, while maintaining the relational, needs-led ethos that underpins the Juniper Pathway. This ensures pupils are academically challenged but still supported in ways that maintain emotional safety and autonomy, allowing them to thrive in the final years of secondary education.



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Progression Model

Secondary continues Primary's staged journey—**Informal** → **Entering/Engaging Semi-Formal** → **Approaching Formal** → **Formal**—but contextualised for adolescence.

- **Informal** → regulation-based KS3 entry (safety, co-regulation, sensory readiness, trust).
- **Entering / Engaging Semi-Formal** → project-based functional engagement (interest-led practical work, communication, foundations for functional literacy/numeracy).
- **Approaching Formal** → early accreditation preparation (Entry–Level portfolios, initial Functional Skills practice, selected AQA Unit Awards).
- **Formal** → GCSE / Functional Skills L1–L2 / Unit Awards toward targeted outcomes

Teaching & Implementation

How this looks in Secondary:

- **Informal:** highly structured regulation routines; **interest-led practical exploration** in very short bursts; strong adult co-regulation.
- **Entering/Engaging Semi-Formal:** project-based tasks blending functional literacy/numeracy/ICT; **short cycles with planned breaks**; clear roles to reduce social load.
- **Approaching Formal:** hybrid model—mini-projects plus early accreditation tasks (guided past-paper snippets, portfolio artefacts).
- **Formal:** subject-specialist teaching with flexible scaffolds and demand-sensitive adjustments to protect regulation while preparing for GCSE/Functional Skills.



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Assessment

Informal

We assess the informal curriculum through observation of skills in an interest-led practical setting. By watching pupils as they engage in play, we can gain valuable insights into their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Interaction during play allows us to see how pupils communicate, solve problems, and collaborate with their peers. This method of assessment is non-intrusive and helps create a relaxed environment where pupils can naturally demonstrate their abilities and skills. Observations are documented and added to Evidence for Learning, ensuring that each pupil's progress is tracked and supported effectively.

Entry semi-formal

The semi-formal stage is a blend of teacher assessments and observations, aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of a student's development. Practitioners use assessment for learning and observations to assess pupils and gauge student progress. Observations play a crucial role, allowing practitioners to capture real-time insights into student learning, engagement, and learning styles. Learning is documented and added to Evidence for Learning, ensuring that each pupil's progress is tracked and supported effectively. Through these assessments, we can identify and evaluate a range of skills, ensuring that each pupil's development is supported in a holistic and engaging manner.

Approaching formal

The approaching formal stage is characterised by a shift towards more structured assessments, with a greater emphasis on practitioner and teacher assessments. Practitioners use assessment for learning to evaluate pupils and gauge their development. While observations still play a role, the focus is increasingly on systematically documenting learning outcomes. Evidence for Learning enables practitioners to record assessments and monitor each pupil's progress effectively. Through these assessments, we can identify and evaluate a range of skills and determine their next steps for learning, ensuring that each pupil's development is supported in a holistic and engaging manner.

Formal

The formal pathway includes more structured assessments, in line with the assessment policy used by the other pathways. Practitioners use assessment for learning to evaluate pupils and gauge their development. While observations still play a role, the focus is increasingly on systematically documenting learning outcomes. Evidence for Learning enables practitioners to record assessments and monitor each pupil's progress effectively. These assessments help identify and evaluate a range of skills, as well as determine the next steps for each pupil's learning, ensuring their development is supported in a holistic and engaging manner while preparing students for their next stage of learning.





Assessment - Secondary Specific evidence and portfolios

Assessment Principles:

- Pupils/learners are assessed through portfolio-based evidence, photo/video artefacts, witness statements, and annotated work logs.
- Interest-led practical exploration evidences Informal learning (readiness, regulation, participation, emergence of communication).
- Entering/Engaging Semi-Formal: capture functional application (communication in context, task initiation/completion, problem-solving, community learning).
- Approaching Formal: capture early accreditation artefacts (Entry Level, AQA Unit Awards checklists, Functional Skills practice tasks).
- Formal: capture qualification evidence (GCSE components, Functional Skills assessments) alongside classwork demonstrating secure conceptual understanding.
- Across all stages we assess independence and self-regulation (e.g., self-advocacy, use of regulation plans, recovery time, tolerance for collaboration) with clear, age-appropriate descriptors.

Quality Assurance:

Moderation spans portfolios from all three secondary pathways—GCSE, Foundation (Functional Skills), Individualised (AQA)—so that academic and holistic outcomes are valued together.



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Impact

The Juniper Pathway at the secondary phase has been highly effective in reducing pupil anxiety by providing a flexible and relational learning environment that places student well-being at the centre of every decision. Its personalised structure allows pupils to progress through a skills-based curriculum that encourages autonomy, helping older learners take meaningful ownership of their studies in a way that feels safe and manageable. By giving pupils genuine control over how they engage with learning, the pathway nurtures confidence and strengthens their sense of self-efficacy, enabling them to explore subjects more deeply and with greater motivation.

This flexibility ensures that learning is consistently tailored to individual readiness, interests, and emotional needs, supporting steady progress across academic, social, and developmental domains. As pupils navigate their chosen pathway—whether GCSE, Foundation, or Individualised—they experience success through achievable, carefully paced goals that acknowledge both their strengths and their challenges. This approach not only supports academic achievement but also builds resilience, communication skills, independence, and emotional literacy, all of which are vital for preparing pupils for post-16 transitions.

By the time pupils leave the secondary Juniper Pathway, they do so with a stronger understanding of themselves as learners, increased confidence in their own abilities, and a portfolio of meaningful qualifications or unit achievements that reflect their journey. Most importantly, they develop the life skills, self-belief, and sense of empowerment needed to move confidently into further education, training, or personalised future pathways, proud of the progress they have made and equipped for the next stage of their lives.



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