



**First Thought
Independent School**

FIRST THOUGHT CARE SERVICES

Teaching and Learning Policy

2026-2027

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Statement of Intent

At First Thought Independent School (FTIS), we are committed to delivering high-quality teaching and learning that enables every pupil to make progress, achieve personal outcomes, and develop the skills needed for life.

All of our pupils have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with primary needs in autism, complex needs, or severe learning difficulties (SLD). Our teaching and learning approaches reflect the highly personalised nature of our provision, supported by small classes, high staff-to-pupil ratios, and specialist strategies.

Our teaching and learning is aligned with our Curriculum Policy, which is built upon the EQUALS Informal, Semi-Formal and Formal Curriculum, supplemented by Phonics for SEND, the PSHE Association SEND framework, and our bespoke Digital Skills curriculum. Lessons are multisensory, communication-focused, and designed to develop independence, resilience, and confidence.

Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance, including:

- Equality Act 2010
- SEND Code of Practice: 0–25 years (2015)
- Independent School Standards (2014, as amended)

This policy operates in conjunction with the following FTIS policies:

- SEND Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Assessment Policy

Political Impartiality

FTIS is committed to ensuring that teaching and learning are balanced, objective, and free from the promotion of partisan political views. Staff must not express or promote their own political beliefs in lessons, extra-curricular activities, or through any school-organised event or materials. Where political or controversial issues arise, teachers will take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure pupils are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views, using accessible, developmentally appropriate approaches suited to our pupils' needs. This applies while pupils are in school, participating in extra-curricular activities organised by or on behalf of the school, and when the school promotes external activities or opportunities.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Board will:

- Ensure high expectations for teaching and learning across the school.
- Monitor the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils with SEND.

The Head of Education will:

- Oversee the school's approach to teaching and learning.
- Ensure resources, staffing and training meet pupils' needs.
- Promote a culture of ambition, inclusion, and continuous improvement.

Teachers will:

- Deliver adaptive, engaging lessons linked to the curriculum pathways.

- Adapt activities to meet diverse developmental levels.
- Use communication strategies (Makaton, PECS, symbols, sensory approaches).
- Collaborate with colleagues, parents, and professionals to review progress.

Support Staff will:

- Implement planned interventions and targeted support.
- Promote independence, communication, and social development.
- Work closely with teachers and therapists to ensure continuity of support.

Learning Environment

Our classrooms and wider school environment are structured, predictable, and sensory-considerate, reducing anxiety and supporting regulation.

- Displays are purposeful, aiding communication and reinforcing learning.
- Classrooms include access to sensory equipment and quiet spaces.
- Seating and grouping arrangements are flexible, supporting collaborative and individual learning.

The Curriculum

FTIS follows the EQUALS Informal, Semi-Formal and Formal Curriculum, ensuring that learning is meaningful, personalised, and holistic.

We also deliver:

- Phonics for SEND to ensure access to reading.
- The PSHE Association SEND programme for personal, social, and health education.
- A bespoke Digital Skills curriculum.
- Therapeutic programmes such as Zones of Regulation to support SEMH needs.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, ensuring pupils develop skills in communication, cognition, independence, creativity, and physical wellbeing.

Planning and Preparation

Teachers plan lessons that:

- Reflect EHCP outcomes, prior attainment, and individual needs.
- Are flexible to adapt to pupils' regulation and engagement levels.
- Include clear learning objectives and success criteria.
- Identify resources, strategies, and grouping to maximise progress.
- Involve support staff in preparation and delivery.

Medium- and short-term planning is based on detailed EQUALS schemes of work, adapted to suit the cohort and individual pupils.

Lesson Delivery

Lessons are designed to be practical, interactive, and accessible, with a strong emphasis on communication and independence. Teachers use a wide range of approaches, including:

- Sensory and play-based learning.
- Visual supports and social stories.
- Group work, role-play, and experiential activities.

- Repetition and overlearning to consolidate progress.
- Cross-curricular links to reinforce understanding.

Support staff are fully engaged in lessons, working with targeted groups or individuals as appropriate.

Supporting Pupils

- All lessons are adapted to meet pupils' needs, including those with complex profiles.
- Staff are trained in autism, SLD, and communication strategies.
- EHCP outcomes are embedded in day-to-day teaching.
- Pupils are supported to regulate emotions, communicate effectively, and develop independence.
- Interventions are delivered in collaboration with therapists and specialists.

Assessment

Assessment at FTIS focuses on capturing small steps of progress in line with EHCP outcomes.

We use:

- EQUALS informal, semi-formal and formal assessment frameworks.
- AQA Unit Awards (where appropriate).
- Teacher observation, annotated evidence, and pupil work.
- Regular reviews against EHCP targets.

Progress is reported termly to parents and reviewed formally at Annual Reviews.

Working with Pupils and Parents

- Pupils are supported to contribute to their learning by making choices, expressing preferences, and celebrating achievements.
- Parents are engaged through regular updates, termly reports, and review meetings.
- Staff work in partnership with parents to reinforce learning at home and ensure consistency of approach.

Behaviour and Attitudes

Behaviour is supported through therapeutic, trauma-informed approaches. Strategies include:

- Zones of Regulation to support self-awareness and regulation.
- Restorative approaches to resolve conflict and build relationships.
- Positive reinforcement and celebration of achievement.

All staff model high expectations of behaviour and attitudes to learning, creating a supportive and respectful school culture.

Monitoring and Review

The Head of Education and governing board will monitor teaching and learning through lesson observations, work scrutiny, learning walks, and data reviews.

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains aligned with the school's curriculum, statutory requirements, and best practice in SEND education.