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Oaks Rise Teaching and Learning Policy

1. Vision and Values

At Oaks Rise, we are committed to a **low-demand, consent-based, structured and adult-guided** approach to education.

We aim to:

- Prioritise learner wellbeing.
- Promote academic and personal growth.
- Create an environment where consent is fundamental and non-negotiable.
- Offer different learning journeys from reengagement with learning to formal qualification routes, tailored to each learner's needs and aspirations.

2. Curriculum and Learning Offer

We deliver a **core curriculum** across five subjects:

- Wellbeing, including PSHE
- Maths
- English
- Science
- Humanities

Additionally, we embed **Collaboration** and **Learning-to-Learn (LtL)** skills throughout all interactions and learning experiences.

Learners may choose to prepare for qualifications in English, Maths, and a third subject, if and when they are ready.

Our Wellbeing curriculum has been designed for Oaks Rise with the needs and vulnerabilities of autistic learners at the centre. We support our learners to explore and understand their identities and build healthy friendships and relationships, helping them keep safe now and in the future.



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3. Pedagogy and Approach

At Oaks Rise, our teaching approach is explicitly neuroaffirming and grounded in respect for each learner's strengths, autonomy, sensory profile, and developmental journey. We understand autism as a difference, not a deficit, and we prioritise adapting the environment to meet learners' needs—not the other way around.

Our provision supports autistic children and young people who have high levels of anxiety and have often experienced school based trauma and autistic burnout. Many of our learners are 'high maskers' and most have some degree of demand avoidance ranging from formally recognised PDA to demand avoidance that fluctuates with levels of anxiety and diminishes over time. All learners have the potential to achieve high-level qualifications when supported in the right environment. Many of our learners have previously struggled to attend or engage in school, with some missing significant periods of education. A strength of Oaks Rise is the sense of community and belonging created through a safe, supportive and highly scaffolded environment that often cannot be replicated in more conventional settings.

Our pedagogy is built around the following principles:

- **Neuroaffirming:** We support learners to develop a positive sense of their autistic identity through our curriculum, teaching strategies, environment, and staff representation. Most teachers and TAs at Oaks Rise are autistic, helping ensure authentic understanding and modelling of neuroaffirming practices across the setting. We do not support behaviourist strategies and instead focus on collaborative problem solving approaches.¹
- **Strengths based:** Teaching is designed to amplify learners' strengths and interests. We celebrate diverse ways of learning and expressing knowledge, moving away from deficit-based models.
- **Low demand and consent based:** All participation is low demand and consent-driven, honouring each learner's agency and pace. Consent is not a one-time agreement but an ongoing process embedded into every interaction and activity. Learners are always welcome to opt out of the main learning activity and an alternative is available.
- **Structured and adult guided:** each day is structured so that learners know what to expect and have the 'safety' of a clear and predictable plan to opt into. Learning Facilitators guide each session with pre-prepared resources but are ready to adapt based on the interests and preferences of learners.

¹ See the Oaks Rise Community Guidelines for further information about our behaviour policy.



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4. Learning Groups

Learners are grouped loosely based on age and where they are in their learning and wellbeing journey. All groups are low demand and consent based and flexibly adapted to the needs and interests of learners. Four groups are offered:

- *Reengage Groups AM and PM:* Very low demand, topic-based, often play and games based, primary style model. Aimed at learners who are still comparatively early in their journey, the groups are aimed at reengaging children and young people with learning and building relational safety and trust with key adults. They have a strong focus on wellbeing as well as (sometimes discreet) academics.
- *Learn & Thrive AM:* Moderate structure with thematic subject teaching, one lead Learning Facilitator and Learning Assistant plus dedicated Learning Facilitators for maths and English.
- *Learn & Thrive PM:* Slightly more formal subject teaching for older learners, aligned with GCSE curriculum content.

A typical Learn and Thrive session for both the AM and PM groups consists of:

- Check-in meeting & PSHE discussion; an opportunity to share news, check in on learners' wellbeing, and run through the learning topics for the session. This is followed by a PSHE discussion.
- 3 academic learning sessions are offered per day. The distribution of these sessions over a week are as follows: 2 English, 2 Maths, 2 Humanities, 2 Wellbeing, 2 Science.
- Breaks are when the learner needs and as often as they need.
- Check outs which usually consist of a reflective question for the group to discuss.
- *Exam-Ready:* these are offered one afternoon per week and are optional, higher-structure sessions for learners who wish to pursue formal GCSEs in English, Maths and / or a 3rd subject. They aim to familiarise learners with the structure, style and sequencing of subject specific GCSE papers. Each week past paper exam questions are highlighted and we explore strategies for approaching questions. An exam ready learner should be:



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- Aware of basic KS2/KS3 level concepts which underpin the GCSE;
- Flight/fight/freeze/fawn response is not activated by discussion of explicit preparation for GCSEs;
- Have willingness and are excited to undertake a qualification and the preparation for it.
- *Activity B:* A concurrent, lower-demand more 'hands-on' activity space for all learners needing sensory regulation or increased autonomy. These are often practical activities such as crafts, baking or growing.

5. Learning Environment

Teaching and learning at Oaks Rise is delivered within sensory-aware, nurturing spaces where each learner's unique communication, regulation, and interaction needs are respected and supported.

- Sensory tools for regulation are available within the teaching space and learners are free to use these at any point during lessons. This includes large yoga balls, wobble boards, wobble cushions, weighted blankets, and fidget toys. Learners are also free to move around, as they wish even during facilitator-input parts of each session. The fact that these tools are organically available to all learners in the main learning spaces helps avoid feelings of shame or 'othering' and helps learners to build awareness of their sensory needs and how they can best meet them.
- Our lighting in the Oaks Rise building is soft low-lumen, rather than harsh strip lighting, to help prevent visual overstimulation.
- A range of seating is available in the main learning spaces from traditional desks and hard backed chairs to sofas, large beanbags, floor cushions, large yoga balls and rocking chairs so that learners may find a seating arrangement that works for their sensory needs.
- Drinks and healthy snacks are available to learners at all times during sessions. Learners may bring their own drinks and snacks from home and consume these at any point in the learning spaces.
- We have a low-sensory room off the main learning spaces that is accessible to learners at all times during sessions.
- Learning spaces include a main activity zone and an Activity B area.



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Consideration is given to a child or young person's sensory profile during the application stage, with particular attention to whether the CYP tends to need sensory-seeking or sensory-avoidant strategies. This, along, with other factors, helps determine which group a learner may be best suited to joining.

6. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

For any learner that joins Oaks Rise, in the first term the Transition Plan serves as their ILP. This allows us to focus on integration into the settling and building relationships in Term 1. During this term staff will observe and informally assess levels and readiness to learn, so that baselines can be ascertained and used to inform the creation of an ILP in Term 2,

From Term 2 onwards, each learner will have an ILP aligned with:

- Agreed EHCP outcomes.
- Wellbeing - both whole-session and individualised goals
- English and Maths individualised goals.
- Learning-to-Learn (LtL) whole-session goals.
- Collaboration - individualised goals

Targets are developed in partnership with learners where appropriate and tracked regularly to support holistic development.

Reintegration plans are not considered until the learner is settled at Oaks Rise and is ready for their next step. We do not have time bound placements, but rather work holistically to assess each learners' best next step and readiness for this, including reintegration to full time education if this is what is right for them.

7. Staffing and Roles

- Staff work collaboratively to deliver both structured, pre-planned and responsive, flexible learning and wellbeing support.
- Staffing ratios are maintained at 1 adult: 4 learners.
- Senior Learning Facilitators and Learning Facilitators have defined subject leadership responsibilities.
- Dedicated delivery staff for Activity B to ensure alternative activities are consistently available.



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8. Assessment

- Outcomes are assessed continuously through observation, learner engagement, work produced, and progress towards ILP targets.
- Formal assessment in English and Maths is aligned with National Curriculum age and stage expectations for those opting for qualification routes.

9. Quality Assurance and Professional Development

Quality assurance is incredibly important to us at Oaks Rise and we strive to continuously improve the ways that we support our learners. As such we have embedded reflective practice and quality assurance into everything that we do so that staff can continue to grow as professionals.

- Learning Facilitators meet weekly to reflect on, amongst other things, challenges and successes of the week and how approaches can be adapted to better meet the needs of learners.
- On at least a termly basis (sometimes more often if troubleshooting is required) the Oaks Rise Independent Advisory Teacher observes sessions at Oaks Rise and then meets with all staff and directors to provide feedback and training on any areas for development.
- Parents are regularly prompted to provide feedback to Oaks Rise about any ways that we can improve or further support our learners. This includes a termly feedback form.
- Oaks Rise is in the process of further developing its approach to pupil voice, to ensure that the perspectives of Oaks Rise learners are built into everything we do.
- Staff engage in ongoing training to support low demand, consent based and neuroaffirming practice, sensory regulation strategies, and subject-specific pedagogy.
- Regular review meetings are held to ensure pedagogical consistency.