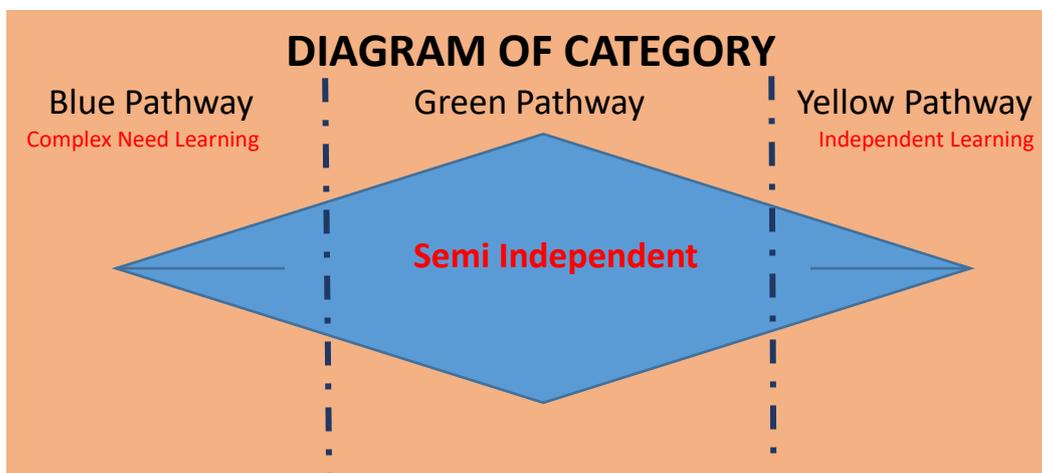


Birkett House Curriculum Philosophy

The Cambridge English dictionary simply defines the curriculum as subjects studied in a school and what each subject should include. Sounds simple. But surely, for a school's curriculum to meet the needs of its students there is a deeper question to ask. What should students know, understand and be able to do?

With this in mind the leadership team at Birkett House have reviewed their curriculum in line with the principles of the Understanding by Design Framework (UbD). This approach encourages us to begin with the end in mind. So we ask what is it that we want the young adults who leave Birkett House to be equipped with to help them enjoy and prosper in life beyond school. When we do this we are able to design a curriculum that is planned backwards from long term desired outcomes and to do this we must first understand the nature of students who come to our school.



The diagram above clearly demonstrates three broad learning needs within the school. Blue Pathway: We educate a group of students at the very earliest stages of development and learning. These young people will probably have profoundly complex physical and health needs as well as impaired abilities with their cognition and learning which have an impact on their day to day lives and learning. It is highly likely they will be reliant on others to ensure they are comfortable and happy in order to even begin to be in a position to learn. When leaving school, it is highly likely they will need high levels of care and support to thrive.

Green Pathway: The vast majority of students at Birkett House will need some form of graduated support when they leave us. We hope they will go on to college and then perhaps engage in some form of paid or voluntary work. These students we hope will be able to live semi independently with minimum support within their local community.

Yellow Pathway: Finally, we have a small group of students who we hope aspire to leave us and go in to paid employment or the voluntary sector. They could perhaps live independently or with minimum support from their local community. We would see these students as independent learners but we truly question if that is the case for any of us. Surely we are all actually interdependent in our lives, requiring the support and friendship from others to thrive.

Pathways – Learning need

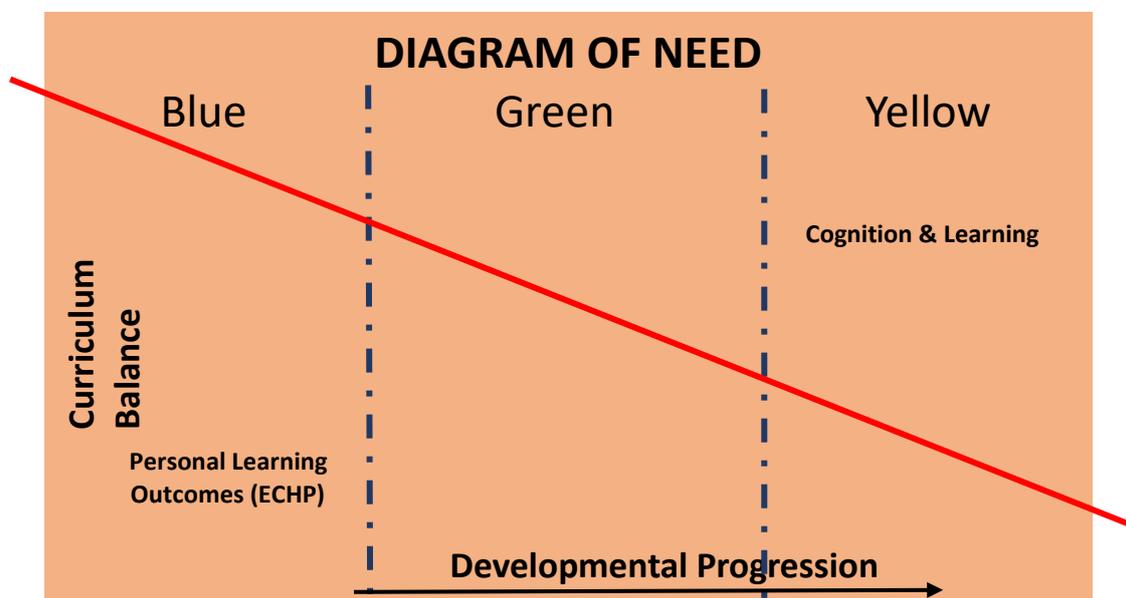
So now we have established the nature of the children and young people at Birkett House we can begin to design our curriculum to ensure it contains a sequential teaching of the skills, knowledge and principles students need to give them the best possible chance of learning what they will need to excel when they leave us. This will form the back bone of our Curriculum Intent. It is not a 'vision' but a very deliberate approach with clearly defined outcomes that we can both plan backwards from but work towards.

With these principles in mind we have designed a curriculum along three learning pathways that broadly address the learning needs of our three types of learner. Following the principles of the UbD Framework we begin to identify the long term outcomes for our students on these three pathways.

Our more complex learners will require a pathway that primarily follows a very person centered approach. Outcomes from the learners EHCP will be used to design a very individualized learning experience that uses elements of the 'curriculum' to ensure they are exposed to a range of learning opportunities. We must also not be afraid to value the time it takes to ensure these students are ready to learn. Simply, if we ignore their health and wellbeing needs they will not be in a position to learn.

For the vast majority of our students their curriculum will be made up of a sequential set of learning opportunities that balances their outcomes as outlined in the EHCP and a more formal curriculum that overtly supports their cognition, learning and acquisition of knowledge. This group of learners will still require support to be able to develop the characteristics of learning such as increased attention span, the ability to turn take and wait but ultimately these skills can be taught in parallel to the more formal acquisition of knowledge.

For our most able students, the ones we hope that will leave us and go in to work and independent living, the vast majority of their curriculum will be built up from the more formal subjects that will develop and deepen their cognition and learning. For these student's access and support from our mainstream partners will be key.



The pathways enable us to design a curriculum and teaching that ensures there is a development and progression of ideas and deepening of students' knowledge and understanding according to learning need. We should equally include opportunities for the students to transfer their knowledge and skills in all aspects of life to widen their understanding. We want our curriculum to allow students to make sense of their learning through exploration, interpretation and application of skills and knowledge as appropriate.

To fully embed these pathways, it is important that the school and its teachers think purposefully about curriculum planning and pedagogy. In order for it to be developmental and sequential curriculum. Content cannot just be left to chance. Teachers must become coaches of understanding not simple deliverers of content knowledge. They must focus on the learning and not simply the teaching. This means we must regularly review the learning pedagogy and curriculum design to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Considerations:

- All age – 4 to 19 which effectively covers 6 age phases / Key Stages
- Students join at different times so prior learning may be unsecure
- Be flexible enough to move between Pathways so we don't put a ceiling on learning.
- A curriculum that feels and looks different as student's age.
- Recognizes cognitive development does not progress through a fixed progression of age related stages