



Inspire. Believe. Achieve.

Hollywater Pre-Formal Curriculum

Gold Class (EYFS to KS3)



September 2025

Intent

PMLD pupils are at the very early stages of development. They need a curriculum which is appropriate to them and their needs recognising that their development is atypical. Due to the complex nature of some of these pupils' difficulties, especially if they have additional mobility difficulties it may well be appropriate to educate them in a classroom which offers more flexible learning and an integrated approach to therapies which are central to ensuring that these pupils are able to reach their potential.

Definition of PMLD

Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) can be defined as those pupils with the most severe cognitive impairments. Persons with PMLD tend to operate at the earliest stages of cognitive development (Lacey, 1998). Lacey (1998) suggests that if it were possible to measure IQ, then it would be below 20. Persons with PMLD often have other difficulties such as hearing or visual impairment, mental health problems, physical impairments and/or complex medical conditions (Simmons & Watson, 2014). This creates an additional challenge for them in that they do not have the ability to deal with any sensory or physical impairment (Turner, 2011). Pupils with PMLD can be prone to conditions such as epilepsy, respiratory problems, gastro-oesophageal disorders, sleep problems and dysphagia (Simmons & Watson, 2014). They are often dependent on a large amount of equipment: hoists for moving, oxygen and suctioning and gastrostomy tubes for feeding. Many will have some degree of incontinence. In many cases, pupils with PMLD will not be able to communicate verbally; some will be able to use Picture Exchange Communication System (PCS), symbols, photos or objects of reference (Turner, 2011). Others will use sounds, fingers or eye pointing to give carers some idea of their wants and needs (Turner, 2011). PMLD pupils will ordinarily be working at P1-P3 of the National Curriculum P-levels. The Department of Education definition is:

Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties have complex learning needs. In addition to very severe learning difficulties, pupils have other significant difficulties, such as physical disabilities, sensory impairment or a severe medical condition. Pupils require a high level of adult support, both for their learning needs and also for their personal care. They are likely to need sensory stimulation and a curriculum broken down into very small steps. Some pupils communicate by gesture, eye pointing, or symbols, others by very simple language. Their attainments are likely to remain in the early P scale range (P1-P4) throughout their school careers. (Department of Education, 2003)

It is through our curriculum that we aim to :

- Support pupils to gain as much as they possibly can from their education
- Encourage pupils to become as independent as possible
- Develop pupil's communication skills
- Set pupils challenging but achievable targets
- Encourage pupils to achieve their full potential
- Ensure pupils are happy, healthy and safe in school
- Ensure pupils can be self-advocates as far as they possibly can be

- Ensure pupils are active and included members of the school community and the wider community
- Ensure that pupils are motivated
- Ensure pupils make steady and suitable progress

		Subject names	
ECHP Areas	SEMH	My Self (Personal Care and Independence)	Use of ICT (My Computing) to be integrated across all aspects of the curriculum. ECHP targets integrated across all areas of the curriculum and "social "time at
	Sensory and Physical	My Physical Development (Physical Development and therapy - physio, standers, hydro)	
	Sensory and Physical	My creativity	
	Cognition and Learning	My world	
	Cognition and Learning	My thinking (Cognition)	
	Communication and Interaction	My communication (Communication)	

Most of the pupils within the PMLD curriculum area have a significant amount of both physical and medical needs. It is our intent to ensure that these needs are met and supported in a way that there is minimal disruption to learning. Some of these needs are turned into learning opportunities, where appropriate therapeutic interventions take place in the classroom and are integrated as part of the curriculum.

Some pupils will be following the Early Curricular Goals for EY and KS1, these allow pupils to get a broad experience of the key curriculum areas through a play-based approach. Each of the curricular goals are broken down into smaller steps so targets can be set that are individualised and specific for the pupil.

Implementation

Pupils at a very early stage of developing communication require pupil around them to be responsive to any attempts at communication. Interpreting behaviour as potentially meaningful is one important adult response. For example, a pupil might smile in during an activity and the adult interprets this response as meaning 'more, please', even if the pupil is not intentionally smiling to get 'more'. The pupil begins to get the idea that smiling results in getting more pleasurable experiences and eventually s/he will produce the smile to communicate 'more' intentionally. To be responsive, adults need to attend very carefully to each pupil and treat all behaviour as potentially communicative. This response may be to echo that behaviour back to the pupil, indicating that the 'communication' has been heard. For example, the pupil may bang the table. The adult bangs back 'saying' 'I hear you' and hopefully this will start a 'banging the table' conversation.

Some Pupils will be more intentional in their communication but not yet able to use conventional language. At this level, Pupils will be developing ways of indicating what they like and dislike. For example, the smile is now used intentionally to 'ask' for an activity to be repeated. Gestures might be used to request objects or just to 'comment' on something that can be seen. A responsive environment provided by staff should include a widening range of motivating activities upon which Pupils can 'comment'. Also making verbal sound after experiencing something to say " I want more ".

Some Pupils will be beginning to use conventional communication, understanding or even using a few single words such as 'more', 'finished' and perhaps names of familiar pupil and objects. Staff should encourage new words and meanings through a range of stimulating activities and providing the example of new words and phrases. Using single words or short phrases is important at this stage.

The programme of learning is divided into three areas :

Responding (to social events and activities)

Eg: everyday activities, care routines and sensory stimuli

Interacting (with others – staff and pupils)

Communicating (with others – staff and pupils)

The programme of learning is delivered through a range of activities and methods including :

- Intensive Interaction
- Tac Pac
- Sensology
- Objects of Reference, photographs, CiP symbols, Makaton, music and songs (individualised to each pupil and their level of development)
- Sensory Stories
- Phase 1 / 2 phonics
- Mark making
- Fine motor skills
- Call & Response
- Curiosity Programme / Attention Autism

Other areas of the PMLD curriculum include :

My Self

This area focuses on social and emotional development as well as independence and self-help skills.

My Physical Development (including hydrotherapy and physiotherapy)

Pupils who are physically impaired or who are still learning to move need lots of opportunities to move around both supported and freely. They may require a range of equipment for lying, sitting, standing, walking. They may be having active treatment from a physiotherapist and/ or an occupational therapy and/or be on an ongoing treatment programme. Always consult

with therapists and ensure that you have physical/ health targets that have been agreed between all the staff who work with each pupil.

The programme of learning is divided into main areas:

Fine Motor Movement - this part of the programme can be divided into 4 areas:

Reaching
Grasping
Releasing
Manipulating

Again, the programme is about physical development only (in relation to arms and hands) and not about how and when to use these movement, although the pupil's developing cognition and communication will enable them to use their movements intentionally to achieve specific ends. To support this area of the curriculum pupils will also engage in the MOVE Programme.

Mobility - this part of the PMLD curriculum can be divided into:

Indoor mobility
Outdoor mobility
Water mobility
Rebound Therapy

Sherborne Developmental Movement

Sherborne Developmental Movement is an approach to teaching and working with movement that is both by people with minimal movement experience.

Motor Activities Training Programme (MATP)

The Motor Activities Training Programme is designed to develop physical skills in small steps so that pupils with severe physical difficulties can make progress across within this area.

Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy are a major part of the curriculum which is delivered in class, the school works closely with therapists in order to make sure the pupils physical needs are met.

My Thinking (Cognition)

Pupils at a very early stage of development need pupil around them who can help them to explore and interpret the world. They have difficulty in making sense of that world and need many opportunities to handle and test out objects, look for patterns and sequences in experiences and generally extend their focus from the immediate to things further away. Many Pupils with PMLD have physical or sensory impairments that undermine their ability to discover things for themselves and have even more need for other pupil to assist them to explore and develop understanding. Staff need to be very inventive in providing alternative ways of exploring.

Pupils at this very early stage need to experience the same activities over and over again if they are going to be able to learn from them. It may be helpful to find a dozen activities that the pupil responds to and repeat those on a daily basis, in the same order every day. Using

an on-off or burst-pause pattern with each activity can help the pupil begin to anticipate what will happen next.

As pupils begin to develop the understanding that they can have an effect on their world, they can be offered a much wider range of activities and objects to explore. They are still likely to require plenty of repetition but may be able to cope with different examples of a similar activity. For example, a pupil who is learning how to take objects out of containers could learn from removing a range of different objects from a range of different containers from the top, the side or the bottom.

When cause and effect has been established, early problem solving can begin. For example, favourite objects can be hidden or containers can have fasteners to be opened or two steps may need to be completed to find the object. Enabling problem solving for pupils with physical and sensory impairments can be difficult and is likely to involve technology. Again staff will need to be inventive to provide activities that get pupils to think.

The programme of learning is divided into 4 areas:

1. awareness
2. exploration
3. control and early problem solving
4. sequence and pattern

My Creativity

Creative arts allow Pupils to develop their cognitive skills and begin to recognise their own feelings. They give them experiences of personal, social and cultural identity.

Pupils will have the opportunity to develop all of their sense, as well as developing communication, cognitive, social, emotional and motor skills.

Music education will be delivered using the Sounds of Intent programme.

My World

It is important for Pupils with PMLD to make sense and learn about the world around them. Pupils at this stage of development need to have lots of support to explore the world around them as they can't do this independently.

My World, develops pupils' cognitive skills through exploring stimuli linked to the world immediately around them and the wider world, picking out broad themes contained within the history, geography and RE.

My Computing

Pupils will have the opportunity to work on many of these skills across other subject areas, especially using information communication technology to communicate. However, there is also a lesson on the timetable to concentrate working on developing relevant skills in this area. As well as using H levels to show progress within this area, pupils will work against a "switch progression map" to demonstrate progress.

Progression

Pupils to undertake when it is felt appropriate the Equals PMLD Pre-formal curriculum, this then will provide a basis for those pupils who may progress to other classes within school to a semi- formal curriculum.

Year 9-11

From year 9 pupils will take part in one of the following ASDAN programmes:

- Transition Challenge
- My Independence (see: [asdan.org.uk/courses/my independence/](https://asdan.org.uk/courses/my-independence/)). This course could be started at any point during secondary as there is a great deal of progression)

For some pupils it may be appropriate for them to complete:

City and Guilds: Augmentative and Alternative Communication (3716)

Transition Challenge

“Transition Challenge offers a learner-centred, activity-based curriculum that can be undertaken with as much support as necessary. It has been developed for learners aged 14–16 with SEND, although it can be used with older age groups if appropriate.

There are two levels available:

Sensory: this programme offers a developmental perspective for learners with PMLD and rewards very small steps of learning and achievement

Introduction and Progression: the activities in this programme cover the statutory programmes of study for the key stage 4 national curriculum, along with activities to develop the skills required for adult living” (ASDAN Website, accessed 17th August 2024)

Teaching and Support Strategies

Age Appropriateness

Owing to the range of pupils’ ages within the class, as well as their abilities, pupils will often be split into groups to cater for both of these things. As far as possible where resources exist provision will be made for older pupils to use resources which are slightly more appropriate for their chronological age; for example using switch games which have pop music on rather than nursery rhymes and making up stories for them rather than using books for very young children. This allows them also to experience other things rather than the same things that they have been experiencing for years, if this is appropriate for them. When pupils are choosing things, however, if they want to choose something which isn’t age appropriate to them then this is fine.

Within the planning there will be activities for primary and secondary pupils as well as differentiation within these groups for pupils working at different levels.

Process based learning

It needs to be highlighted that much of the learning which PMLD / Bridging pupils undertake needs to have its emphasis in the process rather than the end product. It does not matter what the cakes look like when they come out of the oven or that the animal which they have decorated no longer looks like an animal. These things are just not important at this stage of

learning. In fact, it does not matter if there is no end product. What is important is the process which the pupils go through, that they are given time to explore different materials to learning about them. Imray and Hinchcliffe (2014) put this well;

The PMLD class will be involved in baking a cake as a means of improving their exploratory abilities. The product is really unimportant; it is the process which is key, and the staff will ensure that pupils all have as much physical access to the materials as possible. The session might start with an object cue being passed around the circle while a music cue is being played. Considerable thought will be given to individual seating and positioning, thus enabling and maximising free exploration; ensuring materials are easily accessible and identifiable - providing brown sugar so that it stands out from the white flour, presenting the flour and butter in a dark bowl and the brown sugar and dried fruit in a white one; watching, tasting, listening; making certain learners have the opportunity to mix ingredients and see, touch, taste, smell and listen to any changes as they happen. The skill of the teaching is to ensure that the process is motivating enough for each learner to independently explore as much as possible, that known motivating ingredients are placed just out of reach so that the learner has to work that bit harder to get them. The staff might reflect the process they are going through, perhaps making short pithy comments such as “flour.... Soft...dry” or “flour....butter...sticky! (p.35)

Hand-under-Hand

It may be advantageous to help pupils to explore the world using hand-under-hand rather than hand-over-hand. Pupils can be assisted by providing support to the pupil by guiding their hand from the elbow. The palm of the pupil's hand rests on the back of the adult's hand. The adult gently guides the pupil's hand to the directed activity.

Advantages include:

- Pupil can remove their hand when they wish
- Pupils can remove their hand to indicate “finished”
- Pupil can relax their hand once they feel comfortable
- It is easy to assist the movement of their hands.
- Pupils are more likely to feel the object, as there is no distraction from the hands on-top of theirs.
- Once the pupil is engaged in the object you can start working your hands out from underneath theirs to give them more of the object, eventually taking your hands away.

Supporting Communication

Communication methods and strategies will be looked at on a pupil by pupil basis. The Speech and Language Therapist will support this.

Objects of Reference

Objects of reference will be used to help pupils understand what is about to happen, either what they are about to do or where they might be going. They can also be used to help Pupils make choices.

The number of objects of reference to be used will be depended on the pupil's level of understanding, and what they need to help them understand what is happening. Objects of reference will be individualised therefore to each pupil.

Destination Objects of Reference - Pupils should carry their object of reference to the destination, being shown it at the beginning and at the end of the journey.

Some Pupils may move on from Objects of Reference to other cue, such as photographs or CiP symbols. These should be used in the same way.

Makaton

Staff should use Makaton as much as possible to support their verbal communication as this reinforces what is being said to the Pupils. Pupils should be supported to sign where possible.

TaSSeLs

TaSSeLs will be used to indicate to pupils what is about to happen and to gain there attention.

AAC

Some pupils may then go onto use AAC such as PECs, ALDs and Etran frame with symbols stuck onto them.

Approaching and moving pupils in wheelchairs

Pupil should be approached from in front of them and an appropriate greeting given to them, they should be told what is about to happen or where they are being taken.

Pupils should be warned that breaks are about to be taken off. Pupils should be chatted too as they are moving. When changing direction the pupils should be told, or tapping the shoulder of the direction they are being moved in.

Working with pupils in wheelchairs

The following guidelines should be taken into account:

- Wherever possible staff should work at the level of the wheelchair, i.e. sat down.

Tac Pac

Tac Pac is a programme which uses objects of different textures and music. These objects and pieces of music become familiar as well as actions and pupil in a pattern of different activities, the partners communicate with each other.

Tac Pac needs to be repeated, to begin with pupils are likely to be unfamiliar with it, and possibly "tactile defensive". Over time pupils are likely to become more familiar with the music and be able to anticipate the next touch experience. Over time, they may begin to relate more to the "giving partner" and develop a sense of trust, which can help both the giver and the receiver in developing greater confidence in communicating with each other.

Sensology

Sensology describes a functional, or practical, sensory education. It embraces the importance of the theory of early learning through sensory stimulation, sensory experiences and multisensory environments. It is a vital part of the "pre-requisites to learning" skills

everyone acquires in order to access any level of thought. Using the Sensology approach may lead to an understanding of more complex sensory perceptions, which form a concrete base for simple understanding. There is an opportunity for a natural progression to not only understand, but also to remember what has been learnt” (Flo Longhorn, 2007)

What is a Sensology Workout?

A Sensology workout is an enjoyable, positive kick-start way to:

- Awaken the seven sensory systems contained in the body, nervous system and brain.
- Realise you have sensory systems to sense, think, learn, understand and remember.
- Use a favourite sense with pleasure and learn through this sensory pleasure
- Work on the sensory systems in order to begin to sense, perceive- then understand and remember – the world around.
- Build up a suitcase of “prerequisites to learning skills – beginning to:
- Look and attend
- Control movements
- Relate, to oneself, other and the world around
- Communicate
- Anticipate
- Use a working memory and
- Learn through pleasurable and exciting multisensory experiences

(Flo Longhorn, 2007)

Intensive Interaction

Intensive interaction aims to develop the Fundamentals of Communication. These are:

- Enjoying being with another person
- Developing the ability to attend to that person
- Concentration and attention span
- Learning to do sequences of activity with another person
- Taking turns in exchanges of behaviour
- Sharing personal space
- Using and understanding eye contacts
- Using and understanding facial expressions
- Using and understanding physical contacts
- Using and understanding other non-verbal communications
- Vocalising and using vocalisations meaningfully
- Learning to regulate and control arousal levels
- Fundamental emotional learning
- (Probably) the development of neural links

Areas to Learn in

Outside Learning

The school has various outside learning spaces which can be accessed, these include:

- Outside classroom
- Musical chimes attached to the walls
- Accessible roundabout and swing
- Astro turf
- Planted areas

Outside spaces can be used in a variety of ways, these include:

- Sensory stories
- Listening walks
- Physical development
- Making choices

Soft Play

The soft play room can be used for a variety of things in a variety of ways.

These may include:

- Intensive Interaction
- Communication - looking and responding
- Physical development – independent movement
- Body Awareness
- Fine and gross motor skills – Knocking things and moving things.
- Cognition – shape, space, object permanence
- Social interaction
- Sensory Stories
- Social Interaction
- Making choices

Multisensory Room

The multisensory room can be used for a variety of things in a variety of ways. These may include:

- Intensive Interaction
- Communication - looking and responding
- Communication – listening and responding
- Physical development - moving around as independently as possible
- Fine and gross motor skills – manipulating different items in the sensory room and trying to knock and move items.
- Cognition – searching for items, object permanence
- Sensory stories
- Social interaction
- Making choices

Pupils will have clear aims and objectives when going to use soft play or the Multisensory room, which the TAs accompanying them will be expected to follow.

Information and Communication Technology

A range of equipment and software are used in order for pupils to access technology in school.

These include:

- Various switches
- Switch boxes
- iPads
- Big Macks and other sound buttons
- Choose it Maker 3
- HelpKidzLearn Games
- Clicker 7

- Switch adapted toys and equipment
- Immersive suite

Classroom Displays

Informative

Information relevant to the children's needs should be displayed within the classroom setting in appropriate areas. This information can include care plans, self-help and changing needs positioning needs and manual handling information.

Pupil's current targets should be displayed in relevant areas including within the classroom and bathroom/changing room and outdoor areas. Targets for hydro and Rebound should also be displayed and can be made portable to be taken to the different areas. MOVE targets should be displayed in both the pupils classroom and bathrooms.

Learning and Celebration

Learning displays in PMLD classes should be interactive and often take the form of display tables or sensory areas. This could be turning a corner of a classroom into an under the sea cave with a sensory exploration table for example. Wall displays can be used to celebrate work created by pupils and their achievements. These can include photographs, observations and pieces of work.

Continuous provision

An adapted approach to continuous provision is used in classes for pupils with PMLD.

Areas can include but are not restricted to:

- Reading/Sensory story
- Mark Making
- Visual Awareness
- Light/dark area
- Tactile exploration
- Water
- Sand
- Construction

Staff should ensure that pupils aren't left without anything to do, and that they always have something to do.

Impact

We measure the impact of the curriculum in a number of ways outlined below.

Pupils' progress is assessed through Quest for Learning and the Engagement Model (where appropriate). Progress is recorded via Earwig.

The Engagement Model is used for pupils to enable us to assess and monitor both the linear and lateral progress of our learners who are working at this level. The Engagement Model has 5 areas: Exploration, Realisation, Anticipation, Persistence and Initiation. Each of the 5 areas are interrelated and are not hierarchical so there is no expectation that pupils need to

demonstrate progress in all 5 areas. Each of the areas represent what is necessary for pupils to fully engage in their development and reach their full potential. The areas also provide the scaffolding to enable pupils to become independent in developing a new skill or concept. Evidence of this is recorded within Earwig, and this data is analysed each half term to look for where progress is made and for which sort of activities each of the pupils respond well to in order to inform planning. An assessment schedule, Earwig evidence journals and “Evidence and Progression form” for each pupil in the class on the Engagement model is on T-pool.

Pupils have EHCP targets set each year which focus particularly on what they need to learn. EHCPs targets are written taking into account progress already made and consideration of what they now need to learn, and what they may be able to achieve. Ensuring that they have challenging but realistic targets which allows them to make progress. Achievement of these targets are also recorded via Earwig. Some of the EHCP targets, where appropriate, are based on aspects of Quest for Learning.

Those pupils who follow the MOVE programme also have MOVE targets which their progress is assessed against.

Plenty of photographs are taken of what the pupils are learning in school and Records of Achievements are compiled for each pupil with good pieces of work in as well as photographs.

For those that use switches we also use the switch progression map to track progress and map next steps.

Rebound therapy progression is tracked against the Huddersfield Functional Index for Rebound Therapy.

Pet Therapy is tracked against Personal Development levels of progress.