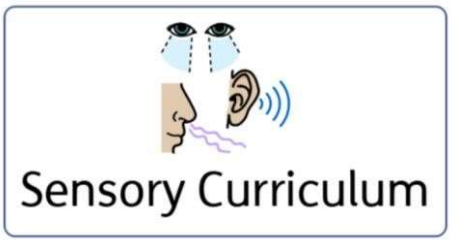
Hollywater School

Inspire. Believe. Achieve.

Hollywater Pre-Formal Curriculum

Gold Class



September 2026

Intent

PMLD pupils are at the very early stages of development. The 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 offer 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 ordinary 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 carers.* (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

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.

Pupils in Gold class will be following the **EQUALS Pre-Formal Curriculum** approach, which is designed for pupils working at early developmental stages who learn best through sensory, experiential and highly personalised activities. The curriculum is organised into key areas that support communication, cognition, physical development, independence, emotional wellbeing and understanding of the world.

EQUALS Pre-Formal Curriculum Overview

The EQUALS Pre-Formal Curriculum focuses on developing the fundamental skills pupils need to engage with their environment, communicate their needs, build relationships and become as independent as possible. Learning is highly practical, sensory-based and personalised, with a strong emphasis on communication, interaction, play, exploration and real-life experiences.

- **My Communication and Interaction**

This area develops the foundations of communication and social interaction through a total communication approach.

What is covered?

- Intensive Interaction
- Attention Autism
- Curiosity and Bucket activities
- Sensory stories
- Core vocabulary development
- Makaton signing
- Objects of reference
- Eye gaze communication
- TaSSeLs
- Expressing wants and needs
- Developing likes and dislikes
- Making choices
- Building functional communication skills
- Role play and social interaction activities

The aim is to help pupils communicate intentionally, engage with others and develop meaningful interactions.

- **Literacy**

The literacy curriculum develops early communication, reading and writing skills through engaging sensory experiences.

What is covered?

- Traditional stories
- Sensory storytelling
- Little Wandle phonics programme
- Letters and sounds
- Phase 2 phonics
- Nursery rhymes and rhyme time
- Mark making activities
- Dough Disco
- Squiggle While You Wiggle
- Write Dance
- Drawing and early writing

- Scissor skills
- Sharing fiction and non-fiction texts

Activities focus on developing listening, attention, early reading behaviours, communication and physical skills needed for writing.

- **My Social and Emotional Development**

This area supports wellbeing, emotional regulation and positive relationships.

What is covered?
- Identifying and expressing emotions
- Zones of Regulation
- Self-awareness
- Family and important people
- Celebrating differences
- Respecting diversity
- Healthy relationships
- Friendship skills
- Personal boundaries and personal space
- Healthy lifestyles
- Hygiene and self-care
- Changes and growing up
- Mental wellbeing

The curriculum helps pupils understand themselves and others whilst developing emotional resilience and social understanding.

- **My Cognition and Learning**

This area develops early mathematical thinking and problem-solving through practical experiences.

What is covered?
- Number exploration
- Counting and one-to-one correspondence
- Shape exploration
- Sorting and categorising
- Pattern recognition
- Weight (heavy/light)
- Capacity (full/empty)
- Time concepts and routines
- Mathematical language
- Real-life application of maths concepts
- Cause and effect learning

Children learn through sensory and practical activities that allow them to experience concepts in meaningful contexts.

- **My Sensory Play**

Play is recognised as a key vehicle for learning and development.

What is covered?

- Functional play
- Parallel play
- Structured play
- Free play
- Turn-taking games
- Social play
- Imaginative play
- Construction activities
- Sensory exploration
- Creative and messy play

Play experiences promote communication, creativity, social interaction and problem-solving.

- **My Outdoor School**

Outdoor learning allows pupils to engage with nature and their environment.

What is covered?

- Orienteering
- Environmental awareness
- Seasonal changes
- Minibeast studies
- Wilderness exploration
- Shelter building
- Planting and growing
- Bug hotels
- Natural art
- Investigating the outdoor environment

Outdoor learning develops curiosity, confidence, wellbeing and understanding of the natural world.

- **My Independence**

This strand develops essential life skills for everyday living.

What is covered?

- Food preparation and cooking
- Spreading, peeling and mixing
- Dressing and undressing
- Body awareness
- Personal care and hygiene
- Understanding privacy
- Travel training
- Moving around school safely
- Community visits

- Preparing for new environments
- Developing independence in daily routines

The focus is on preparing pupils for greater independence and participation in daily life.

- **My Sensory and Physical Development**

This area promotes physical development, movement, health and body awareness.

What is covered?
- Physiotherapy
- Hydrotherapy
- Hippotherapy
- Sherborne Movement
- Creativity and dance
- Boogie Mites
- Dough Disco
- Massage Stories
- Tac Pac
- Mindfulness
- Body awareness
- Movement and coordination
- Sports Day activities
- Shared movement experiences

Activities support physical skills, sensory regulation, coordination and wellbeing.

- **The World About Me**

This area helps pupils understand their communities and the wider world.

What is covered?
- Family and people who help us
- Harvest
- Religious and cultural celebrations
- Diwali
- Hanukkah
- Advent and Christmas
- Space and the solar system
- Spring celebrations
- Materials and their properties
- Forces and motion
- Seaside studies
- Sea life
- World sporting events
- Seasonal learning

Learning experiences encourage curiosity, cultural awareness and understanding of the world around them.

- **Creative Arts**

Art
Pupils explore:
- Collage
- Textiles
- Painting
- Colour mixing
- Drawing
- Printmaking
- Sculpture
- Artists such as Frida Kahlo
- Fine motor skills through art experiences

Music
Pupils explore:
- Tempo
- Rhythm
- Dynamics (loud and quiet)
- Timbre
- Percussion
- Action songs
- Music from different cultures
- Movement and dance
- Listening and responding

The EQUALS Pre-Formal Curriculum aims to provide pupils with rich sensory experiences and meaningful learning opportunities that develop:
- Communication
- Social interaction
- Emotional wellbeing
- Independence
- Physical development
- Early cognition and problem-solving
- Creativity
- Understanding of the world

The curriculum is highly personalised and focuses on helping pupils become engaged learners, effective communicators and active participants in school, home and community life.

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/). 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 do 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 want rest on the back of the adults' hand. The adult gentle 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 bases. 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.

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
- Astroturf
- 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 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 the EQUALS Pre-Formal assessment framework and the Engagement Model. 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.

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.

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.