

What is the Alba Centre?

The Alba Centre is a specialist resource for pupils who are deafblind /Multisensory impaired (MSI). It currently consists of three classes all taught by specialist practitioners who are MSI qualified or in the process of becoming so. We follow a bespoke curriculum that guides professionals in how and what to teach.

Who am I teaching?

All the students at the Alba Centre are deafblind/MSI. Learners with MSI are hugely disadvantaged in understanding and interacting with their environment because the information they receive is so limited, distorted and fragmented. As a result, their learning is often fragile and untidy. They need an optimal, individualised learning environment, defined broadly as the places, people, objects and activities which make up their world.

Because MSI affects people's ability to gain information from and about their environment, it slows the pace of learning, affecting:

- Communication and the development of relationships;
- Mobility and interaction with the physical environment;
- The processing and integration of information from residual hearing, vision and other senses;
- The perception of time and space;
- The transfer and generalisation of skills and concepts and the development of abstract reasoning.

As a consequence, our students require skills and knowledge which promote access, taught within a broad and balanced curriculum that challenges and engages the students, resulting in meaningful and impactful outcomes.

The Alba Centre is equally relevant to learners at all Key Stages and, when appropriate, students are enabled to access other curriculum pathways with a personalised support as required.

What am I teaching?

In order to meet their specific learning needs, students with MSI need a curriculum designed for them. In the year 2009, The MSI Unit at Victoria School in Birmingham published [*A curriculum for multi-sensory-impaired children.*](#) This is the curriculum we follow at the Alba Centre.

The Curriculum is divided into eight domains, each addressing a specific aspect of learning.

The domains are:

- social relationships and emotional development;
- communication;
- conceptual development;
- sensory responses;
- understanding of time and place;
- orientation, movement and mobility;
- ownership of learning;
- and responses to routines and changes

Some of the eight domains, for example, communication and conceptual development, are equally relevant for all students at Linden Lodge. Others, such as sensory responses, understanding of time and place and responses to routines and changes, have particular relevance for pupils with MSI.

On the one hand, the MSI Curriculum provides access to more conventional curricula by developing pupils' learning skills. On the other, it addresses the impact of MSI on development and aims to help pupils overcome MSI-specific barriers to learning and development.

Whilst conventional curricula focus on **what** pupils will learn, with a clear set of linear, product-based learning outcomes on which to measure progress, the MSI Curriculum focuses on **how** children learn and especially on the development of effective learning and interaction skills. It is a process-based, branching, learner-centred curriculum, which specifies staff behaviour rather than learner behaviour, and emphasises cross-curricular working.

Balance

Each pupil's timetable is individually planned to ensure an appropriate balance of learning activities that address EHCP targets across a range of subjects.

Lesson planning is cross-curricular, to promote the development of generalisation and to reduce the challenges of prompt dependency and context-dependency which limit the learning of many pupils with MSI.

Relevance:

Pupils with MSI typically have difficulty accessing experiences which are beyond the immediate, present and familiar. The MSI curriculum emphasises learning rooted in pupils' own direct experience, thus ensuring relevance and the transfer and generalisation of skills which are specifically taught.

The curriculum offers sufficient flexibility to meet individual learning needs based on profiles of ability and sensory, learning and physical difficulties.

Progression

The curriculum is divided into four phases. The phases reflect the developmental progression most commonly seen in children with MSI, whose common feature is that they lack consistent, undistorted sensory input from their physical and social environment.

The levels are linked to stages of communicative development:

- Phase 1 - pre-intentional
- Phase 2 – intentional non-symbolic
- Phase 3 - early symbolic
- Phase 4 – formal

The four curriculum phases reflect pupils' increasingly complex understanding of their environment.

The early phases of the curriculum support the gradual development of awareness, interest and competence in interaction. Pupils at later phases become more able to recognise and deal with a range of people, activities and contexts.

Assessment of progress

The progress of pupils within each curriculum phase is recorded using the Phase Profile. The profiles consist of 'typical achievements' which suggest that the pupil has mastered the skills, concepts and global understanding associated with each phase.

Students working long-term at phases 1 and 2 invariably have profound needs in other areas as well as MSI. With these students, we use Routes for Learning as a developmental framework, which stresses interaction between the person and the environment and the development of compensatory strategies to overcome barriers to learning.