

Curriculum development

Following several years of consultation and discussion, the school curriculum changed quite significantly in September 2019.

Why change?

The motivation for changing the curriculum arose from a combination of factors:

- Surveys suggested that an increase in challenge and in the pace of learning in KS3 would be welcomed by pupils and parents, as would changes to the subjects on offer.
- Qualification reform was taking place at national level and there was a growing recognition of the leap in demand from GCSE to A Level.
- Regular requests were being made by stakeholders to reconsider the school day and school timetable.
- There was a need for the School to respond to the government's ambition to see more pupils studying the EBacc subject combination, especially to increase numbers studying a language to GCSE.

In considering what to change, several issues needed to be resolved. At the heart of the discussion was the question: how do we best meet the needs of *our* pupils?

What changed?

The School day was restructured. The School moved from a timetable of eight 35-minute lessons delivered over one week, to fifty one-hour lessons delivered over two. This improved learning by optimising the length of lessons and allowing flexibility to timetable lessons more optimally during the day and over the week.

KS3 was shortened to two years. This allowed subjects to meet the needs of our high ability pupils more effectively, by increasing the pace and challenge of the KS3 programme. Feedback from pupils speaks to the success of this objective.

The revisions to the schemes of learning that arose from this change resulted in more-challenging material being moved lower down the curriculum (see the English range of texts or the RS curriculum, for example). Associated considerations of sequencing and timing have allowed subjects to respond to gains in KS2 teaching (for example the revisions to the schemes of learning in mathematics and English, or the earlier introduction of translation in languages); thereby, supporting and accelerating learning higher up the school.

The breadth of the KS3 curriculum was increased far beyond the scope of the national curriculum. A decision was made to ensure specialist teaching in the three sciences from entry to enable the early development of our scientists and support progression higher up the school. The three sciences remain popular options at A-Level and many students depart to pursue careers in science and engineering.

It was also decided to address historic gaps in provision by adding Latin to Year 7 and a discrete PSHCE lesson to Year 7 and Year 8, thereby giving all three languages equal curriculum time and increasing the total number of subjects encountered in KS3 to 18.

KS4 was extended to three years. This allowed more time in the GCSE programme to deliver the additional [non-specification] content that we felt was required to engage and challenge our pupils and better support progression into post-16 programmes. It also enabled us to add an additional GCSE course to our standard offer.

Conditions were placed on the subjects that pupils could study. At GCSE, KS4 pupils would be required to study a humanities subject (history or geography) and a language (French, German, or Latin). From 2021, the proportion of pupils studying the EBacc combination of GCSE subjects is 100%, having previously been around 40% to 50% before the changes.

The breadth of the KS4 curriculum was substantially increased. A tenth GCSE course was added to the standard KS4 programme. A discrete lesson in PSHCE and another in Statutory RE was added to the standard KS4 programme and at least two hours per week of Physical Education was maintained to encourage all pupils to pursue active and healthy lifestyles. Market research and modelling suggested that the addition of a tenth GCSE would offset the new restrictions on subject choice and preserve the breadth of our KS4 programme and, in turn, our KS5 curriculum, predictions which have since proved to be true. The addition of a tenth GCSE has also allowed pupils to take a second or third language or humanities subject if they wish.

There are now 18 GCSE subjects on offer within the core curriculum, delivered alongside separate provision in PSHCE, Statutory RS, Core PE, and the enrichment programme (see below). Non-examined programmes now account for nearly 20% of curriculum time in KS4. Due to strong demand from pupils, GCSE Astronomy has recently been added to the co-curriculum programme.

An extensive KS4 enrichment programme was created to ensure that all pupils continue to access a broad range of subjects and to further develop and extend the School's non-examined provision. Weekly lessons, designed by subject specialists, ensure a universal provision beyond KS3. Pupils continue to take lessons in art, music, computing, food and nutrition, and creative writing, and are introduced to new subjects such as economics, politics, ecology, earth sciences, classics, ethics, *ab initio* languages such as Italian, and many more. The courses are designed to complement the GCSE programme of study to ensure pupils are not duplicating work and are delivered by subject specialists to ensure quality delivery.

The KS5 curriculum was largely unchanged, with key developments taking place in the years before, but by increasing demand for the smaller subjects at GCSE and introducing the pupils to new subjects in KS4 through the enrichment programme, the pipeline of potential pupils for certain subjects at A-Level has been increased and appetites whetted for new disciplines. This has resulted in increased recruitment to A Levels in Music, MFL, and PE; new A Level courses such as Politics being introduced; and, happily, Art, Classical Civilisation, and Latin returning to the A Level curriculum after many years of absence. Ultimately, these changes have improved the financial viability of our Sixth Form and enhanced the breadth of the KS5 curriculum available to our students. Despite the small size of our school, 22 A Level subjects remain on offer to the students.

The KS5 enrichment programme has been overhauled and expanded, with all students able to add the Extended Project Qualification to their A Level programme. There are drop-down days to support the delivery of SRE and religious education, and new schemes of learning developed in SRE and careers. A weekly lecture programme has been introduced and goes from strength to strength. It has been amended in response to requests for topics and the evolving needs of the students' post-18 ambitions. The programme now forms an important part of the students' preparation for later life.

What will happen in the future?

The curriculum is under constant review and development. Regular surveys gauge the interests of the pupils and the effectiveness of our delivery. Curriculum leadership structures enable the School to respond quickly to changes in context and need. Changes in staffing pupil preferences, and regular reviews of our schemes of learning have seen changes of direction and focus.

External factors also play their role. Throughout the pandemic, for example, staff have worked quickly to revise schemes of learning and develop new resources and teaching strategies, and to revise plans again for the post-pandemic transition.

Whilst retaining a traditional approach in some aspects of our provision, information technology is now heavily embedded in many areas, with staff and pupils alike keen to make the most of the opportunities such technology offers.