HIGHDOWN SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM CENTRE

# CURRICULUM POLICY

Aspiration – Respect – Excellence

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Review**

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|---|---|---|---|
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# HIGHDOWN SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM CENTRE
## Curriculum Policy

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policy/policies:

- Equality Statement & Objectives
- Learning and Teaching Policy
- Inclusion Policy
- PSHCE Policy

## Intent

***School Curriculum Values***

The curriculum describes everything we teach at Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre. All student experiences are learning experiences and both in and outside of the classroom, they are shaped by our vision and our core values.

Highdown inspires a love of learning and achievement that is founded on the values of aspiration, respect, and excellence. Every person is valued and encouraged to achieve their full potential. Students are supported to develop and express their character, empowering them to positively contribute to their community.

Every student will experience a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum throughout their five-to-seven-year journey at Highdown. Students will acquire and develop understanding and skills in key subjects which will prepare them as balanced citizens ready for their next steps.

***Curriculum Statement***

Curriculum at Highdown is knowledge-rich, challenging and designed in a manner which allows all students to become resilient and active learners. Our curriculum will ensure all students have wide access to a broad and balanced curriculum which emphasises foundational skills, fostering curiosity and ensuring our learners are future ready. Planned with coherency, mastery, and inclusivity at its core, all learners at Highdown will be empowered to become independent and responsible young people, reaching their full potential and ready for further education or employment as believers of lifelong learning.

***Subject Curriculum Intent***

Each subject and curriculum team is proud of their curriculum and subject domain. Highdown recognises the distinct role each individual subject plays in a student's academic journey. Each department's voice is distinctly heard in Highdown's curriculum statement. Each subject's curriculum is planned as a 7, 5, or 2-year journey with an emphasis on a knowledge-rich narrative (Counsell) which is carefully structured so new ideas rest and build upon prior understanding.

***Promoting British Values***

Highdown School is proud to be a multicultural and diverse community of students and staff. The curriculum plays a vital role in promoting and reinforcing; Democracy, Rule of Law, Individual Liberty and Tolerance.

Through ongoing review, our curriculum will look to amplify the voices of all, including those with 'protected characteristics'. Our students will be taught to question and review, knowing that knowledge is a powerful tool to access an ever-changing world. Highdown aims to "give students access to the best of what has been thought and said".

Highdown uses a range of curriculum opportunities such as, Mentor Time, dedicated PSHCE time through Character, Culture and Citizenship (CCC) lessons, a range of external bodies and local providers to explore RSE and contemporary moral issues. Many aspects of our curriculum allow for ongoing and in depth Social, Moral, Spiritual & Cultural Education (SMSC) education. Through these processes, students develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence, encouraging them to accept responsibility for their behaviour in the setting of a wide and diverse world.

***Equality, Diversity and promotion of an Inclusive Curriculum***

Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre is totally committed to promoting equal opportunity and inclusion. In line with the Equality Act 2010 and the Department for Education guidance: The Equality Act 2010 and schools, our curriculum will display a discrimination-free approach to teaching and learning throughout the school. Departments present opportunities for promoting cultural diversity within subjects.[1]

***Careers***

The careers programme is guided by the CDI framework (2021) and the Gatsby benchmarks. Students experience a range of activities during mentor time, CCC lessons, Careers Spotlight sessions during the 5 Careers Weeks, curriculum lessons and through experiences of the workplace and encounters with employers. Students have a specialist input of careers information and guidance through assemblies, group work and 1:1 sessions which broaden knowledge and awareness of pathways, careers and decision making. The Highdown Excellence Plan supports goal setting and action planning which is an integral part of a robust careers development programme.

***Co-Curricular Programme***

Highdown offers a wide and varied programme of extra-curricular activities that take place outside of the formal curriculum. The offer will vary from year to year and term to term, for example different sporting clubs will be offered at different points in the year. Every year, students will be able to participate in activities in the fields of sport, the arts, personal development and cultural opportunities.

## Key Stage 3

***Key Stage 3 Curriculum***

All students experience a broad and balanced curriculum following the guidance in the Academies Funding Agreement. Our Key Stage 3 Curriculum provides a foundation of knowledge and skills in preparation for study at Key Stage 4. The table below shows the number of periods allocated per subject per year group, over a two-week period, for a total of 50 periods per fortnight (ppf). Each lesson is 1 hour in length.

| Subject | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Total across KS3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Art | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Drama | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| English | 8 | 8 | 8 | 24 |
| Ethics | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Geography | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 |

[1] Further information can be found in our Equality Statement and Objectives.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| History | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 |
| ICT/Computing | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Mathematics | 8 | 8 | 8 | 24 |
| MFL | 4* | 4 | 4 | 16 |
| Music | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Physical Education | 4 | 4 | 4 | 12 |
| Science | 7+1** | 7+1** | 8 | 22+2 |
| Technology | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| PSHCE(CCC)*** | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |

*Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) receives an additional 2ppf of twilight lessons, 2 mentor periods a fortnight (for a total of 1ppf) and 1ppf of additional time taken from PE
** 8ppf of Science (7ppf of Science +1ppf of STEAM)
***In addition to 1 ppf, PSHCE is covered across the wider curriculum and is a focal point for assemblies and external agency visits

Upon entry into Year 7, students will select a language which they will study alongside their wider Key Stage 3 curriculum until the end of Year 9. Languages then become an option at KS4 and 5.

Most subjects are taught in mixed attainment groups in Key Stage 3. Maths is set based on prior and current attainment from October half term in Year 7. English is taught in mentor groups in Year 7 and then in mixed attainment groups in Years 8 and 9. Science is taught in mentor groups in Years 7 and 8 and mixed attainment groups in Year 9.

In Year 8, Students will complete an options process for Design and Technology subjects. This allows them to study fewer subjects more deeply in year 9 for increased specialist knowledge and skills development in preparation for GCSE.

In Year 9, students will complete an options process for study at Key Stage 4.

***Rationale for a 3-year Key Stage 3 Curriculum***
A vibrant and exploratory curriculum at Key Stage 3 is vital to ensure students are best prepared for studies at Key Stage 4 and 5, and their lives beyond the school. Building in opportunities for broader hinterland knowledge (Counsell) which enriches students' passions and love of the subjects they study is an important stage in their educational journey. Additionally, students having regular opportunities to build core knowledge in a broad range of subjects best prepares them for success in the future. From Year 9, students will explore opportunities to develop their skills and understanding of complex topics covered at Key Stage 4, enriching their learning and preparing them for the rigour of Key Stage 4.

## Key Stage 4

***Key stage Four Curriculum***
The Key Stage Four curriculum is designed to allow for specialism and emphasises choice.
All students have the same core entitlement and will study GCSEs in English (GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature), Maths, Science (Triple or Combined GCSE).

Students will then choose 4 additional optional choices. For 2025-26, the following subjects were offered:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Art | Art Graphics | Art Photography | Business Studies |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Citizenship | Computing | Creative iMedia (Level 2) | Design and Technology |
| Drama | Economics | Food Preparation and Nutrition | French |
| Geography | Hairdressing and Beauty (Level 2) | History | Mandarin Chinese |
| Music | Music Technology | Physical Education | Spanish |
| BTEC Sport | Textile and Design | Statistics | Religious Studies |

In addition, students will study core Physical Education (non-GCSE) and CCC. Most students will choose 4 option subjects to study alongside their core subjects and non-GCSE compulsory subjects.

All option subjects are taught in mixed ability groups while the core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science are taught in sets.

The table below shows the number of periods allocated per subject per year group, over a two-week period, for a total of 50 periods per fortnight (ppf). Each lesson is 1 hour in length.

| Subject | Year 10 | Year 11 | Total Across KS4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| English | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| Mathematics | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| Science | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Physical Education (Non-GCSE) | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| (PSHCE) CCC | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Option A | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Option B | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Option C | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Option D | 5 | 5 | 10 |

***Study Programme***

A student will follow a specific study programme. A 'study programme' refers to a combination of different subjects and qualifications, some core and some optional. Students are guided by the school into a recommended study pathway. This is identified by academic performance, pastoral information, and student preference. All study programmes have clear progression routes to post-16 education, apprenticeship or the world of work.

All students will be guided to a study programme which the school feels matches them. We strongly believe our study programmes provide the best basis for student success but will always be guided by student and parental/carer input.

Our Key Stage 4 offer is based on student choice. Our destinations data show that the majority of our students will go into further and higher education. To this end, whilst completing their GCSE options process, students will receive information, advice, and guidance which may indicate specific subjects might benefit them and their future life decisions.

A number of students will be required to take a language or History or Geography as part of their GCSE options. Students who have been participating in the Mandarin Excellence Programme will be expected

to take Mandarin GCSE. A small number of students are recommended to complete additional English and maths instead of one choice subject.

Research shows that taking a language at GCSE is also linked to success in the core subjects. Our Key Stage 3 language curriculum allows for students to specialise in one language from a choice of three, preparing them for the additional rigour of GCSE languages.

Students in Year 7 in 2025-26 will be the first to be offered the opportunity to take up a secondary language in Year 8 before having the choice to continue with either language at KS4 and KS5.

## Key Stage 5

***Key Stage 5 Curriculum***

The Key Stage Five Curriculum is designed to continue students' love of learning and support students in the next phase of their lives by enabling success through exceptional academic results. The curriculum is built to provide opportunities for all and offers a range of A Level qualifications and Technical courses. Alongside this, students will have mandated independent study, opportunities for enrichment learning and additional opportunities such as EPQ.

Course offer in academic year 2025-2026*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Art and Design (Fine Art) | Art and Design (Textiles) | Art and Design (Photography) | Biology |
| Business | Chemistry | Computer Science | Digital Media (BTEC) |
| Drama | Economics | English Lang/Lit | English Lit |
| Further Maths | Geography | History | French |
| Spanish | Maths | Mathematical Studies (Core Maths) | Music |
| Music Technology | Philosophy | Physics | Politics |
| Psychology | Sociology | Sport (BTEC) | |

*Courses can sometimes be added or removed due to student take up or teaching capacity

The table below shows the number of periods allocated per subject per year group, over a two-week period, for a total of 50 periods per fortnight (ppf). Each lesson is 1 hour in length.

| Subject | Year 12 | Year 13 | Total Across KS5 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Block A | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Block B | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Block C | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Block D | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Block E Further Maths | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Block E EPQ | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Block E Mathematical Studies (Core) | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| Enrichment | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| (PSHCE) CCC | 1 | 1 | 2 |

***Entry Requirements & Study Programmes***

*All students must meet the standard Sixth Form Entry Requirements of 5+ GCSEs graded 4-9, including a Grade 4+ in maths and English (Language OR Literature).*

All Sixth Form students will follow a Study Programme that:

- Provides progression to a level higher than that of their prior attainment
- Includes qualification of sufficient size and rigour to stretch students and are clearly linked to suitable progression opportunities in training, employment or higher education
- Includes opportunities to develop employability skills
- Includes activities unrelated to qualifications, which develop character, skills, attitudes and confidence that support progression.

All students studying a Level 3 Study Programme will be allocated 10 teaching periods per subject. A teaching period will commonly consist of a period of direct teaching. However, it might also include periods of individual assessment, individual one-to-one mentoring/tutoring, or time for students to work independently on their work. For some courses, the required practical time allows students to progress at their own pace to craft their work whilst receiving regular feedback from their teacher(s).

Such work does not always necessitate a teacher to be with the students for all the timetabled sessions. This is particularly so where there is a small number of students studying a subject, as they will cover the course content in depth more quickly than for a large cohort of students. Furthermore, the smaller group size enables more of a 'private tuition' approach to learning and support.
To enter the sixth form students must meet the standard entry criteria.

In addition to allocated lessons, a student's study programme will also include non-qualification activities, such as mentor periods, allocated independent study time, PSHCE/CCC and a weekly enrichment activity. It will also include work experience for a week during the term time.

## Bring Your Own Device [BYOD]

Highdown's 'bring your own device' (BYOD) policy will increase students' access to ICT and allow greater personalisation of learning and increase self-directed learning. It is that intended greater access to digital technology in the classroom will extend, enhance and enrich the curriculum, in addition to supporting the development of students as responsible digital citizens.
Students are expected to have signed the Personal Laptop Acceptable Use Agreement before utilising their devices at school.[2]

## Assessment and Feedback

The core purpose of assessment and feedback is to move students forward in their learning. Students' knowledge, understanding and skills sit at the very heart of our two questions when it comes to assessment; 1) What are a student's strengths? 2) What does a student need to do to improve? At Highdown, we expect all lessons to routinely and regularly engage with some form of assessment. These processes form an integral part of our 'Highdown Five' and enable us to diagnose potential gaps in knowledge or understanding and then remodel or reteach to ensure those gaps are closed.

***Key Stage Three***

[2] Further information can be found via our Bring Your Own Device [BYOD] Policy

Assessment at Key Stage Three focuses on three strands: ongoing, periodic and summative. Ongoing to enable quick challenge of misconceptions and early intervention. Periodic to help identify patterns and trends to enable support plans. Summative to gauge success and review impact.

As of Autumn 2025, assessment at Key Stage 3 is going through a process of review and reform. 2025-26 Year 7 will be the first-year group to move to a greater focus on core knowledge (via dedicated Core Knowledge Organisers) which will be rigorously tested through our new assessment model. This process will phase to Year 8 and 9 from September 2026.

Additionally, Year 7 will complete CAT4 baseline assessments in Term 1. These tests focus on four areas; verbal reasoning, non-verbal reasoning, spatial reasoning, and quantitative reasoning. These are benchmarked against national performance and guide GCSE and A Level indicators.

Alongside this, reading age tests take place on an annual basis. Rising Year 7 are tested on their transition day when still Year 6 to enable a smooth entry and support system.

***Key Stage Four and Key Stage Five***
The three main strands of assessment continue at KS4 and KS5. Retrieval tasks emphasise exam practice. Unlike KS3, students in KS4 or KS5 will sit formal practice exams in the Main Hall. For Year 10 and 12, this falls across the end of spring term and start of summer term. For Year 11 and 13, this falls in the winter term. Year 11 has additional practice exams in the spring term.

## Literacy across the curriculum

Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre recognises literacy as a key foundation for learning, personal development and future success. Literacy enables students to think clearly, communicate effectively, and engage confidently with the world around them. As a whole-school community, we are committed to developing strong literacy skills in every subject and at every level.

**Our Vision for Literacy**
We believe that:

- A strong vocabulary and secure reading, writing, speaking and listening skills allow students to access all areas of the curriculum.
- Language supports students to reflect, question, analyse and organise their ideas.
- Effective communication builds confidence, independence and motivation.
- High standards of literacy improve learning outcomes and raise aspirations, supporting students in further education, training and employment.

**A Disciplinary Literacy Approach**
Highdown promotes a disciplinary approach to literacy. This means:

- Every subject contributes to the development of literacy skills.
- Literacy demands differ between subjects; therefore, each department teaches the specific language, reading and writing skills needed within its discipline.
- Strengthening disciplinary literacy enhances the quality of subject teaching.
- Where appropriate, subjects align certain literacy strategies to reduce unnecessary cognitive load and support student progress.

**Developing Core Literacy Skills**

We recognise reading, writing, speaking and listening as interconnected skills. Teachers make their focus explicit and provide targeted support where needed.

***Reading***

Staff support the development of reading skills by:

- Teaching vocabulary explicitly and promoting accurate spelling.
- Encouraging the use of glossaries, dictionaries and active reading strategies.
- Providing reading interventions, including support for EAL, SEND and weaker readers.
- Offering daily opportunities for reading through the Highdown Canon Programme.
- Promoting reading through the library, book clubs, author visits and the annual Literary Festival.
- Assessing reading ages in KS3 to identify students requiring further support.

***Writing***

Staff develop students' writing through:

- Teaching writing for different purposes and audiences.
- Linking reading and writing so students have clear models of effective writing.
- Explicitly teaching features of texts at word, sentence and whole-text levels.
- Giving opportunities to plan, draft and edit work.
- Providing feedback on structure, clarity and SPaG.
- Using the No More Marking programme to assess writing development.

***Speaking and Listening***

Teachers support spoken language skills by:

- Encouraging reading aloud to build fluency.
- Using structured questioning and modelling high-quality talk.
- Providing opportunities for paired, group and whole-class discussion.
- Teaching students how to listen actively and articulate ideas clearly.
- Giving feedback on oral communication.

**Promoting Literacy Across the School**

Literacy is promoted through author visits, festivals, extra-curricular reading activities, termly literacy challenges and staff training on effective reading and vocabulary instruction. All curriculum areas embed literacy within their schemes of learning.

## Curriculum Impact

***Impact Indicators***

Leaders at Highdown use a wide range of indicators to assess the health and impact of the curriculum. These include:

- Student outcomes in public examinations and summative assessments
- Curriculum Insights
- Curriculum Explorations
- Student work sampling
- Learning Walks, drop Ins, lesson Observations
- Student Voice and focus groups
- Student Ambassadors
- Enrolment figures at Year 7 and Year 12
- Destinations of school leavers

- Reports to SSB
- Attendance Data
- Behaviour Logs
- Engagement in enrichment and extracurricular activities
- Progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks

Curriculum monitoring enables leaders to monitor and check the curriculum implementation and the impact. Monitoring supports judgements on how far the curriculum has been consistently implemented.

***Core Knowledge and Skill Development***
Outcomes of summative assessments are a key indicator of our curriculum's impact. However, they only sample the domain and cannot capture the full breadth and depth of what we want students to know, remember, understand and be able to do. Therefore, observations of and discussions with students, alongside their work will allow us to review how secure their development is, beyond performance on summative assessments.

***Ongoing and prioritised Curriculum Development***
Curriculum review is a constant need. As such, time is provided for colleagues to think hard on curriculum topics. Department curriculum time and discussion are a vital component of our monitoring and curriculum development is a responsibility of every teaching colleague. Curriculum Leaders work to ensure consistency and consensus across their teams. However, it is an expectation of every colleague to understand the intent for their subject's entire curriculum, not just those aspects they personally deliver. Firstly, so they can implement the curriculum consistently to ensure equity and parity for all students. Secondly, so they understand the expected end points for students in the years and Key Stages before and after those they teach.

Each curriculum area must be implemented in the context of the subject's broader learning journey. We dedicate regular Department time and host half termly curriculum meetings with all Faculty, Subject, Key Stage Leaders and Lead Practitioners throughout the year. These sessions focus on developing our professional learning around curriculum and assessment literacy, which informs our planning.

## Monitoring and evaluating the policy

The Curriculum Policy will be monitored and reviewed annually by the Deputy Headteacher Curriculum. Appropriate recommendations for changes to the Curriculum can be made via line managers and/or parental discussion. Any changes or alterations will be reviewed at the Curriculum Development Group ahead of confirmation between the Headteacher and SSB. Curriculum monitoring will be centred on Curriculum Explorations, Curriculum Insights, lesson drop ins, Student voice and line management meetings. Further information regarding Curriculum Explorations and Curriculum Insights can be found in Appendix A and B.

## Appendix A: Curriculum Explorations

'Curriculum Explorations' play an important role in the evaluation process of department areas at Highdown School. Curriculum Explorations take place three times a year and each exploration will have a clear focus, linked to the Academy Improvement Plan. The focus of the exploration is known in advance by all parties, with curriculum leaders and senior leader links having a 'pre-mortem' before the exploration begins, where they will identify at least three 'evidence bases' to be used. The aim of each

investigation is to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Strengths can be shared across the academy and curriculum leaders assisted in making improvement plans and taking action where needed.

## Appendix B: Curriculum Insights

'Curriculum Insights' perform the role of curriculum review at Highdown School. The emphasis and focus of this process will centre on the principles of cooperative review, whole department curriculum expertise, and evidence/thought-based decision making around issues of knowledge frequency, curriculum structure, and adaptation of the curriculum to meet the needs of learners.
Curriculum Insights will be conducted as two separate sections. Section A will be completed ahead of Section B. However, Section B does not always have to follow Section A and so there will be opportunities for departments to complete Section A without a full insight process taking place with a Section B.

- **Section A**: *'Curriculum Insight Leaders Meeting'* between Curriculum Leader (including colleagues who also play a curriculum role within the team if desired by the CL), Headteacher, AHT Curriculum, and AHT with responsibility for line management of the department if suitable. Curriculum Insight documentation will be completed ahead of the meeting and shared with all attendees in preparation for discussion at the meeting.
- **Section B**: *'Curriculum Insights in Action'* will look to take the feedback and discussion items from Section A and the Curriculum Insights document and see whether this is reflected in Teaching and Learning. Section B will involve a colleague learning walks, student interviews and work sampling, and colleague discussions. Section B will emphasise the reality of the curriculum and enable all leaders to review the implementation of the curriculum.

***Principles behind the new methodology***

- Focus on cooperation and collaboration
    - The Insights process will be fully transparent from the start. Colleagues will have access to all documentation ahead of time. Section A questions will be shared with middle leaders ahead of the meeting to provide them time to digest and discuss with their teams.
    - External personnel will not be included in the Insights process. Instead, all leaders will provide curriculum expertise, with Senior Leaders expected to be inquisitive of the curriculum and the curriculum experts – the Curriculum Leader. The Curriculum Leader is the expert in their subject and will be treated as such. In combination, colleagues will assess the subject curriculum with the intention to produce a report which augments ongoing development and focuses on areas of key priorities.
- Sampling with focus
    - Insights will analyse two schemes of work/units of work with the goal of using them as benchmarks for the wider curriculum. This will enable leaders to explore them in depth and allow them to be seen in action via the Section B.
    - With the focus on two units, leaders will have the opportunity to explore them in depth. Leaders should recognise that with a narrower focus, not all aspects of excellence might be seen. Any identified areas that cannot be evidenced in the selected units should be

appropriately evidenced by the Curriculum Leader elsewhere in the Curriculum journey of the respective year groups being reviewed.

- Shared purpose
    - The leader Curriculum convention will allow all leaders a voice in judging excellence. As such, the level we will hold the curriculum up to will be agreed and shared well in advance of the Insights process.
    - The resulting recommendations will not be a 'shopping list' of improvements that will be later checked in. Instead, it will be a manifestation of the collaborative discussions and observations, allowing the Curriculum Leader a better-defined road map to move the curriculum forward.