



**MERCHANT  
TAYLORS'  
SCHOOLS**

For Boys and Girls  
aged 4 to 18 years

# Curriculum Policy

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## CURRICULUM POLICY

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At MTBS our Mission is:

**‘The rigorous pursuit of excellence, inside and outside the classroom, combined with a passionate concern for each individual.’**

The School has a reputation for academic excellence and the majority of our leavers proceed to competitive degree courses at Russell Group universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. The emphasis throughout is very much on developing learners who are able to work independently and who have a genuine curiosity in their studies. Recent changes to the curriculum lower down the School have been designed to grow intellectual autonomy and a wider interest in the world around our students, from the World Tomorrow Today courses in Year 10 and Year 11, inspired by the ‘multiple intelligences’ of Professor Howard Gardner, to the curriculum reforms in Year 7 (2014) and Year 8 (2015) with a focus on the development of core skills and the refreshment of subject stimulus material.

All students (11-18) receive a full timetable of education supervised by subject specialists, up to and including Upper VI formers who typically receive 30 periods of A level tuition (including a Games afternoon and/or Community Service, PSHE and other enrichment opportunities). Our curriculum is explicitly designed to offer the full range of educational experiences (linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic). Indeed, we have protected each of these areas right up to 16 (via the GCSE options portfolio) to ensure that none of our students has a “gap” in their education. Whilst mathematics and sciences are traditionally prominent, it is no accident that extra emphasis has recently been ascribed to “creativity” in the curriculum, hence the advent of GTX, World Tomorrow Today, free instrumental lessons in Year 7 and the ending of the Art/Design Technology carousel at Key Stage 3 so that boys can experience these subjects all year round.

We provide a broad platform in the Lower School which incorporates all NC subjects as well as the opportunity to learn separate sciences from Year 8, the classics and GTX. Students in the Middle School have the flexibility to design much of their own curriculum around the core subjects English and Mathematics (IGCSE). They can study between 9 and, exceptionally, 11 GCSEs from a broad range of subjects. Sixth Formers invariably embark on four AS courses and most will then narrow this down to three A2s in the Upper VI for the ‘unreformed’ subjects. We intend to continue with this pattern until full A Level reforms are in place from 2017. An increasing number of supplementary courses and extension opportunities are on offer, such as the Investment (SII) course in Economics, EPQs from AQA, science Olympiads and many others. The vast majority of our Sixth Formers will go on to study academic degree courses (currently 80% at Russell Group universities) and we hope to have instilled in them a lifelong passion for learning which will equip them in Higher Education and beyond.

Carefully designed programmes of study, overseen by Heads of Department, with appropriate differentiation, ensure that subject matter is appropriate to our bright, male student body. These

schemes of work also cater for students classified as SEND as well as those with noticeable gifts in certain curriculum areas (see separate policies). HODs are asked to explicitly identify opportunities for extension within their PoS whilst regular homework and project assignments often provide suitable vehicles for boys to go that “extra mile” intellectually. Importantly, students who are statemented or for whom English is their second language, are catered for by a system of IEPs and specialist learning support. [see separate LDD Policy]

Our curriculum is designed to stretch our students intellectually. Over time, they should have the opportunity to gradually specialise in areas of the curriculum in which they are passionately interested. Whilst we are well aware of the need to equip our boys to achieve top grades in public examinations, we have in place rigorous assessment protocols which track individual progress relative to their own ability and to a target setting programme that transcends crude baseline data. A gifted and talented register empowers departments and those responsible for academic extra-curricular extension to stretch the most able whilst our learning support and pastoral teams provide the “scaffolding” for students who struggle in certain areas, through Academic Reviews and a mixture of in-class support and one-to-one withdrawal. With increasing emphasis on formative assessment and a regular review of marking through whole-school Work Sampling, we believe that our teachers are able to provide effective feedback on work and to establish next steps for progress, either through questioning in class or in the ‘dialogue’ between student and teacher in exercise books and files.

Except in Mathematics, we tend not to set by ability, although there is currently some setting of English in the Middle School and departments with ‘blocked’ periods are encouraged to stream where appropriate. Merchant Taylors’ typically draws from the top 40% nationally. Although this still requires us to differentiate between able and sometimes extremely gifted learners, we feel the benefits of “mixed ability” teaching outweigh the potential pitfalls. Mathematics is the exception to this rule. Indeed we have recently lowered the setting threshold from Year 9 to Year 8 which allows us to fast-track the best mathematicians (ultimately to Further Maths A2) whilst more successfully “scaffolding” relatively weaker students.

PSHE (see scheme of work), is delivered by form and group tutors in a weekly Friday morning session, to all students from 11-18. This comprises class teaching, group activities, assemblies and one-off events such as visiting speakers and themed days. The Head of Pastoral Care orchestrates the delivery of PSHE to ensure a progression of themes and skills suitable to respective age groups. Students benefit by picking up often vital knowledge (including environmental issues, drugs, STIs and bullying). Everything we do in this arena is underpinned by our hope that our boys will develop into altruistic, open-minded, active citizens able and be willing to play a full part in society both locally and ultimately, globally. To complement the PSHE programme, the School Council meets fortnightly to initiate change across many aspects of life at Merchants’ in areas as diverse as catering and charitable giving.

As well as the PSHE portfolio, the School enjoys access to a specialist careers expert (Mrs Vicki Mee) who plays an increasingly active role as boys progress through the school. OASIS acts a diagnostic tool for GCSE students to initially identify their strengths and weaknesses and this is followed up with 1:1 interviews, work experience and UCAS in the VI form. We are confident that our students have access to all of the relevant careers information they will increasingly need in such a fast-

moving globalised economy. Students, especially at the top of the school, are also given a wide range of leadership opportunities. These include monitoring duties, peer support and helping to run academic clinics. Boys also learn these essential soft skills outside the classroom via the CCF, Duke of Edinburgh, GTX and on the sports field. Not only does this tend to fill up UCAS forms, it allows all of our boys to develop as team players and solid citizens ready, we hope, for the challenges of university and adult life beyond these gates.

Merchant Taylors' is a School where teachers can teach and learners can learn. Underpinning everything we do is a tangible respect between staff and boys which provides the basis for good behaviour and a genuine sense of academic purpose through relational learning. All pupils have the opportunity to learn and to make progress. We are, however, keenly aware that this progress can be uneven. Inevitably, each and every student goes through periods of their academic career when they are "flying" and when they seem "stuck". To a great extent our comparatively small teaching groups and tight pastoral units allow us to "know the boys extremely well" and thus, pick up on those moments when things aren't "clicking". A sophisticated infrastructure of academic monitoring (see policy) exists to act as an early warning system to initially pick up, diagnose and then intervene quickly. The Head of Student Progress, in consultation with the pastoral Group Tutors and their teams of form tutors, oversees this infrastructure and makes sure that we are responsive to individual needs.

All staff are encouraged to "push" and build pace into their lessons. There is an ever increasing realisation that we can develop an unashamedly boy friendly pedagogy, enhanced by staff training and work with the International Boys Schools Coalition, which taps into their innate gifts of curiosity and active learning whilst remorselessly seeking to get them organised and reading more! There is also a softer side to our curriculum which acknowledges that boys invariably crave role models and teachers who genuinely care about them as individuals. Hence the high priority we place on tutorials, clinics, PSHE, extra-curricular activities and high quality marking for instance.

In short, our curriculum is designed to provide both a traditional grounding and a myriad of opportunities for boys to gradually find their academic niche in a caring and supportive environment.

*Amended September 2015 RAS*