



# Merchant Taylors' School

Ambition | Character | Excellence

# Curriculum Policy

## **Curriculum Policy**

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Last Amended: October 2018  
Review: October 2019

## 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 curriculum was graded “excellent” (ISI, 2016) in its latest Inspection.** 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), Year 8 (2015) and then Year 9 (2016) with a focus on the development of core skills and the refreshment of subject stimulus material.
- **All students of compulsory school age, as well as those who choose to study A Level here post 16, receive a full timetable of education supervised by subject specialists,** up to and including Upper Sixth formers who typically receive 30 periods of A level tuition (including a Games afternoon and/or Community Service, PSHE and timetabled supervised private study). Those Lower Sixth Formers not pursuing four full A Levels - around three quarters of the cohort - will instead have timetabled enrichment tuition, with the intention of pursuing EPQs, a Financial Services qualification or a Sports Leaders award.
- **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 experiences a premature narrowing of his educational opportunities. 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. All students in the Middle School will experience a six week Debating module and a Current Affairs course, with the intention of bolstering speaking and listening skills as well as promulgating the School’s ethos of compassionate respect for other people combined with intellectual curiosity.
- We provide a **broad and balanced curriculum platform** in the Lower School which incorporates all National Curriculum subjects as well as the opportunity to study Latin and Classical Civilisation from Year 7, alongside a weekly Library lesson to enhance literacy skills, while from Year three separate sciences are offered. 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, 10 (Music) or 11 (Music allied to the combined Latin and Greek GCSE) GCSEs from a broad range of subjects. GCSE

Business Studies was introduced in September 2018. Sixth Formers invariably embark on three full A levels, assessed at the end of the two-year course, supplemented by supervised private study and a “double period” of enrichment activity. An impressive number of supplementary courses and extension opportunities are on offer outside of the timetabled curriculum, either through departments or by staff members with particular academic areas of interest. Joint teaching of Sixth Form subjects with Merchant Taylors’ Girls’ School continue to develop and boys will on occasion be taught Business or Psychology at A Level wholly on the MTGS site while we accommodate a growing number of girls to study Modern Foreign Languages, Music, Classics, PE and Economics.

- **Carefully designed programmes of study, overseen by Heads of Department, with appropriate differentiation**, ensure that subject matter is appropriate to our student body of average and above average ability, as established through the Entrance Examination and initial MidYis testing. 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 further intellectually. Importantly, students who are in possession of an EHC (none on roll as at 20/11/18), have specific and defined learning needs, or for whom English is their second language, are catered for by a system of IEPs and specialist learning support. [see separate SEND 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 aware of the need to equip our boys to achieve top grades in public examinations, we have in place clear assessment protocols which track individual progress relative to their own ability and to a target setting programme that transcends baseline data. Our learning support and pastoral teams provide the scaffolding outside of expected in-class differentiation 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 can 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, where setting begins in Year 7, and English, we tend not to set by ability, although there is currently some setting of English in the Lower and 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.**
- **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 PSHE, in association with Heads of Year, 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 Merchant Taylors' in areas as diverse as catering and charitable giving.

- As well as the PSHE portfolio, the School enjoys access to a specialist careers advisor who plays an increasingly active role as boys progress through the school. We are confident that our students have access to all the relevant careers information they will increasingly need in such a fast-moving globalised economy. Whether through individual appointments, UCAS guidance or the compulsory six-week Careers module in World Tomorrow Today, **students have access to impartially presented careers information to help them make informed choices in order to fulfil their potential.** 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.
- 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. Our comparatively small teaching groups and tight pastoral units allow us to know the boys extremely well and thus make appropriate intervention. 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 Director of Studies, 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 teach to ensure that good progress is made according to ability by building pace and variety into their lessons.** We are developing an unashamedly boy friendly pedagogy, enhanced by staff training and work with the International Boys Schools Coalition, which taps into boys' 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. The setting of homework tasks through the VLE further underpins our commitment to ensuring that boys work effectively at home to support work completed in class.
- 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.

*Reviewed November 2018 RAS*