

THE CURRICULUM AT SWCHS

“Truly great schools inspire their students to develop an all-encompassing love for learning. They focus both on passing on the learning, values and beliefs of the past and on developing.....a wide range of skills and aptitudes that they can apply to the world of the future.” Woods, Macfarlane and McBeath (2018)

Curriculum Intent

Saffron Walden County High School’s mission, which has not changed in three decades, is to be ‘a local school of exceptional quality’. To achieve this mission, our curriculum needs to be so powerful that it provides children with the academic and cultural capital that enables them to compete favourably and at the highest level with students from selective or independent schools. What is distinctive about the SWCHS curriculum experience for teachers and students is the richness and specific nature of subject delivery and subject study. Our middle leaders are authors of the developments in their own curriculum areas. Our emphasis is not only on the acquisition of knowledge, although that is important to teachers, but we foster a student’s relationship to their subject and explicitly teach the skills of critical analysis and imaginative application that can only be acquired when knowledge is rich. It would be unhelpful to characterise SWCHS as either a traditional or progressive school. It does not conform to such stereotypes.

A powerful and impactful curriculum depends on, more than any other factor, excellent subject specialist teachers, and so we place emphasis on the recruitment training, well-being, and retention of staff. The school employs highly qualified graduate teachers with a passion for their subject who can share that passion through excellent subject teaching, and engage and inspire their students through their wealth of knowledge.

Vital to the quality of our curriculum planning and delivery is the deep trust shown in our subject experts. Our school policies for teaching and learning establish principles, but departments are given the autonomy and flexibility to operate in ways that work best for them. Our middle leaders direct developments in their own curriculum areas, both in terms of the curriculum itself and how it ensures progression, and also in terms of the subject specific pedagogy.

The school’s curriculum offer is broad (four languages choices are available, including Latin) and shows the value placed on all areas of learning. The curriculum decisions and the quality of provision at Key Stage 3 is reflected in students’ option choices as they move up to GCSE. Ten or eleven GCSE subjects are studied in total, with Triple Science offered as a core subject, and four options subjects. This allows students to keep a rich and balanced curriculum throughout their Key Stage 4. The impact of this is that, whilst all ‘English Baccalaureate’ subjects have high rates of entry, so too do Art, Music, Drama, Dance, PE, Graphics, Textiles, Product Design, Business, Health and Social Care, and Computing/ICT. All areas of learning thrive and are valued. This is a school where 96% choose at least one Humanities subject, and over 60% choose one or more Languages with that number expected to increase over the next few years. Creative subjects thrive: GCSE Music has multiple groups in each year; we usually see 90% engage in the study of at least one creative subject or discipline to GCSE level.

We believe that choice supports engagement and success, with choice underpinned by excellent information and CEIAG for both parents and students so that all involved are supported to understand the importance and impact of their choices.

This rich curriculum offer continues post-16. There are 45 subject choices at A Level and we are able to support minority subjects like Latin, Philosophy, Photography and Environmental Science alongside the very large numbers following subjects such as Maths, Physics, and English Literature.

Students make excellent progress and achieve exam success at SWCHS, but we do not see the curriculum as being synonymous with specifications; subject enrichment is built into the offer to students - teachers teach beyond the specification and teach to the top.

Saffron Walden County High School makes no excuses for exposing young people to the best that has been thought and said, helping to engender an appreciation of **human** creativity and achievement both in lessons and in our wider provision. Saffron Hall is a living symbol of how this philosophy sits at the heart of the school: built five years ago, this internationally renowned concert hall is also the school hall. All students in the school have the opportunity to work with professional dancers, classical and jazz musicians, and to attend concerts featuring the likes of Courtney Pine, Nicola Benedetti, and The London Symphony Orchestra. The school believes in building the cultural capital of all its learners. This is exemplified by events such as the visit of Brooklyn-based group 'So-Percussion' who performed two excellent and challenging concerts to all Year 9 students, introducing them to a range of styles and composers and a lecture on Music and Maths by Marcus de Sautoy. A Saffron Hall dance project with Thomas Hobden saw some of our Year 9 students creating a dance and film piece which they then performed to Year 7. Projects such as these led to our Platinum Arts Mark status.

Inspirational extra-curricular opportunities are a feature of our provision at Saffron Walden County High School. Each year we stage ambitious school productions which range from musicals to performances of Shakespeare and involve students in both performance and the technical support. Our staff lead outstanding extra-curricular opportunities for students in **all** subject areas with clubs including Politics Club, Geology Club and Coding Club as well as 18 different Music Ensembles. We also have a very popular Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme programme. We want our extra-curricular provision to be inclusive and open to all, as well as nurturing particular talents; our annual dance show sees over 200 students performing, whereas a 'Masterclass' will be put on for a select group of our top instrumentalists.

We place great importance on the extra-curricular sport provision for our students. Our extra-curricular provision is built around 'Sport for All' with extra-curricular PE clubs in a wide range of individual and team sports attracting hundreds of students each week. We compete in a wide range of local, district and national competitions, often entering multiple teams. We are no strangers to regional and national sporting success with County High teams winning competitions at all levels and individual students securing places in national squads. We also host the Uttlesford School Sport Partnership of 34 primary schools and 4 secondary schools. This offers a broad sporting competition programme which gives opportunities to all key stages and abilities of children.

Our trips and visits programme is also ambitious and broad. All students engage with their local community with RE and Geography fieldwork in the local area as well as visits to the Hindu Temple in Neasden and the Olympic site in London. There is also a rich offer of trips within Europe as well as opportunities to travel further afield, including an exchange visit to China and a science trip to Zanzibar. We raise funds to try to ensure that the cost of these visits is not a barrier to participation. We want joy, awe, wonder and inspiration for all of our students both in and outside of the classroom.

Curriculum Implementation

The curriculum model (including extra-curricular provision) at SWCHS aims therefore to allow all students to acquire deep knowledge and understanding, and to develop transferable learning skills and positive character traits by:

- Providing an engaging curriculum that inspires a love of learning;
- Providing a broad curriculum that promotes, across a wide range of subjects, deep subject knowledge and the ability to engage critically with each subject;
- Learning across the curriculum that supports the development of lively, enquiring and agile minds, and fosters intellectual curiosity and the ability to question rationally;
- Helping students to understand the world in which they live and how to navigate through it as active, engaged and responsible participants in society;
- Building cultural capital and broadening personal horizons through curriculum provision and a planned and inclusive extra-curricular entitlement that provides challenge and memorable, enriching experiences with access for all;
- Enabling students to recognise, develop and to use effective and transferrable skills (including literacy, numeracy, IT and the school's "SkillsBuilder" work-related skills) that foster character development and promote 'intrapreneurial' contributions within school and beyond.
- Developing a strong moral compass through the provision of learning with SMSC at its heart

Implementation is achieved by:

- Ensuring that curriculum review, planning, design and delivery is a strategic priority for the school
- Monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum to ensure that it is relevant to each cohort of students, within the context of a rapidly-changing world that will be inhabited by our students
- Ensuring that the curriculum builds on the students' KS2 experience and provides challenge and progression for all students throughout Key Stages 3 to 5
- Design and delivery of subject pedagogy by subject experts
- Personalisation of teaching and learning to ensure that all students experience a challenging and appropriate route through both curriculum and extra-curricular pathways. Personalised pathways combine rich and deep subject and extra-curricular experiences that serve individual needs by promoting progress and achievement for all.
- Provision of on-going professional development of all staff promotes challenging and inspiring curriculum delivery, with a recent emphasis on the role of 'metacognition' in learning
- Fostering the personal development of students within a caring, tolerant and inclusive school community, characterised by good relationships and mutual respect between students and between staff and students. The highest expectations of students, together with common standards and procedures, are maintained by staff.
- Provision of a wide range of extra-curricular sporting, cultural, social, recreational and charitable activities that are available as an entitlement for students.

KS3 Curriculum

Students enter Year 7 as a member of one of 10 mixed-ability form groups divided, for timetable purposes, into two halves - 'S' (Saffron) and 'W' (Walden). They are taught in their forms for all subjects except for:

- a) PE: half year groups which are sub-divided
- b) Technology - year group divided into teaching groups of, typically, 20 students to undertake the Technology 'carousel'
- c) Maths – broad setting from October
- d) English – broad setting from September

51 lessons are timetabled over a fortnightly cycle.

The allocation to subjects in Year 7 is as follows:

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Timetable Allocation (Periods per Cycle)</i>
Mathematics	7
English	6
Science	6
PE	4
PSHE	2
Computing	3
Geography	3
History	3
RPE	2
MFL (French and German)	6
Technology	3
Art	2
Drama	2
Music	2

In Year 8 students are reorganised into new mixed ability teaching groups, remaining in their Form Groups for registration and tutorials. In Mathematics and English they are set in broad bands, and in Languages some setting by ability is undertaken. Latin is offered as an extra-curricular extension course to selected students in Year 8. The curriculum time allocated allows all subjects to deliver a rich and rigorous experience for all students delivered by our subject specialist teams.

The allocation of lessons in Year 8 is as follows:

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Timetable Allocation (Periods per Cycle)</i>
Mathematics	7
English	6
Science	6
PE	4
PSHE	1
Computing	3
Geography	3
History	3
RPE	2
MFL (French and German)	6
Technology	4
Art	2
Drama	2
Music	2

In Year 9, students follow a hybrid programme. They continue to study a broad suite of subjects, but have the chance to make some subject choices and to take up some new options prior to deciding their GCSE options for Years 10 and 11. This allows students to have more time for each Language choice (and to have the option to choose Spanish or Latin as part of their curriculum), it gives more time for each Science and it allows students to make informed choices for their GCSEs. To ensure breadth of experience and development of cultural capital, all students in Year 9 are involved in Arts projects with Saffron Hall (including concerts, performances and workshops) as well as all following rigorous PSHE education and CEIAG programmes (including embedding work-related skills in line with

the Gatsby Benchmarks). Citizenship issues are explored as a part of our RE programme, and our dedicated Year 9 'Politics Day' helps our students to be ready to be informed and engaged citizens.

In core subjects, students are grouped by ability but with flexibility to move between courses/classes. Most options subjects are taught in mixed-ability classes.

The allocation of lessons in Year 9 is as follows:

Subject	Periods per Cycle
English and English Literature	7
Mathematics (including Computing)	7
Science	9
Geography	3
History	3
Language Choice (French, German, Spanish, Latin)	5
Religion, Philosophy and Ethics and Citizenship	3
PE	4
Arts/Technology choice	3
Open Choice (including Computing, a second language, Arts, Technology subjects, Vocational choices)	3 (5 periods for a second language)
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Key Stage 4 provision (GCSEs)

In Years 10 and 11 the vast majority of pupils continue to follow courses leading to GCSE, except for core PE. However, SWCHS recognises its responsibility to respond to the needs of students who may benefit from an adapted Key Stage 4 by reducing the number of subjects that are studied to allow the provision of structured study support.

In addition to the core subjects, students choose 4 'options' GCSEs. Each subject is taught for 5 periods per timetable cycle. All students must opt for at least one English Baccalaureate option subject (and Year 10 in 2021 will usually be expected to take at both a Language and a Humanities option and then make two further choices).

The standard number of GCSEs that a student takes is therefore 10, with 11 for students following Triple Science courses.

All students also continue to follow our rigorous PSHE education and CEIAG programmes (including embedding work-related skills in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks). Citizenship issues are explored as a part of our RE programme.

The allocation of lessons at Key Stage 4 is as follows:

Subject	Periods per Cycle
English and English Literature (2 GCSEs)	7
Mathematics	7
Science (2 or 3 GCSEs)	10
Religion, Philosophy and Ethics and Citizenship	3
Core PE	4
Option 1	5
Option 2	5
Option 3	5
Option 4	5

Adapted courses for students who benefit from a different approach

In Years 9, 10 and 11 selected students are offered the opportunity to withdraw from one GCSE option course to join a Study Support group where additional support is available to promote progress and achievement in remaining subjects.

A small number of students follow an amended Science course, and are withdrawn from one or two options courses. This allows more time for personalised support within the Learning Support Department, bespoke ASDAN courses and additional support in English and Mathematics.

Sixth Form

Within our inclusive Sixth Form, students opt for one of three 'Routes':

Green Route – four A Level courses in Year 12, usually reduced to three A2 courses in Year 13. This recognises the value of students being able to trial a fourth A level before finalising course options into Year 13.

Purple Route – a 'double' Btec or Ctec course (or equivalent fused from two GCE courses eg Film/Media) plus one additional A Level course or 'single' Btec/Ctec course

Gold Route – a one year bridging course consisting of an appropriate Level 2 'Diploma' course in Business or Animal Care

Each course has particular entrance requirements, reflecting the overall academic demands of the Route.

Both the Purple Route and the Gold route offer structured opportunities for students to prepare for re-sits in GCSE Maths and English.

Students have the opportunity to pursue extension activities such as EPQ qualifications in Year 13.

Structured academic enrichment sessions are timetabled in Year 12 to develop post-16 study skills and to broaden their academic experience.