

# Saffron Walden County High School



## Curriculum Policy

**Reviewed: July 2024**

**Next Review: September 2026**

## 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. We keep our focus on what students will need to be successful in the Sixth Form and thereafter and this is reflected in our approaches from the very start of a child’s journey in our school. 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 the subject and so best meets the needs of our students. Our middle leaders direct developments in their own curriculum areas, both in terms of the curriculum itself and how it ensures progression, and 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. Nine or ten GCSE subjects are studied in total, with Triple Science offered as a core subject. 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 very high rates of entry, so too do Art, Music, Drama, Dance, PE, Graphics, Textiles, Product Design, Business, Health and Social Care, and Computer Science and IT. All areas of learning thrive and are valued. GCSE Music can still run multiple groups in each year; nearly 90% engage in the study of at least one creative subject or discipline.

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 is an impressive list of over 45 subject choices in our Sixth Form 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 beyond the national curriculum.

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 ten 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 a visit of Brooklyn-based group ‘So-Drumming’ who performed two excellent and

challenging concerts to all Year 9 students, introducing them to a range of styles and composers. 'So Percussion' then worked with a smaller group to compose a new piece of music that the students helped to perform in a public concert.

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 37 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 a day trip to France open to ALL of our students, a visit to the US and far flung trips in the Sixth Form. We run ski trips, battlefield trips and a music tour. 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 oracy, 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
- 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:

- PE: half year groups which are sub-divided
- Technology - year group divided into teaching groups of, typically, 20 students to undertake the Technology 'carousel' covering Textiles, Graphics, Product Design and Food.
- Maths
- English

50 lessons are timetabled over a fortnightly cycle.

The allocation of time to subjects in Year 7 is as follows:

| <b>Subject</b>     | <b>Timetable Allocation (Periods per Cycle)</b> |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Mathematics</b> | 7   |
| <b>English</b>     | 6   |
| <b>Science</b>     | 6   |
| <b>PE</b>          | 4   |
| <b>PSHE</b>        | 1   |
| <b>Computing</b>   | 3   |
| <b>Geography</b>   | 3   |
| <b>History</b>     | 3   |
| <b>RPE</b>         | 2   |
| <b>MFL (Fr/De)</b> | 6   |
| <b>Technology</b>  | 3   |
| <b>Art</b>         | 2   |
| <b>Drama</b>       | 2   |
| <b>Music</b>       | 2   |

In Year 8 students are reorganised into new mixed ability teaching groups, remaining in their form groups for registration time. In Mathematics and English, they are set in broad bands. 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 time to subjects in Year 8 is as follows:

| <b>Subject</b>     | <b>Timetable Allocation (Periods per Cycle)</b> |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Mathematics</b> | 7   |
| <b>English</b>     | 6   |
| <b>Science</b>     | 6   |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>PE</b>          | 4 |
| <b>PSHE</b>        | 1 |
| <b>Computing</b>   | 3 |
| <b>Geography</b>   | 3 |
| <b>History</b>     | 3 |
| <b>RPE</b>         | 2 |
| <b>MFL (Fr/De)</b> | 6 |
| <b>Technology</b>  | 3 |
| <b>Art</b>         | 2 |
| <b>Drama</b>       | 2 |
| <b>Music</b>       | 2 |

In Year 9, students follow a hybrid programme. They continue to study a broad suite of subjects and complete their Key Stage 3 programmes of study whilst also making some choices to personalise their Year 9 programme. This gives students the chance to take some new subjects prior to making the final GCSE choices for the start of Year 10. It also gives more time for each Language choice (and allows students to opt for Latin or Spanish within their curriculum time). In Year 9, we give more time for each Science which allows students to make informed choices about Combined or Triple Science for GCSE.

To ensure breadth of experience and development of cultural capital, all students in Year 9 are given options to attend concerts, enrichment clubs and take part in workshops in the arts, as well as 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 RPE programme, helping 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 time to subjects in Year 9 is as follows:

| <b>Subject</b>  | <b>Periods per Cycle</b>                  |
|---|---|
| <b>English and English Literature</b>   | 7   |
| <b>Mathematics</b>  | 7   |
| <b>Science</b>  | 9   |
| <b>Geography</b>  | 3   |
| <b>History</b>  | 3   |
| <b>Language choice (from French, German, Spanish and Latin)</b>                                   | 5   |
| <b>PE</b>   | 4   |
| <b>PSHE, RSE, Core RPE, Core Computing, CEIAG</b>   | 3 (Taught on a carousel through the year) |
| <b>Arts/Technology choice</b>   | 3   |
| <b>Open Choice (including Computing, a second Language, Arts, technology, Vocational choices)</b> | 3 (5 for a second language)               |
| <b>Open Choice (including Computing, a second Language, Arts, technology, Vocational choices)</b> | 3 (5 for a second language)               |

### **Key Stage 4 provision (GCSEs)**

In Years 10 and 11 the vast majority of pupils follow GCSE courses in all of their subjects, except for Core PE, PSHE and Core Computing. However, SWCHS recognises its responsibility to respond to the needs of students who may benefit from an adapted Key Stage 4 and bespoke programmes and courses are in place where this would best meet the needs of our students.

In addition to the core subjects (see table below), students choose 2 further ‘options’ for their GCSEs. Our focus on both EBacc and creative subjects ensuring all students have a suitably broad and balanced curriculum). For their two option students can pick from a wide range of subjects.

All students continue to follow our rigorous PSHE and CEIAG programmes and Citizenship issues are explored as a part of our core RE programme. Core Computing continues to be delivered on a carousel model.

| Subject                                    | Periods per Cycle |
|--|-------------------|
| English and English Literature (2 GCSEs)   | 7                 |
| Mathematics GCSE                           | 7                 |
| Science (2 or 3 GCSEs)                     | 10                |
| History, Geography or a Language GCSE      | 5                 |
| PSHE, RSE, Core RPE, Core Computing, CEIAG | 2                 |
| Core PE                                    | 4                 |
| Option subject                             | 5                 |
| Option subject                             | 5                 |
| Option subject                             | 5                 |

### Inclusion

As a school we base our Teaching Assistants in curriculum areas. The Learning Support team provide support in all curriculum areas and our Teaching Assistants are trained in their subject specialism to offer the highest level of support. Our staff also receive regular training in SEND to help identify students who may need additional resources and support.

Teaching Assistants and Teachers co-plan to meet the needs of students with SEND to ensure that high expectations and challenge are maintained whilst balancing this with support to access the subject.

The school uses auxiliary aids and human resources to guarantee that educational opportunities are accessible to all. This includes educational trips, including residential trips, extra-curricular activities and clubs, access to educational resources such as texts, and technology.

It is our aim as a school to make all learners confident and courageous in their learning and through careful considerations and planning we are able to offer a fully inclusive experience.

For some students who require considerable adaptations to include them in a challenging and engaging curriculum, we make these adaptations in full consultation with families, the young person and where appropriate health professionals and/or the local authority.

### ***Adapted courses for students who benefit from a different approach***

Whilst we expect the vast majority of our students to follow our core curriculum as outlined in the table above, we do offer bespoke programmes for those who would benefit from that, as outlined under the policy section on Inclusion. **We strongly advise students to follow a broad GCSE curriculum, including Humanities, Languages and Arts subjects in addition to the core offer.**

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.

Selected students can withdraw from an options to access study support sessions. We also offer alternatives to GCSEs which are decided on an individual level. Decisions are based on individual need and the availability of courses.

### Sixth Form

Within our inclusive Sixth Form, students opt for one of five pathways which meet the 16-19 study programme requirements. Full details of all of the courses on offer are available in our 6<sup>th</sup> Form Prospectus on our website.

# How to Choose your Courses

| PATHWAY   | PATHWAY   | PATHWAY   | PATHWAY   | PATHWAY   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b>  | <b>3</b>  | <b>4</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| 4 x A-LEVEL subjects  | 3 x A-LEVEL subjects<br><b>PLUS</b><br>1 x LEVEL 3 Diplomas   | 2 x A-LEVEL subjects<br><b>PLUS</b><br>2 x LEVEL 3 Diplomas   | 1 x A-LEVEL subject<br><b>PLUS</b><br>2 x LEVEL 3 Diplomas  | Level 2 C&G/CTEC Diplomas<br><br>This is a one-year course. Students will apply to restart Year 12 on Pathways 2-4 once their Level 2 course is completed |
| <b>WHAT YOU NEED</b>  | <b>WHAT YOU NEED</b>  | <b>OR</b>   | <b>OR</b>   | <b>WHAT YOU NEED</b>  |
| Five or more GCSE grades at 5-9, and aiming for a minimum of 5 in English Language <b>AND</b> Maths | Five or more GCSE grades at 5-9, and aiming for a minimum of 5 in English Language <b>AND</b> Maths | 1 x A-Level subject<br><b>PLUS</b><br>3 x Level 3 Diplomas  | 3 x Level 3 Diplomas  | Five or more GCSE grades at 3-9   |
|   |   | <b>WHAT YOU NEED</b>  | <b>WHAT YOU NEED</b>  | You will re-sit GCSE Maths <b>AND/OR</b> English Language, as required  |
|   |   | Five or more GCSE grades at 4-9, and aiming for a minimum of 5 in English Language <b>AND</b> Maths | Five or more GCSE grades at 4-9, and aiming for a minimum of 5 in English Language <b>AND</b> Maths | You will re-sit Maths <b>OR</b> English Language (if required)  |

Please check individual subjects for grade entry criteria

Students also have the opportunity to pursue extension activities such as EPQ qualifications and structured academic enrichment sessions are timetabled in Year 12 to develop post-16 study skills and to broaden their academic experience and our 6<sup>th</sup> Form Music Academy allows our musicians to access masterclasses and other enrichment.

We support all of our students to prepare for their chosen destinations using the 'Unifrog' platform and we run structured programmes to help those preparing for higher education and those preparing for apprenticeships and employment.