Trinity Academy curriculum statement

Curriculum aims

At Trinity Academy we place particular importance on the quality of the curriculum that our school offers. We believe that the quality of education we provide is only as good as the quality of what happens in the classroom: nothing can make up for a deficit in this area. Many of our curriculum programmes are developed by Future Academies' Curriculum Centre, which employs trained teachers who are subject experts to design and develop an ambitious, challenging, and knowledge-rich curriculum. In addition to this support, our staff work towards the same curriculum aims, ensuring our curriculum is:

1. **Driven by conceptual understanding**: we prioritise essential conceptual knowledge that underpins each subject and plan forwards from this in increasing complexity. We do not plan backwards from examination specifications, lesson activities, or generic skill-based outcomes.
2. **A literacy curriculum**: our use of textbooks and focus on in-class guided reading ensures that every student benefits from a vocabulary-rich curriculum characterised by challenging texts. The collective impact of this across all subjects is a literacy strategy that ensures students are exposed to sophisticated vocabulary throughout their school day in all areas of academic and practical study, and are supported to use this in their own writing by their teachers.
3. **Rich in cultural literacy**: our curriculum takes children beyond their immediate, daily experience to educate them in some of the powerful ideas that have shaped and continue to shape human understanding, furnishing them with the capability to explore, build upon, and critique these ideas in later life.
4. **Designed for explicit instruction**: in our classrooms, we recognise that our teachers are the subject experts and our students are academic novices. Our curriculum, therefore, is designed to ensure that teachers teach key ideas and vocabulary explicitly, giving every student the opportunity to make progress irrespective of their background knowledge or prior attainment.
5. **An entitlement for all**: each of our students has an entitlement to study the intended curriculum and classroom differentiation is by instruction and by support. Teachers will be confident in prioritising 'core knowledge' for those students with specific learning needs, this will always afford these students the same opportunity to engage with the intended curriculum as their peers.
6. **A vehicle for valuable, domain-specific skills**, such as critical thinking, creativity, and oracy: these are all valuable outcomes that can demonstrate the efficacy of our curriculum, but do not drive its content.
7. **A foundation for further specialisation**: a high-quality curriculum provides a firm foundation for students to continue studying that subject in the future, not just at the next key stage but at the highest levels of academic study. For this reason, we oppose an over-emphasis on exam skills, in favour of a more expansive understanding of what it means to excel in a subject.

Key Stage 4 and 5

Our approach to curriculum in key stage 4 and 5 is necessarily constrained by the specifications of public examination boards. Whilst we cannot select the core curriculum content for students, we can still apply the same curriculum priorities as we do for other key stages. In addition to those aims, we can also add:

8. **We choose exam boards and units of study** (where applicable) **based on the academic merit of the course** itself, recognising that the aim of the school is to establish a coherent and fully-resourced curriculum for students that aligns with our vision and can be taught by all teachers.

9. **We do not allow assessment to drive the curriculum**; the curriculum drives assessment. This means that a focus of curriculum planning is teaching the course to its fullest potential (and, indeed, teaching beyond the specification where possible). Revision is supported through careful curriculum planning that allows for regular retrieval practice and effective interleaving, and exam skills are taught in the service of, not at the expense of, curriculum instruction.

The curriculum in the classroom

The curriculum plans for each year group can be accessed via our website. Knowledge sits at the heart of our curriculum and, consequently, the process of passing on that knowledge to students sits at the heart of our teaching practice. As such, we recognise that learning is closely connected to memory: in part, learning is the process of building up a coherent and detailed mental map or schema of a subject in our long-term memory.

An important implication of this is that the most effective method of teaching – of transmitting knowledge and so developing students' schema – is particular to specific subjects. This is to say, for example, that many of the elements of a 'good' history lesson will be different to a 'good' chemistry lesson. This prioritises teachers' *pedagogic content knowledge* (their knowledge of how to teach each part of our curriculum).

However, we also believe that there are some general principles, or habits, that underpin effective classroom practice. As a school, we advocate for the importance of explicit instruction in the classroom, where the teacher explains the curriculum to students clearly and in small stages, asking lots of questions to check understanding, modelling complex ideas or tasks visually in front of the class, and providing opportunities for deliberate practice of skills, such as essay writing. Our implementation of the curriculum is therefore informed by a framework that makes these general principles explicit for our teachers and shapes our approach to their professional development.

Our 'Eight Habits of Effective Classroom Practice' are a list of practices that provide a foundation for effective teaching in our school. Importantly, they are not a list of things we would expect to see in every lesson, a checklist for lesson observations, or an exhaustive account of good teaching practices. What they do provide is a common language around teaching and learning across our school, making it simpler to identify and discuss specific elements of teaching and curriculum implementation.

Our Eight Habits of Effective Classroom Practice

1. Creating a calm, scholarly, and inclusive classroom culture that is focused on academic or practical study first and foremost.
2. Crafting a memorable and meaningful exposition of the curriculum, considering how best to phrase and utilise explanation, exemplification, or elaboration to assist all students to access the curriculum.
3. Using questioning frequently to check students' understanding, identify misunderstandings or misconceptions, and develop thinking around a topic.
4. Modelling complex information visually for students, breaking down explanations into small chunks or illustrating processes so that all students are confident in what they need to know and be able to do.
5. Teaching responsively, which is to say, checking students' understanding and adapting lesson plans or in-lesson scaffolding to focus on what individual classes need to prioritise.

6. Creating plenty of time for in-class writing and opportunities for independent practice, which is crucial for students to think deeply about what they are learning.
7. Promoting and practising oracy in the classroom through whole-class discussion, paired talk, or individual presentations. Crucially, we want teachers to ensure students are active participants in their learning, able to articulate and express themselves persuasively and confidently.
8. Managing the cognitive demands placed on students by limiting unnecessary or extraneous information, and foregrounding the information that students need to focus on and think about deeply.

Inclusion and supporting students with SEND

At Trinity Academy our teachers work closely with our SEND Coordinator to ensure that all students are included in school life and experience academic success. Our SENDCo provides information to teachers that is accurate, relevant, and accessible to support lesson planning. Our teachers plan lessons which provide additional scaffolding to support those students that need it most. This means that teachers do not differentiate by giving students with SEND different, less challenging curriculum materials; rather, they provide additional support to ensure these students can access the same curriculum as their peers. More information about how our curriculum meets the needs of students with SEND is available from our SENDCos.

Assessing the impact of the curriculum

In our academies, we assess students' learning in two ways.

1. **Formative assessment**, which is sometimes called *assessment for learning*. The purpose of formative assessment is to check student understanding during lessons and to enable teaching that is responsive to the information gained from this. Examples of formative assessment include regular low-stakes testing, questioning in class, interrogative and instructional marking, batch or sample marking and feedback lessons, all of which can address common misconceptions or require students to recall knowledge. Formative assessment is part of the everyday experience of teaching and learning across the school: it is the most valuable tool for our teachers to understand the impact of our curriculum throughout the year.
2. **Summative assessment**, which is sometimes called *assessment of learning*. Our school conducts summative assessments in formal conditions (i.e. examinations), which are specifically designed to test knowledge of the curriculum. Summative assessments are designed by the Curriculum Centre (for curricula provided by the Centre), school departments (for curricula designed within schools), or public examination boards (only for students preparing for public examinations).

Our summative assessments are carefully designed to ensure that they are *fair* (e.g. they do not assume or require knowledge outside the curriculum being assessed, they are suitable for all levels of knowledge of the curriculum, and they are sat in appropriate conditions), and they are *reliable* (i.e. student outcomes indicate their wider knowledge of the curriculum).

Whilst formative assessment is part of the day-to-day experience of teachers and students, it is important that summative assessment only takes place at intervals when such assessment can be valuable and purposeful for all involved. It is important that summative assessment is not over-used, which can lead to assessment driving the delivery of the curriculum ('teaching to the test') and a narrowing of the curriculum. With this in mind, our school typically conducts summative assessments:

- In a formal environment. They take place in classrooms under the supervision of the class teacher, or, preferably, each year group will sit a summative assessment in an 'exam hall' supervised by invigilators towards the end of the academic year (space and staff permitting).
- Twice a year, usually at a mid-point in the academic year (December-February) and at the end point in the year (May-July). This enables students, parents, teachers, and leaders to gain a snapshot of progress during the year, respond to this and put in place strategies that can support learning for the end of year examinations.

To find out more about our curriculum, please contact the relevant Head of Year for your child. Alternatively, contact the Vice Principal in charge of curriculum.