

English Department Rationale



Key Stage 3 Curriculum

The Key Stage 3 curriculum was designed with nourishing a love of English as a culture, whilst also developing key skills necessary for Key Stage 4 such as **close reading**, **textual analysis** and **extending writing**.

For Year 7, the focus is identity, starting with an exploration of the transition to school and looking at schools in literature drawing from Dahl, Snickett, Dickens and Agard. This is taught alongside a descriptive writing unit that uses moving image to help develop use of style and sequencing. This then progresses to an introduction to poetry unit that explores performance poetry as well as Coleridge, De La Mare and Rosetti.

Students are encouraged to learn **poetry by heart** and rewarded for their efforts with letters home as well as learning to appreciate the sounds and rhythms of the given works. Depending on how students have achieved in this unit, they will either be given the entirety of the ***Rime of the Ancient Mariner*** to explore with their teacher or read extracts from Shakespeare in an introductory unit that explores tragedies, comedies and histories. With each of these, we have opportunities to explore meaningful context to the text with a focus on **authorial intent** as well as **reader response**. With reading, students are encouraged to take part in a Wider Reading project where they read as many books as they can from a given reading list, at least one Carnegie winner, one book recommended by their teacher and then one piece of 'classic' children's literature. All of this is underpinned by the principle of asking the students to reflect on which aspect of the work that they find most engaging whilst also setting themselves manageable targets at the beginning of each term.

By publishing all work online, the barrier of hand writing anxiety has been removed. The locus of the learning has been placed in a position that enables students to access the work when suits them and introduces healthy accountability.

Progression to Key Stage 4

Developing skills of close reading and textual analysis are present throughout the curriculum. Students are given a variety of tasks that have been designed via Bloom's Taxonomy and encouraged to complete the tasks that best suit their prior achievement and personal targets. Students have a 'Big Write' lesson at least once a week using Vocabulary, Conjunctions, Openings and Punctuation (VCOP) to explore given texts and plan responses of their own. Students then produce at least one extended piece of writing at least twice a half term. There is also a developing independent reading programme with use of projects and Accelerated Reader. These are all necessary skills that to prepare for Key Stage 4.

Weekly 'Big Write' lessons as well as reading projects and a developing approach of project based learning where students are encouraged to make creative responses to set texts such as artwork, writing an extension to a text or producing a scripted adaptation.

The nature of English allows the skills to be taught as a spiral curriculum, revisiting skills throughout the year through separate units of content. The use of assessment allows us to see how achievement will then affect future plans and lessons. As students progress throughout year 9, there is a clearer focus on how the skills will relate to examination content and giving them meaningful purpose in the wider curriculum. Units are still taught with a focus on a line of enquiry rather than simply an examination focus.

The schemes of work and year plans were written with a focus on challenging content and developing skills in readiness for key stage 4, however, some expectations have had to be adjusted as a consequence of the pandemic and gaps in learning. For instance, we look at a wide range of poetry including Coleridge, De La Mare and 19th Century extracts from Dickens, Bronte and Stevenson. The work has gone through various stages of differentiation in order to get to a point that curriculum boundaries can be effectively broken down.

How are Students Assessed?

Through **standards based assessment**, students are clear of the skills they are developing and why. I have developed a [website](#) where students are able to view the badges available, accompanied by a skill level, clear criteria and exemplars.

Students are introduced to the badge and success criteria early within a sequence of lessons. Badges of achievement are most often grouped in skills of progression. For instance, two entry level badges that demonstrate understanding are: [Understanding](#) and [Select a Quotation](#). These build on the skills that need to be demonstrated in the English Language GCSE examinations. At stage two, the [equivalent of this badge](#) would be to identify a specific figurative or dramatic device and then suggest possible ways that this might affect a reader or audience. This would then progress at [stage three](#) so that students are considering authorial intent and possible reader response via an exploration of figurative devices.

Standards based assessment also helps to encourage a growth mindset amongst students. Students have access to the badge criteria at all times and they can attempt to achieve badges as many times as they wish. As students become more confident and take greater ownership of their development in English, they are then encouraged to choose their own targets to aim for.

The discussion surrounding formative assessment no longer focuses on levels or grades but how the acquisition of skills will help their development as learners.

Students are also given several opportunities to plan and produce extended writing throughout the course of a term, where they are then given individual feedback and their teacher will record a level for them. Students are only given the level once they have acted on the feedback. There are also specific points in the year where students are encouraged to return to a piece and re-draft it in order to either achieve a greater badge, or assessment level (or both).

By the end of the academic year, students will be encouraged to produce a portfolio of works that they are proud of.

GCSE Examination Board

After careful consideration, we have selected the AQA GCSE English Specification (8700).

This decision has been based on a number of factors.

The examination layout follows a logical structure with an even weighting on skills of understanding, analysis and creative writing.

Resources available through the AQA website and their teacher specific site allow access to examiner's reports as well as past papers. The Exam Pro section of their website is invaluable, clearly breaking down student responses into highlighted assessment objectives and with examiner feedback.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the rigour of their standardisation process that happens annually for teachers is maintains clear standards and accountability.

Literacy Beyond the Curriculum

The focus of reading alongside English lessons is for enjoyment. Students are encouraged to choose books that encourage their own specialist interests. Time is dedicated to discussing and recommending books, and reluctant readers are given time reading with a learning mentor. We are trialing the use of Accelerated Reader in order to help monitor reading habits and ages. Each year group also has an Independent Reading Project with a different focus: - Year 7 (Reading for Pleasure) - Year 8 (Reading for Knowledge, complimenting fiction with non-fiction texts) - Year 9 (Exploring Themes – students are asked to reflect upon themes brought up in the curriculum such as 'What is power?', 'What is identity? Or 'How is X shown across texts' Students are encouraged to share their findings on this in a way that suits them. For example: presentation, report, video or podcast.

Reading lessons are structured at the pace of individual students. Some classes may start reading a book together and then separate to read their independent reading books. Some classes may have individuals who are independent enough to read their own books. Students are encouraged to return to **Accelerated Reader** at the end of book to take quizzes and also have new books recommended to them. When the Carnegie Shortlist is announced, students from each year group will be invited to take part in a book group where they will discuss the books and which they think is more likely to win. Students will also be encouraged to write reviews of the novels they have read through this club.

Acquisition of Cultural Capital

The English Department is also working alongside King's College London, using the [Let's Think in English](#) programme. This sequence of lessons was specifically designed to develop verbal reasoning skills and metacognition. Each lesson uses theories of Vygotsky and Piaget to develop a discursive learning environment drawing on a wide range of stimulus texts encompassing pre-19th Century literature, modern literature, non-fiction and short films.

There is also a clear focus on the acquisition of vocabulary throughout the curriculum. Having a wide vocabulary is integral to understanding and constructing creative writing. Students are given a different word of the day at the start of each lesson. Students are encouraged to write sentences using this word. The words from each week link together via root, prefix or suffix. At the end of the week, students are given time to reflect on how the words link and explore similar patterns of forming words. There are also vocabulary and idiom starters available to use at form times. At GCSE level students are expected to use 'extensive' and 'ambitious' vocabulary. Students also need an extensive vocabulary to decode and infer unseen texts in the language exam. We intend for KS3 to a time where students develop a love of playing with words.

When given feedback for extended writing, comments linked to vocabulary are made clear and impressive phrasing is highlighted. Where applicable, feedback is also linked to GCSE grade descriptors.