

Curriculum Principles

Our Mission

Our Mission is to challenge educational and social disadvantage in the North.

- All children are entitled to a curriculum and to the powerful knowledge¹ which will open doors and maximise their life chances:
 - Our academies challenge social inequality by instilling shared and powerful knowledge
 - Children need powerful knowledge to understand and interpret the world, and to think in new and unexpected ways. Without it, they remain dependent upon those who have it
 - Shared and powerful knowledge is verified through learned communities e.g. universities, research and subject associations
 - Powerful academic knowledge is cognitively superior to everyday knowledge, transcending and liberating students from their daily experience
 - Shared knowledge is a foundation for a just and sustainable democracy. Citizens educated together, share an understanding of our common values, and can understand, cooperate and shape the world together²

How?

We establish high-performing non-faith academies which maximise attainment, value diversity, develop character and build cultural capital.

- Our curriculum is led by, collaborated on and delivered by high-quality subject specialists, working in cross-cutting teams to create the richest narrative possible for their students. “A good curriculum will always be contested... The arguments that ensue show how difficult it is to arrive at their ‘best’, but if we don’t care for quality then the very thinking of our pupils will be dumbed down.”³
- The grammar of each subject is given high status; the specifics of what we want students to learn matter and the traditions of subject disciplines are respected.⁴
- Skills and understanding are seen as forms of knowledge and we do not believe that there are any real generic skills that can be taught outside of specific knowledge domains.
- The curriculum should be planned vertically and horizontally giving thought to the optimum knowledge sequence for building secure schema.
- The curriculum should be designed to be remembered in detail: to be stored in our students’ long-term memories so that they can later build on it forming ever wider and deeper schema. As a result, a good knowledge-rich curriculum embraces learning from cognitive science about memory, forgetting and the power of retrieval practice.
- The curriculum is owned by students from all faiths and backgrounds, not by any one. The selected content should conform to shared cultural agreements of what is considered valuable to know. It is the entitlement of all and we resist parental opt-outs.
- The curriculum should embrace and value the most powerful knowledge from a variety of cultures and traditions.
- At each phase, the curriculum should focus on closing gaps, early intervention, and developing the core literacy and numeracy skills for success at that level.
- Both in and out of the classroom, the curriculum should build the hard work, diligence and resilience necessary for success in life.
- The curriculum should introduce students to new experiences and powerful knowledge beyond the classroom and outside the academy to broaden their horizons and to prepare them fully for later life.
- Curriculum breadth and academic rigour are key to our mission: “Imparting broad knowledge to all children is the single most effective way to narrow the gap between demographic groups through schooling.”⁵

Measure

By the age of 18, we want every student to have the choice of university or a high quality apprenticeship.

- Regardless of setting, streaming or mixed ability classes, children of all abilities are entitled to the most powerful knowledge they can retain and to the highest expectations they can meet.
- Children are entitled both to be prepared thoroughly for national assessment and to acquire sufficient knowledge of the wider domain to fully enable further study.
- Students are entitled to high currency qualifications which improve their life chances. This entitlement overrides any consideration of how an academy’s overall performance is measured or reviewed externally.

¹ M Young, D Lambert *et al.*, *Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice*, London, 2014

² These bullet points are adapted from work by Carolyn Roberts, Headteacher, Thomas Tallis School

³ M Robinson, “Curriculum: An Offer of What the Best Might Be”, *Journal of the Chartered College of Teaching*, Sept 2018

⁴ This and the next three bullet points are adapted from 2018 blogs by Tom Sherrington <https://teacherhead.com/>

⁵ E D Hirsch, *The Knowledge Deficit: Closing the Shocking Education Gap for American Children*, New York, 2006

