

Belfast High School

CURRICULUM POLICY

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This curriculum policy seeks to express how the school meets the learning needs of the children who are its pupils. It strives to answer five questions on the curriculum it provides for pupils:

- Why do we offer what we do?
This question is answered in the Curriculum Objectives section.
- What do we offer?
This question is answered in the sections relating to Provision.
- How do we deliver it?
This question is answered in the sections on Teaching and Learning, Capacity Building, Staff Development and on other procedures.
- Who is responsible for its delivery?
This question is answered in the section entitled Leadership and Management.
- How successful are we in its delivery?
This is answered in the section on Assessment and Reporting as well as the final section on Monitoring, Evaluation and Review.

CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES

The objectives are intended to be in harmony with the **Aims of the Schoolⁱ**, the **Aimⁱⁱ** and the **Statutory Requirements** of the **Northern Ireland Curriculum (2007)**.

The following school aim is the most pertinent to this policy:

‘To provide a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum which suits the needs of all pupils in a changing society and which encourages each pupil in his or her intellectual, cultural, aesthetic and physical development.’

The school promotes the objectives of the Northern Ireland Revised Curriculum, as follows:

- ‘To develop the young person as an individual’
- ‘To develop the young person as a contributor to society’
- ‘To develop the young person as a contributor to the economy and the environment’

In furtherance of these objectives the school also focuses on the following:

- To provide all pupils access to experience and understanding of:
- Mathematical skills, processes and applications - promoting numeracy;
- Scientific method and its wider application;
- Linguistic skills, in both English and other languages, which focus on the four dimensions of listening, reading, speaking and writing - promoting literacy;
- Literature, music and the visual arts;
- Historical and geographical perspectives.
- To ensure that the curriculum of all pupils focuses on the attainment of the cross curricular skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Information and Communication Technology.
- To ensure that all pupils have opportunities to improve their attainment of ‘other skills’, i.e.

- ❖ Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making;
 - ❖ Self Management;
 - ❖ Working with others;
 - ❖ Managing Information;
 - ❖ Being Creative;
 - ❖ Self Expression and Reasoned Argument.
- To provide access to programmes and courses of Religious Education to help develop ethical and spiritual values.
 - To provide all pupils with access to opportunities for exercise and sporting competition to promote physical fitness and well-being.
 - To provide all pupils with access to programmes of Health Education to encourage a healthy life-style.
 - To provide all pupils with programmes of Careers guidance and experience (CEIAG).
 - To offer all pupils the fullest opportunity to gain such qualifications and skills as will fit them for further education or for employment in accordance with their aspirations and abilities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Final accountability for the curriculum rests with the Principal and the Board of Governors. Strategic planning, management and performance review are the responsibility of the Senior Management Team and, in particular, the Deputy Principal (Curriculum). The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) reports annually to the Academic Committee of the Board of Governors. He coordinates Heads of Department at formal meetings and in general. He also coordinates the work of the Strategy Groups which concentrate on Literacy, Numeracy and ICT. Heads of Department and subject and skill Coordinators are responsible for the planning, management and delivery of their particular area of learning. Subject teachers are responsible for delivery to pupils in the classroom.

PROVISION

General outline:

The subjects and subject choice offered to each pupil in the school are the responsibility of the Principal and, through her, of the Board of Governors. They will strive at all times to comply with the current statutory requirements of government. They will also take into account the recommendations of ETI.

Every pupil at Key Stage 3 follows a common curriculum, which provides a wide range of experiences, disciplines, skills and areas of study. A limited amount of time (c.12%) is set aside in Form 3 for optional choices for pupils to experience new subjects before GCSE choice. The wider curriculum for Form 3 pupils remains broad and balanced and common to all. In each year at Key Stage 3 all pupils have access to subjects from all the Areas of Learning defined by the Northern Ireland Curriculum (2007).

At Key Stage 4 and 16+ the school recognises the right of pupils to make certain choices about the subjects they study, so that they may follow courses suited to their interests, abilities and aspirations. Such choices are governed by the following factors:

- The statutory requirements of government;
- The provision of places in classes of suitable size within the economic resources of the school;
- The suitability, as judged by the school, of particular pupils for particular courses.

In organising classes, the school attempts to meet the preferences of as many pupils as possible. The school will also continue to explore collaborative opportunities within the **Newtownabbey Learning Community** to widen access both for our pupils and for the pupils in partner schools. While the school welcomes representation from parents or guardians about the subjects available to their children, the Principal remains the final authority to decide on the appropriateness of subject choices.

The Principal is the final arbiter of the **time devoted to each subject** in each year. In reaching decisions about the allocation of time she will take into account:

- Statutory requirements, where appropriate;
- Historical precedent, where appropriate;
- The representations of Heads of Department;
- The advice of the Deputy Principal (Curriculum), The Curriculum Strategy Group and the Senior Management Team.

Current provision (2014-15) is listed as follows:

Form 1 (Year 8):

Art & Design, Biology, Chemistry, English (with Library Studies and Drama), French, Games, Geography, History, Latin, Learning for Life & Work (Home Economics, Personal Development, Employability/ Careers, Citizenship), Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Physics, Religious Education, Technology.

Form 2 (Year 9):

Art & Design, Biology, Chemistry, English (with Library Studies and Drama), French, Games, Geography, German, History, Latin, Learning for Life & Work (Home Economics, Personal Development, Employability/ Careers, Citizenship), Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Physics, Religious Education, Spanish, Technology.

Form 3 (Year 10):

As Form 1 (Year 8) except that Classical Civilisation, German, Home Economics, Latin, Spanish, Technology become optional subjects of which two are chosen.

Forms 4 & 5 (Years 11 & 12):

All pupils will begin a programme of at least nine GCSE subjects. It is expected that at least 95% will complete this programme of nine subjects.

Compulsory Core: English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, a modern language are all studied to GCSE.

Non-exam courses in Physical Education, Learning for Life and Work, Games and Religious Studies are taken by all pupils.

Science is also studied to GCSE level with pupils choosing from Double Award, Single Science, Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

Optional subjects studied to GCSE are Additional Mathematics, Art & Design, Business Studies, Classical Civilisation, Computer Studies, Electronics, Geography, German, History, Home Economics (Child Development), Home Economics (Food), ICT, Latin, Motor Vehicle Studies, Music, Physical Education, Religious Studies (Full and Short Course), Spanish, Technology.

Additional Mathematics, Astronomy, Classical Greek and Music are also available as an extra GCSE for able and interested pupils.

Forms L6 and U6 (Years 13 and 14):

Depending on the GCSE achieved points score pupils choose either 3 or 4 subjects at AS/A2 level from the following lists:

Provided by School: Art & Design, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Classical Civilisation, Classical Greek, Electronics, English Literature, French, Further Mathematics, Geography, German, Government & Politics, History, Home Economics, ICT, Latin, Mathematics, Media Studies, Music, Physical Education, Physics, Religious Studies, Spanish, Technology.

Provided by partner schools and institutions: Accounting, Drama & Theatre Studies, Engineering, Health & Social Care, Moving Image Art, Performing Art, Travel & Tourism.

Pupils also have access to enrichment courses as follows: ICT Key Skills (Level 2), Motor Vehicle and Road User Studies (GCSE), Sign Language, Young Enterprise, Careers Guidance, Philosophy, Irish Language, Chinese Language.

Pupils in L.VI and U.VI also have access to private study time. While Form U.VI is supervised by ancillary staff, it is assumed that pupils in the Sixth Form can make profitable use of study time without supervision. Members of the teaching staff currently supervise private study periods for Form L.VI.

PROGRAMMES OF STUDY

Programmes of Study and related schemes of work are the responsibility of the Heads of Department. Heads of Department incorporate the statutory requirements into their planning. Schemes should constantly be revised to reflect the thrust of the NI Curriculum, incorporating opportunities for skills' application as well as Assessment for Learning strategies and cross curricular collaboration. Copies of schemes of work and programmes of study are kept in the departmental files and are also available for the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) and other members of Senior Management as required for monitoring purposes.

GUIDANCE

Pupils and parents have access to expert guidance on subject options and choices at every stage of the curriculum. Such guidance arises from a variety of means, including:

- Explanatory letters to parents;
- Specialist presentations for pupils and parents at Parents' Nights;
- Careers interviews for pupils and parents;
- Subject choice handbooks;

UPTAKE OF OPTIONAL SUBJECTS

Listed below are the criteria to be applied if class sizes need to be limited or if decisions have to be made about the viability of classes.

- Safety regulations with regard to numbers of pupils in classes for practical subjects will be strictly observed.
- Classes will be limited to the number of pupils for whom furniture can conveniently be provided in the classrooms involved.
- Account will be taken of the workload of teachers, in particular the amount of preparation, marking and organisation of assessment work required for specific subjects at different levels.
- The provision of places in any class or subject group is dependent on the availability of suitably qualified staff.

When there is debate about the viability of optional courses, the following considerations may be taken into account:

- The motivation and ability of the pupils concerned;
- The number of pupils opting for the course compared with other subjects at the same stage;
- The staffing available and whether it could be more usefully employed in other ways;
- Whether the provision of the course creates undue pressure for other members of the teaching staff;
- Historical precedent for the provision of the course;
- Special consideration may be given to pilot schemes for new courses or to courses which appear to have special value in the context of the whole curriculum.

EVENTS AND FOCUS DAYS

It is evident that the NI Curriculum requires greater flexibility in provision than hitherto. It is clear that strictly timetabled provision is not always the best approach to learning opportunities for pupils. Events and Focus Days, especially in the learning areas of Careers education, Learning for Life and Work, Health Education and ICT are now an integral part of the school curriculum. The degree to which extra-timetabled activities encroach upon normal class time is the concern of the Principal. Her approval or that of the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) must be gained in every instance in advance of planning. Notice of events must be provided as early as possible. Before approval is granted the following factors will be considered:

- The educational value (in the widest sense) of the event proposed;
- The difficulty of arranging the event outside school hours;
- The degree to which the education of any pupil involved has previously been disrupted by absence from class for any reason;
- The imminence of major external or internal examinations;
- The disruption which the absence of any pupil from class could cause to any statutory assessment procedure.

In order to minimise disruption consideration should be given to variation in the days used for events and for the timetabled day to be changed as necessary.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A central focus of the Revised Curriculum is that children should attain the skills which enable them to become independent learners. While traditional teaching and learning methods

continue to have a place it is also the job of the teacher to act as a guide to the development of the pupils' own abilities and resources.

New and varied methodologies in teaching and strategies for learning are of prime importance in individual pupil and whole school improvement.

The development of thinking skills and the utilisation of Assessment for Learning as a strategy for pupil improvement are important aspects of the teaching and learning process in the delivery of the curriculum.

The sharing of good practice is increasingly evident in school planning and staff Inset. The school has also produced a **Teaching and Learning Policy** document (2006, revised 2012), which should be read in conjunction with this Curriculum Policy. Teachers trained in the methodologies of teaching and learning also disseminate good practice through whole school staff Inset. The ICT Strategy Group provides a similar service.

CROSS CURRICULAR SKILLS

These are Communication, Using Mathematics, Information and Communication Technology. The acquisition and development of these skills is of prime importance in a pupil's education. Competence and facility in these skills are essential for any pupil hoping to achieve his full potential at school and in his ultimate career path. Their cross curricular application helps develop a flexible approach to learning which will last young people well beyond the bounds of their school days. They are life skills.

Strategies for the cross curricular implementation and assessment of these skills have been developed.

Communication: The main skills associated with Communication are effectively those of developing literacy, i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening. Hitherto these have been developed mainly through work done through the programmes of study in the English department, although all other subjects had a contribution to make. With the advent of the NI Curriculum the school has begun a process of formal integration of communication skills within the schemes of all subject areas of learning, which began with Form 1 in the academic year 2007/8. The assessment of these skills is cross curricular, but the English department will continue to provide a foundation and will share expertise across the curriculum.

Using Mathematics: The main skills associated with Using Mathematics are effectively those of developing numeracy, i.e. interpretation of information, carrying out calculations, interpretation of results and presentation of findings. Hitherto these have been developed mainly through work done through the programmes of study in the Mathematics department, although many other subjects had a significant contribution to make, especially the sciences, Technology, Geography and Home Economics. Using Mathematics is now integrated into subject schemes, as appropriate, and assessment is cross curricular, although led by the Maths department.

ICT: Skills associated with ICT have a central part in the curriculum. Examples of these skills include word processing, use of spreadsheets and data bases, electronic communication and the internet.

At Key Stage 3 ICT skills are developed mainly through applications within subject areas. The monitoring and tracking of these is the responsibility of the ICT Co-ordinator. In addition Year 8 pupils have two focus days devoted to the consolidation of skills. The first of these, held early in first term is to 'baseline' pupils' skill levels. Year 9 pupils also have 2 ICT focus days, again devoted to the development of relevant skills.

In Year 10 all pupils have one period a week timetabled for ICT. There are 3 objectives associated with this course: to consolidate the skills developed throughout Key Stage 3; to ensure pupils are ready and prepared to achieve the CCEA Certificate in ICT; to provide a platform for GCSE choice of ICT. Work produced throughout Key Stage 3 may be held in a portfolio and within subject based folders in the C2K system.

At Key Stage 4 ICT is a popular GCSE choice. Skills learnt at KS3 are utilised in applications in other subject areas. Computer Studies was reintroduced as a GCSE option for the academic year 2014-15.

At 16+ the Key Skill in ICT (Level 2) is taken by most pupils who do not possess a GCSE in ICT. ICT applications are an integral part of the work for most other pupils and provide opportunities for further skill development.

The ICT Strategy Group has a central role in the cross curricular dissemination and development of skills and practice. Each year it sets targets, monitors progress, provides opportunities for staff development, all devoted to school improvement. The ICT Coordinator meets regularly with the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) and the Deputy Principal (Teaching and Learning) for review, evaluation and planning.

LEARNING FOR LIFE AND WORK

Learning for Life & Work (LLW) is an integral part of the pupils' curriculum at Key Stage 3.

The skills associated with **Personal Development** are studied in each registration group's Form Period. The schemes of work are the responsibility of the Year Teacher and are delivered by the Form Teacher.

The skills associated with **Employability** are studied in a period timetabled for half the school year. The schemes of work (which include personal careers planning) are the responsibility of the Head of Careers and are delivered by a team of specialist teachers.

The skills associated with **Citizenship** are studied in a period timetabled for half the school year. The schemes of work are the responsibility of the Citizenship Coordinator and are delivered by a team of specialist teachers.

Home Economics is timetabled for all pupils in Years 8 and 9. The schemes of work are the responsibility of the Head of Department and are delivered by a team of specialist teachers. In Year 10 Home Economics is an optional subject.

Many of the '**Other Skills**' defined in the Revised Curriculum are the particular focus of the work done in LLW at Key Stage 3.

At **Key Stage 4** the school provides the 'minimum entitlement' in **Learning for Life and Work. Personal Development** continues to be studied during each registration group's Form Period. Form Period is also utilised for aspects of **Employability and Careers Education**, while other aspects (eg interview skills) are concentrated in Focus Days. There are also Focus Days for **Citizenship**. Schemes of work are the responsibility of the Year Teachers, Head of Careers and Coordinator for Citizenship.

A team consisting of the Deputy Principal (Curriculum), the Year Teachers, Head of Careers and Coordinator for Citizenship continue to monitor the future direction and implementation of LLW at Key Stage 4.

CAREERS EDUCATION

- To develop knowledge and understanding of themselves and others as individuals – their strengths and limitations, personal qualities, interests, abilities, skills, potential, values, attitudes, motivation and needs.
- To develop knowledge and understanding of the opportunities available to them, of the major roles which people play concurrently or sequentially in various spheres of life, and of routes of entry to employment and other careers.
- To develop skills and personal qualities needed to make considered career choices, to formulate and implement career plans and to cope with the transition from school to adult life.

The policy for Careers Education in Belfast High School is to secure for each individual pupil an experience of careers education which will focus on his or her personal needs and aspirations, through a cross-curricular approach:

- Subjects, within the curriculum, make appropriate contributions to identified content. Also provide are
- Careers education units of work;
- Employability classes and focus days;
- Vocational guidance with a careers officer;
- Community based experiences, provided through the assistance of key people within the community.

Implementation

In addition to classroom teaching, the careers education programme will necessitate learning in a number of environments which may include:

- One-to-one interviews
- The Careers Library
- Talks
- Visits
- Careers conventions
- Works experience or work shadowing
- Mini-enterprise projects
- Other experiences (seminars or conferences on industry, business etc)

ENRICHMENT

Enrichment may be defined as the 'Informal Curriculum'. Activities which are outside the normal timetable, but which add to pupil experience, understanding, knowledge and enjoyment of curricular subjects and skills fall into the category of enrichment. Such activities are an extremely important part of the experience of pupils at Belfast High school. Examples of enrichment activities include:

- Field Trips, excursions and study visits to sites of relevance and foreign countries;
- Competitions, quizzes, essay writing, inter-school, e.g. Mathematiques sans Frontieres;
- School societies which promote consolidation of skills and enjoyable activities, e.g. the Language Club, the Senior Reading Group;
- Study exchanges, e.g. school Brandenburg link;
- Work experience;
- Community Service Group;
- All sports, individual and team;
- Musical groups and performance;
- Study visits and projects, e.g. Nuffield Science projects.

HOMEWORK

Homework is considered an integral part of the curriculum of the school. It gives opportunities for pupil consolidation of class work, for independent learning and for parents to see what work is being done in school. It provides raw material for teachers as a diagnostic tool in assessing pupil progress and identifying areas for improvement. There is a separate **Homework Policy** which should be read in conjunction with this policy. In addition, each subject department publishes its own homework policy.

ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

Assessment and reporting are key elements in measuring pupil progress and planning for improvement. Since 2005/6 the school has made increased use of the data rich opportunities provided by C2K in tracking and reporting pupil assessment. The NI Curriculum envisages the production of a Pupil Progress File to track and record pupil progress, achievement and areas for improvement. Information to parents currently includes assessment results in language and literacy and Mathematics and Numeracy, achievements in other areas of learning including performance in public examination, and a formative record of progress and achievement.

Transitional arrangements currently apply for statutory reporting. The school has a number of groups planning and implementing the new arrangements, in particular the assessment of the cross-curricular skills.

Current arrangements for assessment and reporting include the following:

- Utilisation of the C2K database to record aggregated information about pupil achievement and progress to be used as an indicator of progress over time and to identify areas for improvement;
- Twice yearly timetabled examinations for all pupils measuring progress (Forms 5, L.VI and U.VI take public examinations);

- Twice yearly detailed reporting to parents on pupil progress, based on measurable outcomes in school examination, and providing advice on areas for improvement;
- Annual Parents' Nights providing opportunities for parents to speak to teachers regarding their child's progress;
- Termly progress reports on pupils whose progress gives grounds for concern, outlining the area of concern and strategies for improvement;
- Assessment Cards for all new pupils, twice yearly;
- Publication of Principal's annual report to governors on the varied achievements of the pupils;
- The use of CATS data (Forms 1 and 4) to benchmark pupil performance and negotiate targets for improvement; ALIS is used for Form L.VI.
- Systematic tracking of pupil performance within the different subject areas focusing on attainment of skills as well as specific subject knowledge;
- Use of homework as a learning tool, properly marked with suggestions for improvement, following the School and Department Homework Policies;
- Production of a portfolio of pupil's work as evidence of what a pupil can do;
- Moderation of pupil work within subject departments;
- External moderation for public examination at Key Stage 3, GCSE and A Level;
- Importance of the role of Year and Form Teachers in assessing an overview of pupil progress;
- Utilisation and reporting of DE Benchmarking data for comparison of school and NI performance in external examination and identification of areas for improvement;
- Publication to the wider community of school and pupil achievement;

THE ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Entitlement Framework is intended to provide access to a greater range of courses for pupils at Key Stage 4 and 16+. Schools are required to provide access to a mix of 'General' (academic) and 'Applied' (vocational) courses which should be at a balance of not more than 2/3 to 1/3.

This school has achieved the full implementation of the Entitlement Framework for pupils at Key Stage 4 and 16+. The school has a traditional academic focus which it wishes to retain, but is actively engaged in the **Newtownabbey Learning Community** and sees this involvement as the principal instrument for the successful provision of a mix of 'General' and 'Applied' subjects as envisaged by the Entitlement Framework. Through collaboration with partner schools and through the employment of 'distance learning' packages the school met the 2/3 to 1/3 balance of 'General' and 'Applied' subjects at 16+ in the academic year 2007/8 providing access to 30 subjects of which 10 are defined as 'Applied'. Access to equivalent provision of 'Applied' subjects at Key Stage 4 is provided entirely within the school's curriculum.

The school also provides access to a number of 'General' courses for pupils in partner schools.

The key staff members involved are the Principal and the Deputy Principals for Curriculum and Teaching and Learning.

CAPACITY BUILDING & STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The successful delivery of the school curriculum requires suitably qualified and informed teachers who have up to date knowledge and skills. The development of such skills and the building of capacity are of prime importance in school improvement. Examples of how the teaching staff are kept abreast of change are given below:

- Strategy Groups
- Heads of Department Meetings
- ICT Strategy Group
- Sharing Good Practice
- School Inset (Whole School and Departmental)
- External Inset (through e.g. CCEA, NEELB etc.)
- Publications and web resources, e.g. TTI, CCEA web site

SPECIALIST STATUS FOR LANGUAGE

The school held Specialist status for Language from 2007-10 until the project came to an end. This status provided the school with increased resources for realising the requirements of the Revised Curriculum and for targeting areas of whole school improvement. It has also opened a new curricular area – the school and the wider community. For areas of overlap it is necessary to read the **Specialist School Plan** in conjunction with this document. Some such areas are listed below:

- Staff development and Sharing Good Practice;
- Provision;
- Community involvement;
- Enrichment activities for pupils.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

Improvement of provision and improvement of outcome are the benefits of thorough evaluative and review mechanisms. It is a consistent aspect of management in the school to monitor current provision, to evaluate and reflect upon its effectiveness and to review and manage change. At Belfast High School these mechanisms include:

- Curriculum mapping;
- Annual curriculum Target Setting and Action Planning in School Development and Departmental Plans;
- Departmental Audits and development planning;
- Reports to Principal from Deputy Principal (Curriculum);
- Report to Board of Governors from Deputy Principal (Curriculum);
- Utilisation of DE Baseline data for comparison of school and NI performance and identification of areas for improvement;
- Report to Parents from Principal and Deputy Principal (Curriculum);
- Heads of Department Meetings;
- Forums for pupil and staff feedback and proposals, e.g. Pupil Council, Staff Inset days;
- Pupil and staff Evaluation;
- Departmental moderation of pupil work as a basis for teacher self evaluation and a means of access to new teaching methods.

This Curriculum Policy was most recently updated in Autumn Term 2014.

J K Currie, Deputy Principal (Curriculum)

i The Aims of the School:

- (i) to provide a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum which suits the needs of all pupils in a changing society and which encourages each pupil in his or her intellectual, cultural, aesthetic and physical development;
- (ii) to instil in each pupil the determination to strive in all activities, academic and otherwise, to achieve his or her own level of excellence;
- (iii) to encourage in pupils a respect for religious and moral values;
- (iv) to create a caring environment in which the needs of each pupil are considered;
- (v) to make full use of the contribution of the home and the wider community to the education process;
- (vi) to foster social attitudes which will enable each pupil to take his or her place as a responsible member of the community.

ii 'The NI Curriculum aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives...'