

## ***Our intent: a rationale***

We provide a challenging, rigorous, engaging and broad curriculum for able and ambitious students in the local area within the framework of a caring community. All students, regardless of need, gender, ethnicity and background, are guided to be independent thinkers, emotionally resilient, empathetic, well behaved and socially responsible. They are prepared to make a constructive contribution to society as a result of the experiences they encounter, and the example set by others.

Coherence comes from linking a knowledge-based curriculum with a focus on the acquisition of skills. Using skills ensures that we can understand the connectedness of the whole curriculum (William, 2013). It is a misnomer to try to distinguish between the two because each attribute enables the other to thrive – it is a virtuous circle - and by ensuring that the acquisition of skills and knowledge work in tandem, it enables students to achieve their best regardless of their background.

In designing our curriculum, we ensured that our middle leaders identified the body of knowledge and skills that they wanted their students to 'know' at the end of each year, and then more broadly, at the end of each key stage. (For Key Stage Three only these are our end of year standards). Through mid- and end- of year assessments we track students' ability to retain information and to apply skills. Low stakes assessment ensure that information is retained and persistently re-enforced through recall and repetition. For instance, lessons will in many cases begin with a retrieval session where students recall what they learned last lesson and explain where the knowledge fits within the curriculum. Mastery, we believe, evolves through repetition. Learning is a repeated discipline, which is to be mastered and valued for its own sake; it is myopic to identify exam outcomes as the sole measure of determining impact.

Each subject is sequenced and determined by the head of department using the whole school Intent as the starting point. As subject experts, they and their teams have been accorded the autonomy to decide upon the approach they wish to adopt as they guide students through the content of their courses to achieve the self-confidence to be able to move to the next 'level' of the course. Regardless of whether students access that course at Key Stage 3, at GCSE or A level, their retention of knowledge and application of skill can be applied in every subject area, thereby developing as resilient and independent thinkers. In addition, our approach aspires that 'children have more than a general sense of a topic through vaguely remembered knowledge encounters... we want them to amass a body of declarative and procedural knowledge.' (Sherrington, 2018)

For example, in History, students are taught to think about significance, how the past has been interpreted, causation and how to reach judgements etc. In KS4 this is all directly relevant to the tasks of having to look at the significance of events such as Manchuria in the 1930s, how to use sources to decide if they agree or oppose a view, and reaching judgements on for instance the key factors in the causes of WW2. By the time they get into exams, the thinking skills curriculum of KS3 will mean that they should be able to do these things independently and with resilience. Our curriculum is well integrated, and the skills students

develop transcend subjects. For example, the reference above to thinking about how to reach justified conclusions in history would be cemented and reinforced by work in the English and Geography curricula.

Key Stage 3 and 4 are separate entities. Although students study all subjects to the end of Key Stage 3 (except for a 'third' language), if they choose not to pursue the course beyond, each student will have had sufficient exposure to the skills and knowledge of the subject to be able to achieve between a standard '4' and '6'. This is fundamental to our proposal that our curriculum is broad and ambitious.

At Key Stage 3 we encourage creativity. Our drive is to have a broad curriculum - all the way through to the end of Year 9, so that students experience a wide range of learning contexts and are best able to choose what their focus should be at GCSE. We aim to encourage creativity by having a wide range of practical subjects, as well as encouraging creative thinking within traditional academic subjects. We believe that this is a useful way of allowing students to tackle complex questions at GCSE in all areas - for example we encourage and see a lot of enquiry-based approaches rather than basic closed or small activities where possible, giving students as much ownership of the tasks as possible and allowing them to think and be creative in their answers.

Beyond this, we have identified a variety of opportunities between departments, as part of off timetable days, through extra-curricular activities, where students can identify connections between curricula and skills and learn to apply these. This in turn creates 'flow', or effortless learning, and ensures that knowledge is retained without resistance. (Csikszentmihályi, 2008) Further: 'Flow is the most optimal of these states for learning, as it is where skill level and challenge level of a task are at their highest. This creates an opportunity for learning and intense focus, where learners can even feel that they lose track of time because they are so immersed in the task.' We don't see flow happening solely in the classroom. It happens beyond in our broad extra-curricular programme activities which extend lessons and develop interests.

Our extra-curricular opportunities are a significant strength of the CGS curriculum. They support students' education, personal development and has a positive impact on behaviour & attitudes. Post-COVID, in September 2021 we made a return to extra-curricular a priority. We run over 50 clubs at lunchtime and after school in a wide range of subject linked or extracurricular themes, increasing students' experience of cultural capital. We run a broad range of activities in sport, music (such as concerts, practices, peripatetic teachers from Lincs. Music Service) and drama (such as our annual school production.) Our house system enables students to mix across year groups in a broad and inclusive range of activities (music, drama, sports, quizzes, chess, pancake race, etc.). Our house prefects, working with staff, enjoy taking on leadership roles to enable these activities to take place. They understand the importance of contributing to their community. We are a Duke of Edinburgh Centre and run activities at Gold, Silver and Bronze level: over 100 students per year take part. We also attend debating tournaments, Young Enterprise, academic competitions in Biology and Chemistry, STEM and creative writing (Nightingale) and journalism (Caistor Focus). At the end of the school year 20/21, we ran three competitive House activity days. We intend to continue with this next

year. In July 2022, we are looking forward to the Caistor Fringe Festival, as well as Maths and EPQ-based activities for Years 7 and 8. We will resurrect our annual School Walk for the charity WaterAid in July 2022.

As part of our cohesive approach, our PSHE and RSE curriculums are not 'add-ons' or an adjunct: they are an integral part of our curriculum's design and its intent. The programme is reviewed frequently and exposes students to challenging material which enables them to develop an understanding of the world. A careers programme works alongside this to further guide and inform students about choice. The proliferation of virtual opportunities helps to inform students, thereby directing them to see outcomes as a means to building their choices and developing the possibility of social mobility. Work supporting a range of charities (local, national and international causes) supports students' world view, including supporting an understanding of gender, racial and sexual identity. A strong understanding of safeguarding, the understanding of what it means to have positive mental health, a superb proactive and when required, reactive, pastoral support structure, also link to our curriculum intent.

Our curriculum is therefore 'utopian' (Robinson, 2018) in that it is driven by what is right and good as well as preparing students for the demands of the society into which they are will eventually take a full and active role, possibly leading the way. It embraces individualism, recognising that all students have different aspirations and goals. Our role is not to direct students along established pathways which are representative of an outdated perception of selective education. Instead, we direct, then provide, then introduce and finally seek for students to build a body of knowledge and skills to empower them to make choices which are right 'at the time' for them, their families, and in the long term, their communities.

Our curriculum is designed to allow students to thrive in the face of challenge of an ever-changing world. So, for example, we would aim for fast-paced lessons, which have a high level of challenge and extension tasks to ensure that no student is being allowed to coast. Our aim is to help Special Educational Needs and disadvantaged students, for example, to embrace and tackle as many challenges as possible, rather than restricting their curriculum. We promote the idea of obstacles and challenge being a good thing and useful to learners in the long run. Whilst we always reward and credit success, we don't pretend to students that every answer they give is correct, and we encourage them to use challenge and mistakes to build on their understanding and learning. We believe that this makes them more willing to take risks and to be resilient in examinations.

It is therefore important that for a School which is accessible by the top quartile of the local catchment area, that we can offer a curriculum which is challenging, rigorous, engaging and broad, and which sees students engages with a world in which they will – and could already be – making a significant contribution.

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