



WESTMINSTER  
SCHOOL

# CURRICULUM POLICY

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## WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

# POLICY ON CURRICULUM

### INTRODUCTION

Westminster offers a broad, liberal education where pupils are taught to think, discuss, challenge and debate. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and tackle problems both individually and collaboratively. Academic departments are given considerable autonomy in choosing which examination boards and syllabuses to follow, including GCSEs, IGCSEs, A Levels and International A Levels. That said, the Westminster teaching and learning philosophy is such that pupils are not only well prepared in syllabus content, but are stretched and extended beyond that, and are given sufficient opportunity to develop study skills in order to prepare them for life beyond Westminster. Similarly, pupils' academic performance is viewed as being directly related to their wellbeing, and so the curriculum and delivery of it is designed to support pupils' emotional development in terms of academic risk-taking and resilience, but equally supportive and adapted to their individual needs.

The School is committed to creating opportunities for pupils to develop speaking, listening, literacy, numeracy and digital skills through the curriculum. Heads of Departments develop bespoke schemes of work that support classroom teachers to plan and deliver lessons that are varied and appropriate to pupils' different abilities, as well as pupils' educational and emotional needs. Classroom teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and use a range of effective teaching methods, resources and activities in the classroom, studio or laboratory. Where possible, cross-curricular links are cultivated and explored across departments. All pupils and teachers have access to an iPad in lessons as another pedagogical tool, such that pupils are regularly honing their organisational and digital skills.

We aim for pupils to leave Westminster with a love of both independent and collaborative learning, and so they are thus ready to make a positive contribution to society and the community at large. All pupils are catered for by teachers who adapt their lessons and support pupils as individuals both inside and outside the classroom. Pupils with SEND and EAL are fully supported both with specific teaching strategies in classrooms and departments, with extra support where necessary from the Learning Development department.

### LOWER SCHOOL CURRICULUM

All pupils who arrive in the Fifth Form (Year 9) follow a common curriculum appropriate to their age, aptitude and ability. No subject choices are made before arriving at the School. Subjects studied at this stage include English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, French, Latin, Ancient Greek, Geography, History, Philosophy and Religion, Art, Computer Science, Electronics, Product Design, Drama, Music, PE and RSHE. The study of one modern and two ancient languages not only offers an introduction to Western European culture but also provides a formal and transferable basis for the future acquisition of any other language. Science is taught as three separate subjects, as well as an Extension Science course, and all pupils study introductory courses in Computer Science, Product Design and Electronics. All pupils have weekly RSHE and Wellbeing lessons supported by tutorials and year-group lectures and workshops.

For their next two years of Lower and Upper Shell (Years 10 and 11), pupils will prepare for 10 or 11 (I)GCSEs, including Mathematics, English Language, English Literature, French and at least two of the three Sciences (the Science courses are designed so that all pupils will have achieved scientific literacy by the end of the Lower Shell). Otherwise the system of choice open to pupils is very flexible and at this stage pupils can begin a second Modern Language (German, Mandarin, Russian or Spanish), building on the firm linguistic basis of French and Latin. Pupils are required to take one or two practical / creative subjects, choosing from Art, Computer Science, Drama, Electronics, Product Design and Music. The aim is that classes should not, or very rarely, exceed 22 in number, and should be smaller wherever possible. There is setting in French and Mathematics but mixed ability classes elsewhere.

Fifth Form and Lower Shell pupils join at least two Lower School Activities (LSAs): this is a varied programme, ranging from languages such as Modern Greek, Italian and Japanese, through additional sports, to music and classic films.

## **UPPER SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

The Upper School curriculum in the Sixth Form (Year 12) and Remove (Year 13) is designed to satisfy requirements both of depth and of breadth in a coeducational environment.

All Sixth Form pupils follow 4 A Level or International A Level courses in the formal timetable ("in block"). Of these, the majority will continue with these subjects in the Remove and complete four qualifications (A Levels / International A Levels). A wide range of subjects will be offered making a broad range of subject combinations possible. The School aims to be as flexible as it can in meeting the wishes and needs of individual pupils.

While pupils will be able to mix and match the Arts and the Sciences if they wish, this is by no means the requirement or advice, and many choose to follow a fairly specialised route; pupils are encouraged to play to their interests and strengths, and the only recommendation given to pupils is to seek some sort of coherence and to bear in mind the options they are opening up or closing down in applications to universities or future careers. Pupils attend a Futures Evening in the Upper Shell with their parents, where they are given guidance on subject choices by the academic and Higher Education teams, ahead of making subject choices.,.

In many subjects, pupils have the opportunity to produce extended independent research projects, essays or investigations, some of which are an integral part of examination board specifications. In all subjects, examination board specifications will be seen as forming only a part of the core delivery. All pupils are strongly encouraged to undertake the internal John Locke extended summer project on a subject or cross-curricular topic of their choice, for which they receive guidance from a subject mentor, supporting their university applications.

A General Options and Cultural Perspectives programme of three cycles of eight-week single-period courses is offered alongside the specialist A Level teaching in the Sixth Form. Cultural Perspectives introduce pupils to a range of cultural, ethical and sociological topics, and include essay writing opportunities at one point at the end of the year. General Options comprise a series of courses on a huge variety of topics, including a number aimed at supporting pupils' wellbeing. Pupils can also choose to pursue a further qualification in these lessons including Electronics or the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) (often in subjects not offered at A Level e.g.: Computer Science).

An additional and extremely valuable feature for both the Sixth Form and the Remove is the John Locke Society, where the entire Upper School is taken out of lessons for one period around four times per term so that they can attend a talk by a visiting speaker who might be a politician, journalist, author, sportsperson, industrialist or religious leader. Our central London location gives us ready access to distinguished visitors of many kinds – a benefit which is also productively exploited by the numerous departmental societies.

## **BROADER ACADEMIC STUDY**

Outside of the formal academic curriculum, a wealth of opportunity is offered to pupils of all year groups. Further languages may be studied (e.g.: Arabic, Italian and Japanese); music, drama, debating and Model United Nations are all major features of School life; and there are many opportunities for educational visits both in the UK and abroad, covering academic, sporting, exploring and cultural activities.

## **SPORTS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

All pupils participate in the Station (games) programme on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Some pupils will play competitive matches on Saturdays and other days of the week. There is a wide range of competitive and non-competitive options on offer, particularly in the Upper School.

The Fifth Form additionally have an 85-minute weekly PE lesson one half-term per term.

## **GUIDANCE AND CAREERS**

Tutors and Housemasters engage with the pupils' academic progress and decision-making on a frequent and regular basis, to ensure coherent and realistic choices are made for courses at (I)GCSE and (International) A Level, and that pupils are encouraged to fulfil their potential.

A structured programme of guidance for pupils runs throughout their time at the School. When subject choices are made, pupils are offered advice on how academic decisions might affect possible career paths. Discussions about subjects choices are linked with careers at every stage when there is a choice (Fifth Form for (I)GCSEs and Upper Shell for (International) A Levels).

There are regular opportunities for pupils of all year groups to attend a variety of talks on careers. Additionally, there are opportunities for pupils to engage with online careers platforms such as Morrisby and Unifrog from Fifth Form into the Upper School in order to chart pupils' individual thinking on careers and courses. Talks on UCAS and US / international universities are available to pupils and parents, as well as regularly updated information on Firefly. Individual advice is also provided by the Higher Education Team which includes the Director of Upper School, Head of UCAS, Head of US and International Universities and advisers from A List, who are all supported by Housemasters and Tutors.

The School offers specific guidance days linking the curriculum with career and life choices for both Upper Shell and Sixth Form pupils, which is provided by the Higher Education team, the Careers department and external providers. The School's RSHE and Wellbeing programme which is further supplemented by tutors in tutorials, explores aspects of leadership, self-knowledge, writing CVs, goal setting and ways of approaching employers. In all guidance, care is taken to ensure that the information is presented to pupils in an impartial manner.

## **Work placements**

Discussions about careers are integrated in lessons by individual departments. Pupils and parents are encouraged in both Upper Shell and Sixth Form to seek their own work experience placements, although the School is happy to provide support in assisting those who are finding this problematic. Contacts with Old Westminster and current parents are a key component in developing career opportunities for pupils.

## **RELATIONSHIPS, SEX AND HEALTH EDUCATION (RSHE) AND WELLBEING**

All pupils take part in weekly Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) and Wellbeing lessons with the programme overseen by the Head of RSHE and Wellbeing. This programme encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. These protected characteristics are:

- a. Age
- b. Disability
- c. Gender reassignment
- d. Marriage and civil partnership
- e. Pregnancy and maternity
- f. Race
- g. Religion or belief
- h. Sex
- i. Sexual orientation.

In the Lower School, pupils attend weekly lessons. For these sessions, pupils are split into half-classes (groups of 10-12) and follow a bespoke, spiral, age-appropriate syllabus (see the School's Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) and Wellbeing Policy). This is supported by termly lectures and workshops by external experts, as well as older pupils.

In the Upper School, pupils also attend weekly lessons, following a continued spiral, age-appropriate syllabus, supported by termly talks, seminars and workshops delivered by external speakers.

Topics covered in lectures may also be referenced and built upon in the semi-weekly tutorial.

## **SPIRITUAL, MORAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is at the heart of everything they do. Pupils attend services twice weekly in Westminster Abbey where a short address given by the Chaplain, a member of staff or a visiting speaker, encourages them to reflect on a wide range of topical issues. Latin Prayers, a weekly service up School, also typically includes a reflection or thought for the day, as well as a celebration of pupils' successes.

In addition to the whole-school opportunities for SMSC, the nature of the Westminster classroom environment encourages pupils to explore a wide variety of ideas in the course of their work. The literature components of the humanities and languages courses tackle important themes, and the religion and philosophy course in the Fifth Form introduces pupils to a wider range of ideas. Extension science classes tackle the application of science in society, for good and ill.

For all year groups, there is a programme of opportunities for pupils to be engaged in external community activities which goes beyond our formal Civic Engagement (volunteering) programme. Westminster expects every pupil to become involved in at least one significant activity or project in this area during their time at the School.

## **DIGITAL SKILLS**

Digital skills at Westminster are primarily delivered through the main curriculum. All pupils have access to an iPad from the Fifth Form and so very quickly adapt to using them in subjects.

Westminster-specific systems are explained to pupils through tutorials, with pupils quickly becoming familiar with email, the intranet and Firefly. Pupils then learn and develop their use of

standard desktop programmes through their activities as part of the main curriculum: for example, typing essays, analysing data in spreadsheets and preparing presentations.

Risks online relating to academic dishonesty and online abuse are discussed both in tutorial and classroom settings as well as forming part of the RSHE and Wellbeing curriculum.

## **FUNDAMENTAL BRITISH VALUES**

The School is committed to actively promoting the Fundamental British Values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Activities promoting these values are embedded throughout School life. With our location close to Parliament and the Supreme Court, and with a highly diverse student body, we are in an excellent position to raise pupils' awareness of these values and their centrality to British identity.

All parts of the SMSC curriculum, including Abbey and Latin Prayers, actively promote Fundamental British Values. Classroom teachers delivering content which supports SMSC are committed to promoting Fundamental British Values actively throughout their teaching. This is supported further by the RSHE and Wellbeing spiral curriculum, as well as topics covered in termly year-group assemblies.