St James Curriculum Rationale

Subject Content

At the core of our ambitious learning culture is a broad, knowledge-rich curriculum, which is cohesive, cumulative and effectively sequenced.

Our curriculum is academic, rigorous and challenging, and designed with long-term memory in mind; students' knowledge, skills and understanding are cemented by frequent and systematic revisiting.

The following central principles underpin our approach to the curriculum and planning at St James and in the Ted Wragg Trust:

- Academic excellence
- Robust research
- Coherent sequencing
- Effective assessment
- Rich knowledge
- Inspired choices

Academic excellence: our curriculum is academic, rigorous and challenging: tier two vocabulary and complex concepts are taught from year seven.

Robust research: our learning model and sequenced learning are underpinned by the cognitive science work of Daniel T. Willingham. We understand the capacity and limitations of the working memory; we recognise that the transfer of new information to long-term memory requires time and practice.

The St James Standard is designed to ensure that our day-to-day practice ensures 100% participation in every lesson. This means that teachers can track, guide and evaluate the extent to which students have understood new content. The St James Standard creates a radically inclusive classroom in which students' thinking is visible and accountable. Over time, the St James Standard enables teachers to build their students' fluency with curriculum content through mechanisms such as show-me boards and choral response. The St James Standard sets out a process by which teachers plan the gradual release of responsibility, as students gain fluency and confidence, towards independent practice and mastery.

Coherent sequencing: our curriculum is based on the understanding that students arrive with significant prior knowledge, a foundation that we build upon from day one.

Effective assessment: we believe that assessment is an intrinsic part of successful curriculum planning and effective teaching and learning. We use frequent, efficient assessment both to empower students to become highly effective independent and resilient learners and to reduce teacher workload. We use data and assessment systematically to inform planning to ensure rapid and sustained progress for every student. Through regular retrieval practice, spaced learning and interleaving, we embed knowledge into the long-term memory.

Rich knowledge: we believe that our high-quality curriculum ensures that our students learn both declarative (what and why) and procedural (how) knowledge. Declarative knowledge includes the

substantive knowledge required to connect prior learning with new, as well as the contextual **disciplinary knowledge** which leads to their ability to connect learning between subject domains.

Inspired choices: we provide a curriculum which rich and varied, allowing students to specialise in their foundation subjects, fostering that passion early, whilst providing additional time for Geography and History, subjects pivotal to learning about our place in the world around us.

Numeracy/Literacy

Time is focused on the deliberate teaching of reading and writing strategies and number mastery to ensure all pupils develop reading, writing and number fluency, improving both their access to, and performance across, the curriculum.

Students who need extra support in English and Maths are quickly identified and this additional support is put in place through extra curriculum time.

Reading

We understand that reading is essential for students to have a secure foundation for learning. We begin with termly diagnostic testing for all students, with an additional phonics screener for new Year 7 students. Through this systematic testing, we have a clear understanding of the 'readers of St James': who they are and what they need.

We recognise that students at any age may have gaps in their phonological knowledge. This is rapidly identified through diagnostic testing. Because these gaps are likely to significantly impede students' learning, students with phonics needs receive daily intervention to address this. It is important that phonics intervention is age-appropriate. We run two phonics programmes to meet the different needs of KS3 and KS4 students.

Fluency is the bridge from decoding to comprehension. We identify students whose phonics knowledge is secure but who have weaker comprehension for Fluency intervention. This intervention prioritises students' ability to read with intonation and prosody. Students who receive this intervention make significant progress in their comprehension and inference. The aim of this intervention is to ensure students are secure and confident readers.

Our universal provision for reading has three strands: Book Club in English lessons; Sparx Reader (accountable independent reading) and our tutor reading programme, the St James Canon.

- Book Club: a weekly lesson for Years 7-9 where a book is read aloud to students, developing listening comprehension, models fluent reading and exposes students to high-quality fiction, read for pleasure.
- Sparx Reader: weekly accountable independent reading homework for Years 7-11, adaptive to the student, testing reading comprehension and monitoring reading speed.

The St James Canon: tutor reading programme where students share a high-quality text for 20 minutes, three times a week. We model expert reading through the teacher as the lead reader and share texts separate from the English curriculum, for pleasure.

Writing fluency

At KS3, writing fluency is taught through the deliberate teaching of sentence construction, explicitly focusing on the main clause and the addition of other component parts. We explicitly teach this knowledge and practice its application through the English common curriculum. This allows pupils to structure and punctuate sentences with reason, thus improving their writing fluency and reducing their cognitive load.

Number fluency

We develop number fluency by teaching and practicing three main components: number bonds, to develop students who can complete efficient and accurate calculations; procedural knowledge so that students can apply a flexible range of approaches to calculation; and conceptual knowledge so that students understand the mathematical principle behind procedures. This is overtly taught and practiced, and supported by the use of Sparx in both the classroom and for homework.

Vocabulary Instruction

We explicitly pre-teach tier two and tier three vocabulary across all subjects. We then revisit and utilise this vocabulary throughout the cycle so that pupils master its use.

The St James literary canon

We have a literary canon, a collection of high-quality texts selected for their literary merit and the themes, perspectives and ideas they explore. Our canon includes voices from a diverse range of cultures, ethnicities, religions and backgrounds, alongside texts that reflect a breadth of human experiences.

We allocate 20 minutes, three times per week, to reading as part of our canon programme and study at least four texts in each year group annually. Students are provided with a curated selection of carefully chosen books and are given the opportunity to select from this range, enabling them to engage with texts that match their interests whilst ensuring access to ambitious and diverse literature.

Foundational Knowledge

Students arrive at St James with varying levels of prior knowledge and understanding. Through transition information, baseline assessment, and ongoing formative assessment, we identify the foundational knowledge and skills that students need to access the secondary curriculum successfully. Particular emphasis is placed on the core foundations that underpin learning across all subjects and support students to engage fully with an ambitious curriculum.

Our foundational knowledge strategy focuses on:

Literacy: developing decoding and reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and confidence in accessing challenging texts.

Numeracy: securing number sense and calculation fluency, and the mathematical understanding and application required across the curriculum.

Handwriting and spelling: ensuring students can communicate accurately and effectively through written work.

Speech and language: developing students' ability to articulate ideas, participate in discussion, and communicate confidently in a range of contexts.

Where gaps in foundational knowledge are identified, targeted support and intervention are used to ensure students can access learning successfully and make strong progress across the curriculum.

Curriculum Structure and Timetabling

Across the entirety of KS3, our students study a broad range of subjects, including the full suite of EBACC subjects and a range of arts. At KS4, pupils specialise with their options whilst maintaining a breadth of EBACC GCSEs.

We believe that our students have the unalienable right to a five-year learning journey which is not just about an end-point of GCSEs but a time of discovery, a time of awakening a passion for subjects, and a time for acquiring knowledge and skills which will support their futures studies and their working lives.

With this in mind, we provide a curriculum which rich and varied and which follows the national curriculum in years 7 and 8. As we move into year 9, we allow students to specialise in their foundation subjects, fostering that passion early, whilst providing additional curriculum time for the humanities and modern foreign languages, allowing teachers to teach beyond the limits of the national curriculum. At the end of year 9, students complete their final options for GCSE study. During the options process we advise students about their progress and their likelihood of success to support them in making choices. We support students to study a broad range of subjects and encourage a language selection.

Cycles

Our curriculum is delivered in twelve-week cycles, comprising contextualising learning, introducing new content, assessing and addressing knowledge gaps and misconceptions.

The school year is divided into three twelve-week cycles. Each cycle comprises ten teaching weeks, followed by an assessment week and a feedback week. Throughout the cycle, students build new knowledge and skills whilst revisiting and strengthening prior learning, enabling them to make secure connections across the curriculum.

During the ten teaching weeks, students engage with carefully sequenced learning that builds on previous topics and cycles. Subject-specific vocabulary is explicitly taught and revisited throughout lessons to support literacy, comprehension and academic success. Careers education is embedded within the curriculum, helping students understand the relevance of their learning and make meaningful connections to future pathways and employment opportunities.

In the eleventh week, all students in Years 7-11 complete assessments in each subject. These assessments evaluate both current and prior learning, providing teachers and students with valuable information about strengths, areas for development and knowledge retention.

The twelfth week is dedicated to feedback and improvement. Teachers use assessment information to address misconceptions, close knowledge gaps and revisit areas where students require further support. This ensures misunderstandings are corrected promptly, learning is secured before moving on to new content and students are well prepared for subsequent cycles. Feedback Week is a key part of our assessment strategy, enabling responsive teaching and ensuring that assessment leads directly to improvement in student outcomes.

At the start of each cycle, teachers introduce the key themes, knowledge and skills that students will encounter. Students are supported to understand how current learning connects to prior learning, future topics and, where appropriate, wider career pathways. Subject-specific vocabulary is introduced and reinforced throughout the cycle to help students access ambitious academic content and communicate their understanding effectively.

Assessments

Assessment is an intrinsic part of successful curriculum planning and effective teaching and learning. We use frequent, efficient assessment low stakes assessment to embed learning, regular formative assessment to inform planning and feedback and termly summative assessment to track progress.

Low stakes assessment

We plan low stakes assessment into our lessons as through this regular retrieval practice that is spaced and interleaved, we embed knowledge into the long-term memory. Students complete their low stakes testing to check they have learned the key declarative knowledge from both their lessons and knowledge organisers that is core to their curriculum. This is usually in the form of 'Do Now' tasks that begin all our lessons.

We are committed to using frequent, efficient assessment both to empower students to become highly effective independent and resilient learners but also recognise the impact this can have on teacher workload. Therefore, where possible, our low stakes assessments are automated so that they provide immediate accurate and assessable data whilst reducing teacher workload. Teachers utilise the data generated from low stakes assessments to identify gaps in learning and misconceptions. Teachers then address their gaps in knowledge through correction and revisiting.

Formative assessment

Students complete mid-cycle formative assessments across all of their subjects. These assessments test the declarative knowledge (both substantive and disciplinary) taught – the what and why – as well as procedural knowledge - the how. In written subjects, this will often be through an extended piece of writing; in maths, it will be through problem solving whilst in practical subjects, it may be a practical task or performance.

Teachers assess this work using a clear success criteria and give students formative feedback about how to develop their work, identifying gaps in learning and misconceptions. They then adjust their planning and interventions to address these to ensure rapid and sustained progress for every student.

Summative assessment

In week eleven of each cycle, students complete summative assessments across all of their subjects. These assessments come in two parts:

- **A knowledge assessment** (declarative knowledge - both substantive and disciplinary) that assesses what students have retained in their long-term memory. These assessments are formed of short answer retrieval questions and multiple-choice questions. These assessments are given a percentage score.

- **An application assessment** (both procedural and declarative) where students apply their knowledge to a task, such as extended writing, problem solving or performance. These assessments are marked against an agreed mark schemes (default is GCSE or derivative) and given a mark and percentage score.

Homework

Across Years 7-11, homework is primarily completed through online learning platforms, including Sparx, Educake and Quizlet. These platforms support the development and retention of subject-specific substantive knowledge, disciplinary skills and key vocabulary that are essential for success across the curriculum.

The amount of homework set increases progressively from Year 7 to Year 11, helping students to develop effective study habits, independence and strong routines for learning outside the classroom. This gradual increase prepares students for the greater demands of revision, independent study and examination preparation at Key Stage 4.

Homework tasks are designed to reinforce learning, identify gaps in understanding and provide opportunities for retrieval and practice. Online platforms also enable teachers to monitor completion and engagement, ensuring that students receive appropriate support and challenge as they progress through the school.

The wider offer

The St James Enrichment Curriculum ensures that every student can access a broad, inclusive and purposeful range of experiences beyond the classroom, with 5 clear outcomes;

1. Develop essential employability and life **skills**.
2. Develop as active, **healthy** and culturally aware young people.
3. Discover new interests, talents and **aspirations**.
4. **Participate** fully in a broad and inclusive range of enrichment experiences.
5. **Engage** positively with the school and wider community, strengthening a sense of belonging.

The Electives programme is an important part of our enrichment curriculum which supports the development of the student attributes outside our academic curriculum. We have a huge range of exciting courses that enables students to develop new skills and engage in shared creative and active experience.

Alongside electives, students access elements of the St James Baccalaureate (JBacc) curriculum, which brings together Religious Education, PSHE, Relationships and Sex Education and Citizenship. The JBacc programme supports students to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to navigate modern life successfully, whilst promoting personal development, wellbeing, social responsibility and active citizenship. [stjamesexeter.co.uk], [stjamesexeter.co.uk]

Extra-curricular activities run throughout the week and include a wide range of opportunities across sport, the arts, music, leadership and enrichment. Students are encouraged to participate fully in school life and disadvantaged students are supported financially where required to ensure equitable access to these experiences.

Our fantastic Performing Arts team has created a vibrant and inclusive community where students from all backgrounds connect through creativity and performance. Throughout the year, we provide opportunities for students to be a part of our live performances. These take place in the evening, and we are delighted to invite families along to these.

We recognise the value of students engaging with nature, adventure and the outdoor environment. For us, outdoor education is not simply an additional activity but a recognised and valued component of our enrichment curriculum.

Year	**Outdoor education participation opportunity**
7	Active adventures enrichment
8	Jurassic Coast Challenge
9	Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award
10	Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award
10	Ten Tors

We are committed to meeting all Gatsby Benchmarks and providing a comprehensive careers programme for every student. Careers education includes employer encounters, careers guidance sessions, college and sixth form visits, workplace experience opportunities and a mock interview day. All students receive impartial careers guidance. Additional support, guidance and encounters are provided for vulnerable students and those identified as being at risk of becoming NEET, helping them make informed decisions about their future pathways and aspirations.