NCBIS Principles of Curriculum Design

Secondary School 2023-2025

1.Purpose

It is our core shared responsibility to ensure that students have access to the very best education possible. One of the most fundamental and influential aspects of a child's education is the curriculum that they have access to. The power of curriculum is immense. It has the power to not only change an individual, but to also change whole communities and shape their understanding of the world and their place in it. Therefore, it is imperative that the curriculum on offer within NCBIS is truly world class and gives students access to powerful knowledge that takes them far beyond what their own individual experience ever could.

This policy aims to give staff a starting point, a foundation upon which they can build vibrant subject communities. The policy will allow them to begin the great curriculum conversation within their teams and bring curriculum to the forefront of our thinking around school improvement. This policy does not promote a tick box exercise, nor is it designed to sit on a shelf to collect dust, rather it is to be used as a prompt, a guide for how to kick start conversations within our teams, while also igniting our love and passion for our disciplines.

1.1 Aims

We encourage and promote a knowledge based, spiral curriculum design that incrementally deepens student understanding of disciplines, caters for the age, aptitudes and needs of all students, including those pupils with special educational needs and fosters:

- A love and passion for life-long learning.
- A sense of wonder, curiosity and respect for the world we live in.
- The ability to problem solve.
- Rigorous and challenging academic excellence.
- A sense of pride in their own and others' achievements.
- Social, moral, spiritual and cultural awareness.
- Independence.
- High expectations of themselves and others.
- Respect, trust and empathy.

1.2 Curriculum Content and Objectives

The curriculum will use the English National Curriculum as the basis for its development from KS3, and KS4/KS5 will follow specifications as set out by the examination boards chosen. While we follow the English National Curriculum, there will be times that we adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of our students and to reflect the context in which it is taught.

2. Common language used in curriculum conversations

Curriculum leadership requires attention to *what* is being learnt. Consequently, we need a curricular language for talking about curriculum and teaching that illuminates rather than conceals the subject being taught and learnt. It is also important that this curricular language is used with fidelity and sensitivity to the subject.

2.1 Core and Hinterland

Core	This refers to the substance of the curriculum that students must remember to ensure a secure foundation in their schemata development.
Hinterland	This is ALL that content that sits outside the core. It might be about the bigger picture. For example, the full novel. Without acknowledging and using such hinterland, the core (a small passage from a novel) doesn't have meaning. Hinterland adds essential meaning and context for a narrative and not merely engaging activities.

2.2 Disciplinary and substantive

Substantive knowledge	The knowledge produced by an academic subject, which is made up of established facts that are uncontested.
Disciplinary knowledge	Disciplinary knowledge refers to what pupils learn about how that knowledge was established and constructed within the discipline, its degree of certainty and how it continues to be revised by scholars, artists or through professional practice. In some subjects, this is where there is space for judgement making, argument, open-ended challenges and subject thinking.

Does this distinction work in all subjects?

In some school subjects, disciplinary knowledge does not play a significant role in the school subject (e.g. MFL). In other subjects, this distinction is imperative to good teaching, but it will manifest differently within each subject. For example, to teach history you have to

acknowledge historical knowledge as a product of social activity, and recognise its evolution over time, how it was constructed and by whom. Disciplinary knowledge might shape how teachers present substantive knowledge, and so the interplay between the two is important. Even for a textbook or teacher to state, '*Scholars are unsure* whether trade in seventh-century Arabia…' is to show disciplinary attentiveness by modelling responsible claims.

2.3 The indirect manifestation of knowledge – proximal and ultimate function of knowledge

Curriculum sequencing. This is ultimately about *how* and *why* a certain section of the curriculum serves to prepare students for future content, such that it has a *proximal function* to make the next stage possible and *ultimate function* to do an enduring job.

Proximal function	Each bit of a curriculum has a job to do. The proximal function is how the knowledge/skills from this lesson supports the work planned in the next few lessons/weeks.
Ultimate function	Knowledge acquired across a curriculum is durable and has an ultimate function, a future purpose. This knowledge supports students, over time, to develop deeper conceptual understanding. It allows individuals to not only eventually enter disciplinary conversations and debates with confidence but allows students to potentially become knowledge creators themselves in the future.

For example, this allows you to think more carefully about the following questions:

- Why have you chosen to teach this?
- What is its curricular role in your subject?
- What value might these skills/knowledge have within your pupils' continuing education?
    - a) immediately – rest of KS3/KS4?
    - b) later in their secondary education (GCSE/A-Level)?

What questions might illuminate our curriculum thinking about the ultimate and proximal function of knowledge?

- What difference does this part of the curriculum in Year 7 make in Year 9/10 etc?
- What knowledge/skills are you choosing to assess in Year 7 and how will you know its fruits in Year 9/10 etc?
- Talk to me about the strengths and deficits of this Year 11 piece of work in terms of the knowledge/skills that lies 'beneath' it from Key Stage 3?
- How are children expected to make links with prior knowledge in your subject?
- Are we making explicit any useful connections with previous subject content/skills?

2.4 Overtime the way in which knowledge/skills is structured within disciplines

Cumulative	This is where knowledge is not wholly reliant on students having previously studied a 'certain' topic, which means there are many pathways to mastering the content.
Hierarchical	This means that you cannot teach one topic until students have 'mastered' the prior knowledge - e.g., times tables before fractions.

Understanding how cumulative and hierarchical applies within disciplines and subjects is much more complex than this, but being aware of the difference can be useful.

What questions might illuminate our understanding of how and why this structure matters within their subject?

- What prior knowledge/skills are needed for pupils to learn what you are teaching now?
- How many times will pupils bump into these essential knowledge/skills throughout the curriculum?
- What does challenge look like if pupils must master this content?
- How do pupils progress with this curriculum content?
- When would you expect pupils to be secure with x?

3. The role of a Head of Department/Head of Faculty and their teams

You along with your teams are the architects of the curriculum. Key principles in curriculum design are as follows:

- You cannot teach everything, so what will you choose and why? Pay attention to what you are therefore leaving out. Does this look appropriate?
- Pay particular attention to sequencing. Students taught lots of knowledge without any skills means that nothing is sequential or transferable. Good organisation of a curriculum can help signposted how it fits into existing schema from prior knowledge.
- Curriculum design is a team sport. For the best result, as many people as possible must feel ownership and involvement in its creation. Spread out the responsibility (and the fun!) and try to engage as many people as possible in the endeavour.

You and your team may be asked the following questions and should be secure in your answers:

- What are the starting points for your children?
- How do you ensure effective key stage transitions?
- Can you show me how this matches the national curriculum/KS4 or KS5 syllabus?

The following questions should help you to reflect on your choices:

- By the end of the Key Stage, what **knowledge** should your pupils be able to use with fluency (speed and accuracy)? (The core knowledge) This is what should appear on a knowledge organiser. (It's not a textbook with every piece of content packed in)
- By the end of the Key Stage, what **skills** should your pupils be able to use with fluency (speed and accuracy)? This is what the students should be able to apply to unfamiliar contexts.
- How were decisions about the selection and sequencing of knowledge made?
  A follow-up question: What aspects of your subject's domain have you left out within your curriculum?
- Taking a sequence of learning, please tell me, what are the proximal and ultimate functions of this knowledge for your students?
- What is the impact of having taught (choose a specific sequence of learning) in year 7, when the child gets into year 8?
- How is your assessment designed to ensure that you can tell whether all students have security in the skills and core knowledge ?
- For a chosen topic in year 10, what skills and core knowledge do students need to know in advance, and how did you ensure this was secure?
- Does your team share your vision for the curriculum in this subject? What would they tell me?
- How do you know that you are being ambitious for your students? Can you show me an example of an appropriate challenge in your curriculum model?
- Do you have subject-specific vocabulary which students need to learn for each year group?
- How will you use homework to ensure that students meet the curriculum intention?

4. Reviewing the Curriculum with Confidence (End of the Year)

It can be challenging to attempt to review the curriculum of a Year group/subject area; therefore, this section outlines the process:

Step 1:

The Middle Leaders will bring the following to a curriculum review meeting:

- The subject curriculum map
- 3 best books from the/each year group

A conversation will take place using the questions in the previous section to ascertain how well the curriculum has been enacted - is the result that students are learning skills and core knowledge? Or are they learning entirely different information and missing the point, or focusing too much on one element and not grasping another.

Step 2:
The Middle Leader will also bring:

- Class data sheets for 1 class per year group
- Select 3 children from the/each year group

How does progress and achievement show the curriculum is having an impact. Why have some students (if any) not progressed? Are they following it but at a slower pace? (Fine) Are they missing out pertinent units? Can you justify what and why? Are they having a weaker diet?

Step 3 At the start of the academic year after reflection:
Each Head of Department will prepare a 10-minute presentation on their curriculum and their learning from the previous year.

4.1 Agenda - Curriculum Intention Presentation
The intention of your curriculum is what you want students to know and how this will benefit them and make them fluent in your subject. Prepare a 10-minute presentation which should include:

- What principles and/or values underpin your curriculum
- What is taught - provide overviews, should fit on 1 sheet of A4/A3 ideally.
- What decisions have you made recently regarding sequencing/content/coverage?
- How do you know that it is challenging?
- Give us an example of one topic in more detail, explaining the proximal and ultimate function of that knowledge.

5. Documenting the Curriculum
In time, the curriculum will be documented on a whole school level (Curriculum Map) and department level (Schemes of Work). There will also be a knowledge organiser for each unit of work covered on the medium term plans documenting key knowledge students should retain from one unit/year to the next.

6. Review

This policy/handbook will be reviewed collaboratively every two years.

7. Highly Recommended Reading

- Christodoulou, D. (2014). *Seven myths about education*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

'When we try to solve any problem, we draw on all the knowledge that we have committed to long term memory. The more knowledge we have, the more types of problem we are able to solve. The reason why we need that knowledge in long term memory and cannot rely on it being in the environment is that our working memories are limited. Working memory can only hold 3-7 pieces of information at any one time.' Daisy Christodoulou (2014).

- Counsell. C (2018). In search of senior curriculum leadership : Introduction – a dangerous absence. [online]. The Dignity of the Thing. Available at: https://thedignityofthethingblog.wordpress.com/2018/03/27/in-search-of-senior-curriculum-leadership-introduction-a-dangerous-absence/ [Accessed 6 Oct. 2021]

- Counsell, C. (2018).*Senior Curriculum Leadership 1: The indirect manifestation of knowledge. a curriculum as narrative*. [online] The Dignity of the Thing. Available at: *https://thedignityofthethingblog.wordpress.com/2018/04/07/senior-curriculum-leadership-1-the-indirect-manifestation-of-knowledge-a-curriculum-as-narrative/* [Accessed 6 Oct. 2021]

- Counsell, C. (2018). *Senior Curriculum Leadership 1: The indirect manifestation of knowledge. b final performance as deceiver and guide*. [online] The Dignity of the Thing. Available at: *https://thedignityofthethingblog.wordpress.com/2018/04/12/senior-curriculum-leadership-1-the-indirect-manifestation-of-knowledge-b-final-performance-as-deceiver-and-guide/* [Accessed 6 Oct. 2021].

'A curriculum exists to change the pupil, to give the pupil new power. One acid test for a curriculum is whether it enables even lower attaining or disadvantaged pupils to clamber in on the discourse and practices of educated people, so that they gain the power of the powerful.' Christine Counsell (2018).

- Hirsch, JR., E.D. (2016). *Why Knowledge Matters: Rescuing our children from failed educational theories*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

'Schools are not sole agents of education - therefore no school can overcome the barriers of poverty completely - advantaged pupils generally have better nutrition, richer language, wider experiences to draw from and higher expectations upon them. We have such a huge proportion of disadvantaged pupils that we need to compensate for any barriers to progress. Vocabulary size, for example, is the product of slow, multi-year accretion. If this isn't happening at home, then it MUST happen at school. The difficult truth: Good schools inherently narrow the gap because they benefit poor children more than advantaged ones, (advantaged ones will do well regardless) therefore it is true to say that poor schools damage the progress of disadvantaged pupils more than advantaged ones, as poorer children simply do not have the resilience and the foundations to do well regardless.' E. D. Hirsch, JR. (2016).

- Young, M., Lambert, D., Roberts, C. and Roberts, M. (2014). *Knowledge and the Future School*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

'The key distinguishing feature of a knowledge-led curriculum based on an 'entitlement to knowledge' is that the issue of the knowledge a school wants its pupils to have access to is its starting point…a knowledge-led curriculum must be defined by subjects …This stands in sharp contrast to the idea that the school curriculum should start with the interests and experiences of the children, their parents and the locality, or with broad ideas such as well-being… there are at least two problems involved in placing an emphasis in the curriculum on locality and pupil experiences. First, it weakens the role of subjects as the basis for ensuring that students' progress and do not miss out on key concepts; and secondly… schools in lower income areas are far more likely to opt for programmes based on local experience than schools in higher income areas.' Michael Young (2014).