

Community Schools Trust: Curriculum Approach

Curriculum Intent

FGCS and TCS serve areas of significant deprivation. For example, approximately 80% of TCS students are from the lowest 30% of socioeconomic backgrounds. The curriculum we provide serves as a driver of social mobility to address this fact. As such, we ensure that students are able to access Ebacc subjects and are not marginalised into perceived “easier” subjects. Our schools provide a broad and rich curriculum, and not an impoverished one.

We employ a knowledge-engaged curriculum. Hence, knowledge is seen as underpinning and enabling the application of skills, although the latter are often taught alongside knowledge. We don't see a tension between knowledge and skills, and instead see them as intertwined.

We aim for students to engage in regular spaced, distributed practice. Hence, key mastery concepts have to be taught and returned to throughout planned sequences of learning.

Students are allocated to high-challenge pathways based on prior attainment in KS2. The bulk of children are allocated to pathways A,B,C or D. A small number of children are allocated to pathway S and given a personalised curriculum. For the very able students, we create a pathway X, designed to stretch and challenge the students according to their ability.

Each pathway is further subdivided into subjects. These subjects are then broken down into a series of mastery statements, developed understanding of which will lead students to make exceptional progress as measured by their peers nationally. Students are required to interact with these mastery statements regularly. These statements form the basis of reports and are shared with parents. The aim is to focus student discussion on learning outcomes and not behaviour.

This high-expectations culture is demonstrated in the hidden curriculum. Teachers are required to demand high standards of behaviour from students. Routines exist to enforce the good order of the school, and, crucially, these are monitored. Clear boundaries are created for staff and students. A tracked and monitored system of support and enforcement exists to allow the school to function in a calm manner.

Each school has a “Master Mission Programme” and a “Big Question Programme”. These are intended to create good British citizens and to increase participation in life outside of academic study and to equip students with the cultural capital they need to thrive in the modern world. The Master Mission programme is delivered through form time and reinforced in assembly. The Big Question is delivered through form times and assembly. The expectation is that 100% of students will complete their master mission award to at least bronze standard, and for many students to go beyond this to reach silver and gold.

In addition, all students in Years 7-10 get the opportunity to participate in a creative arts carousel where they are able to pursue their interests in drama, DT, art, food and music. These sessions are not examined and are designed to encourage students' creativity and expression.

Above all our Trust exists to create an academically challenging environment that equips students with the skills required to be successful in the world. We share a vision to make our schools beacons of excellence in the communities we serve.

Curriculum Implementation

At CST, we provide a curriculum that gives significant opportunities for children to learn by giving them adequate time on task. Individual lessons are planned to give weight to the main concepts and ideas and to get children to practise manipulating these ideas. Lessons are planned in sequences and transitions between lessons are mapped out in mid and long term plans. There is a model of curriculum progression for every subject.

Our curriculum demands that effective questioning be used to ensure effective formative assessment. Lessons are quality checked regularly by a rolling system of learning walks. Immediate feedback is encouraged through the use of targeted live marking.

Our curriculum requires students to engage with high-level concepts that stretch their knowledge and understanding. These concepts are limited in number and hence students must return to them to assess their progress. This demands a degree of repetition which ensures good learning takes place.

Lessons at CST are aimed at adaptive teaching. Staff are trained on formative assessment techniques to assess children's progress in lessons. Frequent, low-stakes testing takes place, linked to the body of knowledge outlined by the examination boards. This spaced-repetition is a key factor in driving changes in long-term memory. The DPR system, devised within the school, allows for the provision of materials to aid children's long-term memory.

Children are equipped with literacy and reading skills during form times through an effectively planned programme of reading, writing and communication tasks, and numeracy based activities. These are planned and monitored. Reading is tracked across the school and reading for pleasure encouraged and nurtured through various activities by literacy coordinators.

Curriculum Coherence

The mastery statements on the DPR were carefully selected after an exhausting process of iteration with middle leaders over the course of three years. Each statement is intended to be student friendly, relevant to the subject being taught and challenging. The statements are regularly reviewed by teams of curriculum leaders and amended. For less able learners, or learners with an SEN, the targets are personalised to reflect individual needs.

Learners progress towards each statement is assessed on a four point scale as either emerging, developing, consolidating or secured. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on gaps in learning and to re-teach where required. Outstanding systems exist to ensure consistency in teaching and outcomes and to monitor within school variation.

Leadership of the curriculum, both academic and pastoral, is expected to be exemplary. Leaders at all levels are given the tools to implement effective learning and they are taught how to use them. Effective monitoring and control techniques are explicitly taught to Leaders. Ownership of what is being taught is very much devolved to middle leaders and is cemented by a properly planned training programme that encourages leaders to think beyond their role. Leaders are expected to ensure that all learners are able to access the curriculum regardless of starting points and management of this process is not left to chance.

Students choose options that allow them to choose the Ebacc route at the end of Year 8. A wide range of options subjects are presented to students after a grounding at Key Stage 3. To deliver the extended and increased content of the curriculum and deliver outstanding outcomes for disadvantaged students requires extra time and thus we firmly believe in a three year duration for our Key Stage 4 curriculum.

Selected students in Years 7 - 10 participate in extra classes in creative subjects on rotation, half-termly, to develop their talents and free expression. Curriculum in Years 7 - 10 is broad and rich.

Curriculum Impact

The Trust has a very strong belief that extraordinary academic achievements can lead to overwhelmingly positive life outcomes for students. The Trust has an outstanding track record of equipping particularly pupil premium children with the academic credentials required to access the upper echelons of British society.

The impact of the curriculum at FGCS has been profound. More than two thirds of students now go onto level 3 studies, up from under half of students eight years ago. More than 20 students have gained scholarships to Eton, Winchester and a range of highly selective schools in the last four years. Progress at FGCS has been the best in Newham, aggregated over the last three years, and in the top 50 schools in the world for P8 for the last three years.

Students at FGCS partake in a wide variety of activities as outlined in the school self-evaluation. They are feted in the press, the local community and by visitors for their attitude and behaviour towards others.

Attendance at school, after school clubs and pupil satisfaction levels are high and well above average as compared on PASS tests.

At TCS, school attainment and progress have improved and current predictions are for another improvement this year. The impact of the curriculum changes at TCS are not yet embedded but are expected to follow the trajectory of FGCS.