

The Trinity Academy Curriculum

Principles guiding curriculum intent

Transformational learning

Learning involves a **change** in the long-term memory.

More specifically, learning happens when people encounter new information, connect it with what they already know, and as a result experience changes in their knowledge – and consequently their ability to do certain tasks¹.

In other words, *learning transforms us*.

This is why we educate: to transform the students we serve, so that they in turn can have a transformative impact on the people around them.

In educating our students we seek to fulfil our mission of raising standards within an area of disadvantage. Our desire is that students leave us having been equipped for lifelong learning, meaningful work and active citizenship, ready to serve their generation faithfully and well, occupying the unique place for which they were created.

It's instructive to break our description of learning into its component parts. Learning happens when people:

1. *Encounter new information*

A transformational curriculum is **knowledge-rich**, because the basis for skills and understanding is the encoding of knowledge within the long-term memory.

2. *Connect it to what's already known*

Knowledge is understood rather than simply learned by rote when it is **connected** to what we already know. The more connections we are able to draw, the better our understanding². Learning therefore involves encoding knowledge in the long-term memory in the form of *knowledge maps* (frameworks of connected facts and ideas).

3. *Experience changes in knowledge or their ability to do certain tasks*

The development of understanding changes our minds in a fundamental way. We are able to draw upon our knowledge to solve unfamiliar problems, and connect new information to what we already know so that learning in related fields becomes easier. As we practice applying our knowledge to do certain tasks, we become skilled. The development both of understanding and skills is known as **expertise**.

¹ Pasupathi, M *How We Learn* The Great Courses, Audible, 2013

² The ultimate goal of education is to see *unity in diversity*; hence the name 'uni-versity' – a place where students come to see that, ultimately, *all* knowledge is connected

Three questions, seven attributes

There are three questions that we must ask about the curriculum, and these give us *seven attributes* that we have used to shape the Trinity curriculum:

a. WHAT WILL STUDENTS LEARN?

i. Focused

We can't teach everything; there isn't time. We therefore choose to teach *knowledge that yields the greatest cognitive benefit*³. In particular, we should teach

- i. the kind of knowledge that writers assume their readers will have – sometimes called our *cultural heritage*, and
- ii. the concepts that come up again and again because they are the *unifying ideas* of each discipline
 - ⇒ **Our curriculum will emphasise a small number of “big ideas”⁴ rather than attempting to include all aspects of the subject that might reasonably be learned by students of a given age. This will involve leaving out significant, and important, material**
 - ⇒ **As a Christian-ethos school we choose to present students with “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable”⁵**

ii. Balanced

A balanced curriculum is like a balanced diet: nutritional and tasty! It will contain the right components in the right proportions.

The traditional ‘academic’ disciplines figure strongly in any school curriculum; here students encounter both cultural heritage and unifying ideas, building a framework of knowledge that makes lifelong learning a joy.

The curriculum should also promote the intellectual, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, creative, emotional and physical development of each child. The creative and performing arts are just as important to this end as are the language arts, sciences and humanities.

- ⇒ **All students study philosophy, theology and ethics throughout Years 7-11**
- ⇒ **Throughout Years 7 and 8 students encounter a broad curriculum:**
 - **English, mathematics, science, history, geography and the creative and performing arts, business and computing, design and technology, and** (except where literacy levels make additional English a more pressing priority) **one or more foreign languages**
- ⇒ **From Y9 as options subjects are introduced:**
 - **all students retain English, mathematics and science**
 - **all but our ‘Green Route’ (see below) also study history or geography**

³ Willingham, D.T. *Why Don't Students Like School?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009, p.47

⁴ For example, in geography concepts of sustainability, globalisation, inequality and environmental change are to the fore; these now feature earlier in the curriculum than they used to do.

⁵ Philippians 4:8, the Holy Bible

- **A significant proportion** (currently 40%) **retain one or both foreign languages**

iii. **Relevant**

By making the curriculum *relevant* to each student we foster intrinsic motivation, helping our students love learning.

Intrinsic motivation is high when learning is chosen rather than coerced, when learning connects us to other people, and when we feel competent in the subject. This means that we want students to have an element of choice in what they study fairly early on. Students know what they're good at and what they enjoy, and they have an emerging idea of what they want to do next. This guides decisions about where to specialise.

Of course, there needs to be a framework for choice; students should not be allowed to discontinue the study of particular subjects until they have experienced enough of the subject to make an informed decision.

Relevance is also cultivated by a curriculum that capitalises on local interest, or that prepares students for opportunities in the local community about which they are aware.

- ⇒ **Given that Trinity Academy is located in an area of high unemployment with local industry and family heritage favouring construction, engineering-based courses are a growth area for the Academy**
- ⇒ **A strong local tradition of dance has led to the employment of a specialist dance teacher; Trinity Academy also offers film studies, recognising the paucity of opportunity in neighbouring schools to pursue this popular subject; sport has seen considerable investment within and beyond the curriculum because of strong local pride, and this has been particularly effective in motivating disadvantaged young people**
- ⇒ **The examined curriculum is supplemented by a *co-curriculum* that permits students to pursue additional interests beyond the school day. Opportunities for co-curricular art and textiles, drama, dance and sport are extensive, and music is a growth area**
- ⇒ **Opportunities are taken to study matters of local⁶ and topical⁷ interest, in the non-examined as well as the examined curriculum**
- ⇒ **In Year 8 a second modern language is offered**
- ⇒ **Students choose three options in Y9 (one of which must be a language where aptitude permits), two of which they opt to retain to GCSE:**
 - **The Year 9 courses are designed to provide a broad framework of knowledge that prepares students for the GCSE**

⁶ For example, Y7 study the geography of Thorne and Moorends: the role of waterways, the importance of coal and the shift to renewable energy, the environmental impact of local peat cutting and the decline of traditional manufacturing with the advent of business parks

⁷ For example, tutor groups regularly discuss current affairs, using materials prepared by the history department

specification, but which is useful and interesting in its own right

- **A wide range of vocational subjects are included amongst the options, recognising the attractiveness and utility to many students of work that is directly applicable to the workplace, and assessed continually throughout the course. A 'Green Route' for about 18 students supplements a vocationally rich curriculum with workplace experience for a day a week from Y10**

⇒ **In the sixth form the range of curriculum options is huge, and students and their parents are given clear guidance as they select courses**

b. WHEN WILL STUDENTS MEET EACH TOPIC?

The order in which topics are best met has a vertical as well as a horizontal dimension:

i. Vertically integrated

What is learned in one lesson prepares students for the next lesson. Established skills and knowledge are used and further developed across the whole program of study. In this way, basic skills and knowledge are both developed and reinforced as other elements are introduced into study. Teaching is structured and progressive, focusing on building to advanced levels of knowledge.

This approach is particularly important in subjects like mathematics, science and languages, where some concepts can only be understood if other concepts have been taught first. Even in a subject like history where some units might stand alone, the development of *skills* requires vertical integration; advanced skills build on more basic skills, and these must be mastered first.

⇒ **We actively work with our feeder primary schools to ensure that students are given a 'flying start' in Year 7. A programme of visits by all teachers, and ongoing collaboration between heads of departments and subject leads involving the mutual sharing and critiquing of schemes of work, has led to an adjustment to the starting point and pace in Year 7**

⇒ **We aim to make clear to students how material taught in one year builds on what was learned in previous units, and how it leads on to subsequent learning**

ii. Horizontally coherent

The entire curriculum should be designed in such a way as to promote the development of capabilities across subjects. *"As a trivial example, it might be a good idea if students learned about graphs in mathematics before they are needed in the science classroom"*⁸.

⇒ **Curriculum maps have been drawn up and shared, and middle leaders have begun the process of discussing areas of curriculum overlap, with a view to teaching relevant topics at the most appropriate point**

⁸ Wiliam, D *How do we prepare students for a world we cannot imagine?* Institute of Education, University of London, 2014

c. HOW CHALLENGING SHOULD IT BE?

i. **Rigorous**

The curriculum should take into account habits of mind – disciplinarily-specific, powerful ways of thinking that are developed through sustained engagement with the subject. Examples are inverse operations in mathematics, cause and effect in science, structure and agency in sociology, provenance and context in history, central tendency and dispersion in statistics.

Students naturally see a subject in terms of its **substantive knowledge** – the facts and ideas that experts in the subject have established. In addition to this information, however, **disciplinary knowledge** is required. Disciplinary knowledge addresses *how* that knowledge was established, its degree of certainty and how it continues to be revised by scholars, artists or professional practice. It is that part of the subject where pupils understand each discipline as a tradition of enquiry with its own distinctive pursuit of truth. The age and stage at which students are exposed in any depth to disciplinary knowledge varies with the subject, but the point is that we wish our students not simply to learn *about*, say, history or science but to *become* historians and scientists. In this way we equip students first to critique another's work and then to add their own contribution to the established body of knowledge.

- ⇒ **The curriculum in each subject aims at teaching the 'big ideas' of the subject**
- ⇒ **Students will be taught that each subject is a *growing* body of knowledge, and they will come to see how experts contribute to its growth and revision, and test for truth**

ii. **Appropriate**

Planning for challenge is not about just making work as hard as possible; the curriculum at each stage should present an *appropriate* element of challenge. To pitch work correctly requires an understanding of what students already know, and an appreciation of the misconceptions that they may bring to their learning.

- ⇒ **In the majority of subjects students are set by ability in order to reduce the breadth of prior knowledge in the room. Some students, and particularly disadvantaged students and boys, require a set placement higher than their latest assessment results would suggest, however, if they are to be stretched**
- ⇒ **Teachers are encouraged to *plan for challenge* in light of regular feedback from students about their prior knowledge, flexing from the lesson plan where individuals or groups clearly don't understand. This requires *checking for understanding* and *adapting to individuals***
- ⇒ **The goal of each teacher is to ensure that everyone *masters* the knowledge – understands it and is able to apply the knowledge in suitable contexts – before moving on**