

Curriculum Policy

Curriculum Aims

The Curriculum at St John's is based on our belief that the underlying purpose of education is to teach our children how to live their lives fully and richly, to become their happiest and kindest selves.

With this vision in mind, our curriculum aims to:

- Enable children to understand themselves, their strengths and their weaknesses;
- Teach children the skills to learn how to learn and so to manage their own learning;
- Give children confidence to take risks, make mistakes and persevere to solve problems;
- Give children confidence to find and express their voice;
- Help children to understand and care for others and for the world;
- Teach children to think for themselves and work both independently and collaboratively, taking charge of their own learning;
- Encourage children to ask questions and develop their ability to think critically, to wonder at the world and to develop their curiosity;
- Inspire children with a love for learning by challenging and engaging every child at the appropriate age and level, thereby ensuring that all children make progress (including the most able children, children from whom English is an additional language, children with specific learning needs and children with an Education and Health Care Plan);
- Teach children the core knowledge (including oracy, literacy and numeracy skills), with the skills to enable them to use this knowledge, in order to lead fulfilled lives and act with wisdom and care in the world;
- Prepare children for entrance to future schools.
- Actively promote fundamental British Values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, preparing children for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in a British society.

How do we achieve these aims?

The above aims are achieved at St John's through three key overlapping elements that form our approach to teaching and learning: the curriculum content, the particular way in which we teach the curriculum and, above all, the teachers' detailed and caring knowledge of the children.

Curriculum

The richest possible curriculum gives children the greatest number of pathways to excellence, the greatest opportunity to discover their value, to find their full range of talents and their particular pathway to success. The curriculum at St John's is therefore broad and balanced; each curriculum area supports and enhances the others and subjects cannot be seen in isolation. St John's provides children with a linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education. No one subject is more highly valued than another, but all have their place in a balance of studies that is carefully reviewed on an annual basis. Throughout all subjects, we promote fundamental British Values and prepare children for the responsibilities, experiences and opportunities of life in a British society (for further details, including specific examples of how we do this, see SMSC and British Values Policy). Details of the current balance of studies can be found in the Curriculum Plan.

Personal, Social, Health, Economic and Emotional Education (PSHEE) underpins other curriculum areas and begins with our 'Emotions for Learning' curriculum, which was specially designed at St John's in collaboration

with our child psychotherapist. It is based on research in the field of attachment theory and aims to promote secure attachments between children and their teachers so that children learn to manage their emotions and use their minds. Fostering each child's ability to think for themselves and solve problems is the primary goal of the E4L curriculum. As children get older, the PSHEE curriculum also covers lessons in economic well-being, relationships, health and careers advice. Careers advice is presented in an impartial way, giving children information to help them make informed decisions about a wide range of careers so that they can lead fulfilled lives. More information about the PSHEE curriculum can be found in the [PSHEE Curriculum Summary](#).

St John's has a skills based curriculum and Heads of Department continually review a subject's 'scheme of work' to ensure that the development of these skills is being provided for. The schemes of work may take into account the National Curriculum but are not exclusively based on it. Although the school is exempt from the 'Early Years Foundation Stage Framework', the Kindergarten Curriculum is currently based on the objectives from the framework. A focus on the skills taught within a curriculum area and the benefits of responding to children's own learning and their interests, means that content is continually revised, adapted or changed. More information about the content, aims and objectives of each individual subject, including the Early Years Foundation Stage, can be found in the [Curriculum Summaries](#) and the [Kindergarten Curriculum and Supervision](#) document. Speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills are developed across the curriculum and these documents give more specific details of content and skills.

On Thursday afternoons at Senior House, timetable is 'off curriculum' and children experience a range of enrichment activities and lessons that help to develop children's questioning and thinking skills, collaboration, creativity and information sharing. Learning experiences provided on Thursday afternoons include:

- Trips and visits: these include the opportunity to hear from inspirational speakers from a range of different careers, beliefs and experience.
- Philosophy: Philosophy lessons begin in Form 2 and aim to teach children to be philosophers. Children learn how to structure thinking in different ways, to ask open-ended and searching questions, to consider issues from different points of view, to explore the reasons behind their own and others' beliefs and opinions and to discover what some of the great philosophers of the past have taught.
- My Mind: children in Senior House have a series of lessons that draw together the common thread from different sections of the curriculum: Philosophy, Study Skills, Research Skills and Mindfulness. It teaches critical thinking, self-management of learning and management of self. Across the different strands there is a combination of theory about the mind and self with practical ideas for implementing this theoretical knowledge. It aims to help children understand themselves, their learning and their relationships in such a way as to be better able to manage themselves in the future.
- Arts Award: children in Forms 5 & 6 have the opportunity to build a portfolio of work to submit for an 'Arts Award'. This is a nationally recognized qualification, which inspires young people to grow their arts and leadership talents and use self-motivational skills to pursue artistic endeavours in their spare time. It culminates in a presentation to peers, parents and teachers in which they explain their work and answer questions about it.

How do we teach the curriculum?

Children at St John's are usually taught in classes of up to 20 children. In KG – Form 2 classes are mixed ability taught by one main class teacher, though with some specialist teaching. In Forms 3 – 6 an increasing amount of setting is introduced and children are taught by an increasing number of specialist teachers. Full details of teaching arrangements can be found in the [Curriculum Plan](#).

The school expects high standards of teaching and educational practice. The inspirational teachers at St John's are expected to teach well-planned lessons that make effective use of class time in order to ensure that all children make progress. They are constantly researching and developing the latest ideas in educational practice in order to improve our ability to meet our stated curriculum aims. We spend time carefully planning, trialling and evaluating any new initiatives. If these prove to be successful, staff are then trained in order to embed new initiatives into their current teaching practice to make up the special education that we offer. A regular cycle of observation, review and professional development supports teachers to enable them to perform at the highest level. Some of the key themes in how we teach at St John's are:

- Creativity: Creativity is one of the most sought after skills by employers today. At St John's we believe this can be taught and we aim to nurture this creativity in the children, supporting them to look at familiar things in a new way or explore new possibilities, examine problems with an open mind, make

connections and learn from mistakes. This is underpinned by the development of sustainable creative practice in our teachers. At Byron House teachers have received training by the Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination Partnership and have explored how the approaches of creative arts subjects can be used to enhance learning in all areas, including giving children more choice in and leadership over their learning. 'Child initiated learning' topics have also been introduced once a year for each year group in Byron House. The children agree on a topic of learning after discussion and their own persuasive presentations and then take this forward over the course of a term in the directions that they themselves choose, asking questions and selecting the best ways in which to answer them. Child initiated topics have proved to be a highly motivating and inspiring way of learning. They also provide opportunities to foster higher level thinking and encourage independent, active thinking and learning, equipping the children with skills that will serve them for life.

- **Critical thinking:** All teachers are trained and experienced in questioning and supporting children to discuss and think critically across the different subjects, from being guided to solve problems independently in Design Technology to the central place of investigations in Maths, from debating in English to choosing their own materials and then evaluating their work in Art. The introduction of philosophy lessons has further strengthened children's ability to question and their skills in argument and critical thinking. In Byron House, teachers have been trained in the use of thinking skills based on the research by Jane Simister and these skills are threaded through all curriculum areas.
- **Self and peer assessment:** Teachers at St Johns employ a variety of techniques to help children develop this important skill. For example, children may be asked to reflect on a piece of work in a written comment in their books themselves, suggesting where they could improve it or give the reason for any errors. We use 'Mark ladders' in some subjects, which outline the success criteria for a piece of work and ask children to mark their own work against these success criteria. The use of Google Docs have opened up other avenues for pupils to peer assess work and the children enjoy supporting and learning from each other by commenting on each other's work.
- **Independent and collaborative learning amongst the children (developing speaking and listening skills):** Research has shown that children learn most effectively from each other and when they are in charge of their own learning, as well as the fact that employers seek people who have initiative and can operate independently. The place of Drama lessons, from the very start of a child's life in St John's, is one key way in which children develop the skills to learn collaboratively since they are taught how to listen and respond to each other, to build role-plays and share ideas and to work together as a team. 'Self-Organized Learning environments' in which children work in groups doing computer based research to find answers to 'big questions' with very little adult intervention are another means of fostering collaboration between the children.
- **Mindfulness:** all teachers are trained in 'Mindfulness' techniques and the theory behind the importance of mindful practice. In Byron House, stilling and mindfulness exercises form part of the E4L curriculum and are practiced every day. In Forms 3 and 4, Tai Chi has been introduced in order to develop mindful movement. In Senior House, every lesson begins with a 'Mindful Moment' and in Form 6 children are taught an eight week Mindfulness course that teaches the theory and practice of Mindfulness. Many children choose to practice mindfulness independently, for example in preparation for exams or sports day races.
- **Mindsets for Learning:** at St John's we want to help our children to become motivated, happy and independent problem solvers with a 'growth mindset'. This means having the belief that, with effort, they can develop their abilities, become a successful learner and thus achieve more. We therefore identified twelve learning dispositions (focus, collaboration, curiosity, risk-taking, flexibility, reflection, linking, perseverance, compassion, imagination, rigour and enjoyment) which have been introduced across the whole school and are now part of the language of every classroom and are incorporated into all areas of teaching and learning. Children are encouraged to identify those dispositions they feel they need to work on and, together with their teachers, look for ways to develop and improve these.
- **Play based learning in the pre-prep:** play has been called the highest level of research. Through play, children are involved in active, engaged, minds-on thinking that is fun and riven by intrinsic motivation. Play offers a risk-free environment where children can explore ideas and deepen learning through application and collaboration. The curriculum in the pre-prep (Kindergarten to Transition 2) centres around play-based learning, with children having free-flow access through to the outside area and, in T1 and KG, across both classrooms in the year group. Play is carefully planned for and guided. Our teachers arrange resources to be accessible, introduce learning points or stimuli, offer challenges and play alongside the children to direct, scaffold, engage and lead the children on to a deeper level of

understanding. This approach has been underpinned by the latest research on learning for young children which demonstrated that children learning through play show improved attainment, well-being and learning dispositions such as creativity. For example, studies have shown that learning through play leads to improved reading comprehension by age 11 in children who had been in play-based learning until the age of 7 and that it deepens conceptual understanding and language and communication skills.

- Learning environment: our classrooms have all been designed in such a way as to maximize children's views of nature and to be a calming space avoiding overstimulation. The most recent classrooms include write-on walls and tables in order to facilitate exploratory thinking and the use of discussion, display, collaborative and independent learning.
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC) and British Values: developing children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is at the heart of the ethos of St John's and is woven into every area of the curriculum. For full details of our SMSC teaching, please see the [SMSC and British Values Policy](#).
- Digitally Enhanced Learning: digital technology is used wherever trials at St John's have shown that it enhances learning. This is something that is continually under development. Currently, digital technology is used to: support children's own research and develop their critical analysis and research skills; compose and record music digitally; analyse and present results such as science investigations and geographical enquiry; enhance learning through peer collaboration and digital marking through the use of Google Docs; engage pupils in learning content through asking them to design online 'Quizlet' games or asking them to research and present their understanding through video; make learning purposeful and show the links between ICT, science and technology by cross-curricular projects such as through bridge design and creation.
- Study Skills: in each subject teachers develop not only content knowledge but skills for study, helping the children to learn how to learn. For example, how to use mind-maps to plan or revise, how to structure written work, how to research and critique sources, how to learn vocabulary. These skills are brought together in discrete study of revision and study skills in Form Five, when the children also learn some of the theory behind memory and how the brain learns best.
- Individual expression: in all subjects, teachers aim to develop the child's awareness and expression of their own individual voice. Teachers do this by teaching children to observe and reflect on topics, providing a scaffold to help structure or guide work and then build confidence to explore their ideas, whether through choosing their own materials and angle of study in Art, allowing them freedom to solve problems and make mistakes in DT, or writing poetry on the theme of an 'Apple' in English with diverse references chosen by the children from religion, science or Art.
- Engaging and intrinsically motivating: teachers aim to develop a love of learning in the children. Learning experiences are designed to be meaningful, engaging and challenging. This might be through planning trips and events, building up to performances, allowing children to choose their own topic and questions for study, learning through investigations, connecting work to current affairs, completing child led topics or through finding and building on the children's own interests as a starting point for study. Particular events that inspire the children and bring together the different strands of learning include: book week (in which a range of authors come to school to speak to the children or lead workshops), poetry evening (a performance of the children's own poetry), musical concerts, drama productions for every year group annually (with children taking part in writing some of the plays and in choreographing or developing the staging), reading in Chapel for our Service in Preparation for Christmas, an annual debating competition, fairs organized by children (such as the Easter fair at Byron House or the Victorian fair at Senior House), Enterprise events in Kindergarten, competitions (such as the Latin Play written and performed by children or the Junior Maths Challenge), 'Wow days' in Byron House in which children are immersed in a topic for half a day of activities such as problem solving and imaginative challenges, planning their version of the Great Exhibition or dissecting Owl pellets.
- Differentiation: we aim to challenge each child at the appropriate level. Teachers are therefore expected to differentiate work whether they are being taught in a setted class or not, so that children are being challenged at the right level in order to ensure that all children make progress. Work is differentiated in different ways, including adapting tasks for different ability levels, using the challenge by choice method, providing different mark schemes to focus work at an appropriate level, questioning at different levels, giving specific roles (such as chairing a discussion in philosophy), providing extension projects or support packs for homework.

Knowing the Child

Education at its best is a deep act of care. If we care, then we will notice. If we notice, then we will act on a child's behalf. If we act for each child, then each of our children will grow best, will achieve best, will become their best selves. To be known, to be noticed, to be valued, to be cared for: fundamental things for all of us, these are the essentials of a good childhood and they are at the heart of the St John's way.

In their learning and in their life at school, teachers devote themselves to knowing each child, to noticing and responding to each child's strengths, each child's needs. Our teachers and tutors are expected to know all that they can about the world of each child within and beyond school. We have rigorous frameworks for knowing and communicating about and acting for each child, including:

- Weekly meetings to discuss the children and develop strategies to support them better and ensure that they make progress;
- Action Plans for every child, which are added to on a minimum of a weekly basis and which are formally reviewed at the end of each term;
- Weekly staff meetings to communicate information about children that will improve our care for them;
- Meetings between the Tutor and Tutee a minimum of once every other week;
- Department meetings in which children's progress in individual subjects can be shared, discussed and improvement planned for;
- Regular work reviews in order to plan how to improve our teaching, curriculum or the progress of a child;
- Observations of individual children in class not only by the class teacher but also by middle or senior leaders and individual needs teachers as required in order to inform action planning;
- Care plans for children where a medical or learning need requires a particular plan of intervention;
- Ability profiles for each class, which outline children's particular needs (such as a need for extension in a particular area, an identified learning need such as dyslexia, a child for whom English is an Additional Language or a focus for improvement such as spelling) and key strategies for support that are needed to ensure that all children make progress;
- Pupil Learning profiles for any children with a learning need who have had an additional assessment that summarize the learning need and identify the key actions for support for the term.
- For children with an Education and Health Care Plan granted by the Local Authority, we write Individual Education Plans that detail targets and strategies for support and are reviewed each half term.
- A range of formal and informal assessments, the results of which are analysed and used to inform the discussions and processes above. Full information on the role of assessment at St John's can be found in our [Assessment Policy](#).

For further information about our support for children with learning needs, please see our [Individual Needs Policy](#). For further information about our extension of children, please see our [More Able Children Policy](#). For further information about our provision for children with an additional language, please see our [English as an Additional Language Policy](#).

The children do not need to know of these things processes explicitly but they know that they are known and noticed, and the security they have in their relationships with teachers who truly know them and care about them is the springboard for their learning and the guarantee of their well-being.

Development Planning

The whole school development plan sets out the school's departmental and cross-subject developments. New developments begin with writing a 'Terms of reference' that detail the background, aims and success criteria for a development as well as how the development will be achieved and in what timeframe. The Terms of Reference are discussed with the Director of Studies and must be approved by the Head before being added to the school development plan.

New developments may arise through:

- departmental review (either formal reviews or through the routine observation, review and discussion with the Director of Studies);

- comments, suggestions or reflections made by children or parents;
- interests, research or experiences of individual members of staff;
- research into latest developments and educational theory.

All developments must have clear success criteria and must show how they will be measured and evaluated before the development begins. They almost always begin with small scale trials led by a working party or department, before being rolled out across the school if they prove to be successful. Evaluations are based on a range of evidence, including the views of children, work reviews, assessments and statistical evidence, observations and teacher feedback.

Developments are assessed and balanced on an annual basis by the Director of Studies to ensure that they are prioritized correctly and that they are manageable.

Evaluation and Review

In addition to the evaluations of school developments, Teaching and Learning is evaluated and developed through an ongoing process of departmental and teacher review, led by the Director of Studies working with Heads of Department. The process involves:

- Half termly work reviews led by Heads of Department
- Termly meetings of each individual Head of Department with the Director of Studies to discuss work reviews, observations, assessments, children and teacher feedback and developments. Meetings are recorded and development plans updated following the meeting.
- Peer lesson observations within departments
- An Annual cycle of formal lesson observations for each member of staff by Senior and Middle Leaders. Grades are recorded on an observation spreadsheet, which is analysed by the Director of Studies to inform development planning. Analysis is reported to the Senior Management Committee in the Teaching and Learning Report on a half-termly basis.
- Departmental meetings
- Discussions with pupils
- Annual Balance of Studies review, written by the Director of Studies

Roles and Responsibilities

Under the guidance of the Head, the development of Teaching and Learning at St John's is the responsibility of the Director of Studies. The Director of Studies reviews the Curriculum and balance of studies on an annual basis, manages and oversees the school Teaching and Learning development plan and is responsible for working with a team of teachers who review and analyse the academic progress for individual children.

The Director of Studies manages other members of staff with responsibility for individual subjects (Heads of Department). Heads of Department are responsible for curriculum development within their subject. This includes reviewing and updating the schemes of work, developing the curriculum in the light of research and whole school developments, reviewing the work of pupils and managing assessments within their subject.

The Director of Studies also manages and oversees members of staff who are responsible for specific developments within school (such as the Self-Organized Learning Environments) as well as those responsible for specific areas of Pupil Improvement (such as the Individual Needs Co-ordinator, the Extension Co-ordinator, the Byron House Director of Studies and the Senior Tutor).

Linked Policies

This Curriculum Policy should be read in conjunction with the following additional policies and documents:

- [Curriculum Summaries](#)
- [Curriculum Plan](#)
- [Individual Needs Policy](#)
- [More Able Children Policy](#)
- [English as an Additional Language Policy](#)
- [Kindergarten Curriculum and Supervision](#)
- [Assessment Policy](#)
- [Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education and British Values Policy](#)