

Curriculum vision/rationale

School vision:

For all students to achieve beyond their personal expectations and prior attainment, and to experience an enjoyable and outstanding education

What are we trying to achieve?

Why are they learning what they are?

We have spent time as school leaders contemplating what our students need to know to be successful in life. Our vision is for all students to achieve beyond their personal expectation and prior attainment and to experience an enjoyable and outstanding education. This vision has been carefully created to raise aspirations. We want our students to aspire to go to University if that is appropriate for them, and if not for them to choose a career that is challenging, fulfilling and economically secure and develop the knowledge, skills and qualifications to be successful in that career. Blackburn with Darwen historically was a prosperous region with textiles and mining forming the majority of the job market. This market has declined and resulted in Blackburn with Darwen being one of the most deprived local authority districts in the UK. There are significantly less economically active citizens in BwD than the UK average, 12.4% of the Authority's population have no qualifications compared to 7% nationally, and the average weekly salary is much lower than the National average. There are opportunities however, the building of the M65 motorway in 1997 has brought business and investment to the town. One of the problems for Blackburn residents in recent years is that they have not been sufficiently qualified to take advantage of these opportunities. Only 29% of BwD residents hold qualifications at NVQ level 4 or above (Degree level) compared to 39% nationally. In addition a culture of worklessness (16.3% workless households compared to 14.3% nationally) can mean for some students education is not always seen as a viable route to a better future. The evidence is clear, this lack of qualifications on average in BwD residents means that the average percentage of BwD residents employed in Group 1-3 jobs; managers, professionals, technical is 37 compared to a national average of 47%. We want to change this for our young people. Our curriculum is based on 6 curriculum touchstones:

- An emphasis on the core subjects of English, Maths and Science. We must ensure that our students are literate, numerate and understand how the world around them works.
- A strong emphasis on an academic core including the ebacc subjects that develop cultural capital and prepare students for life in a modern democratic country. The ebacc subjects have been shown to have several benefits including being essential to study at degree level and improving access to University. Russell group universities favour facilitating subjects (Ebacc subjects). Research has also shown that the study of these subjects has a direct impact on performance in English and Maths

- A belief that the curriculum should be as broad as possible for as long as possible. We want to develop rounded individuals. We want to develop students who want to make the world a better place. To do this our students need to learn knowledge, skills, concepts and attitudes in areas such as; mathematics, literacy and linguistics, science and technology but also aesthetic and creative, human and social, moral and physical. To not involve pupils sufficiently in all these areas and elements is to leave their education lacking in some respects.
- A commitment to giving students the opportunity to study the arts and technology for as long as possible but with a commitment to allow students to personalise their diet as they move through the school. The arts are good for the soul. We promote creativity across the curriculum but within the Arts there exists the opportunities for students to experience the sheer joy of creating a piece of music, a painting or an expression in the form of dance or drama. The study of the arts is good for the mental wellbeing of our young people. Technology has a value way beyond providing young people with a career path into manufacturing. We are an increasingly technological society and technological literacy is essential for our young people to understand the world around them. The study of technology also helps students to relate subjects such as maths and science to the real world giving relevance to the whole curriculum.
- To develop students personal, social and health and health education including high quality careers advice and independent guidance.
- To develop student's entrepreneurial skills and qualities

What do we want for them by the time we leave?

What destinations and next steps are we preparing them for?

Any research of employability skills reveals that employers want a range of soft skills and hard skills (actual subject specific knowledge and skills achieved through qualifications) In terms of those hard skills we are committed to preparing our students for the world of work or employment. There is growth in the employment market in the North of England but there is also additional competition for jobs. Analysis of growth indicates that by 2022 half of jobs will be managerial, professional or associate professional. These will require candidates to hold relevant qualifications at Level 4 or above. Technology will pervade the job market and boundaries between sectors will begin to break down requiring flexibility in candidates. 40% of employers prefer students to hold a degree in STEM (Science, Technology, engineering and Maths) subjects and 19% expressed a preference for candidates with a Business related degree. We are committed to raising aspirations and supporting our young people to go to university where that is appropriate. Through this we will facilitate their route into those jobs. Students will need, and we will provide access to those facilitating subjects at GCSE (Ebacc) to increase their chances of going to and staying at university. We will also offer a broad and relevant suite of qualifications at KS4 that give students the opportunity to continue their study of the Arts but adding the opportunity for our students to gain qualifications in technology and business qualifications.

The world economic forum has identified 16 core skills that it has split into 3 different areas:

Skills

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Scientific literacy
- ICT literacy
- Financial literacy
- Cultural and civic literacy

Abilities

- Communication
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Collaboration

Qualities

- Curiosity
- Initiative
- Perseverance/grit
- Adaptability
- Leadership
- Social cultural awareness

Further to this recent employer surveys have indicated that literacy and numeracy skills are vital. A weakness in these skills can affect performance in everyday tasks. For example, the ability to draw out information effectively from written texts and instructions, produce written communication, or work through calculations and make sense of numerical data.

What are our student's needs?

With these factors in mind we have formulated our curriculum touchstones. The touchstones form our strategic aims for curriculum underpinned by research. Our curriculum directly supports these aims. We know this because we have deliberately designed our KS3 and 4 curriculum with the touchstones at the forefront of our thinking. You will see from our curriculum map on page 4 that the curriculum is based directly on the 6 touchstones; 1. The core of maths and English, 2. The Ebacc subjects, 3. Breadth, 4. A focus on the Arts and technology, 5. Personal, social and Health education and 6. The entrepreneurial skills and qualities that an Aldridge school prizes. In addition, we have looked carefully at our cohort of students. We are a truly comprehensive school that draws students from a wide variety of backgrounds and with different ability profiles. We are committed to preparing these students for the next phase of their lives and we actively

encourage the aspiration to go on to Higher education. We are proud of our tradition as the former Darwen Grammar school and an emphasis on high academic standards will always be at the heart of what we do. We recognise that some of our young people need support with:

- Having high aspirations for themselves
- Ensuring that they have a good standard of literacy
- Developing resilience, self-discipline and initiative
- Developing a growth mind set
- Developing confidence

How does our curriculum specifically prepare students for their next steps? How does it deliver the curriculum touchstones? How does it address the needs of OUR learners?

Key stage 3 curriculum – subjects and allocation of hour long periods

Subject	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9
English	5	4	5
Maths	4	4	4
Science	4	4	4
History	2	2	2
Geography	2	2	2
MFL	2	2	2
Creatives	2	2	2
Music	1	1	1
Drama	6 x Drop down days	1	
PE	2	2	2
ICT	1	1	1
	25	25	25

Key Stage 4

Subject	Year 10	Year 11
English	5	5
Maths	5	5
Science	5	5
Option A	3	3
Option B	3	3
Option C	3	3
PE	1	1

The touchstones in practice:

Touchstone 1

An emphasis on the core subjects of English, Maths and Science. We must ensure that our students are literate, numerate and understand how the world around them works.

The curriculum touchstones shape our curriculum at Key Stage 3 and 4. We are committed to a strong focus on the Core. We give more time for English Maths and Science at Key Stage 3 and 4. This is intentional as we are seeking to prepare students for life after they leave us taking into account the views of those in further education and employers.

To support our aim to develop students who are literate and effective communicators we explicitly provide more time for English. Students have five periods of English each week and in Key Stage 3 follow the ARK mastery curriculum. This curriculum has been developed in line with DFE aims and has been proven to enhance student progress. Students who follow Ark mastery make four months more progress than students not following the programme. The curriculum is knowledge based and teaches grammar and vocabulary acquisition explicitly. It is unashamedly focused on the study of classic high quality texts such as Shakespeare's "The Tempest", Jane Eyre, and Oliver Twist.

Whilst we are committed to students following a broad, balanced and rich curriculum that has Ebacc at its heart, we recognise that many students do not have the requisite literacy skills to effectively access the curriculum. The GCSE Geography paper has a reading age of 19. 22% of our current year 7 have a reading age below 9. This is the reading age widely acknowledged to be "functional". To this end we identify those students who fall below the expected level and provide explicit literacy lessons in place of their MFL lessons. The students are taught in separate groups and follow the "Read, write, Inc. programme". We aim to regularly retest to get students to a point where they can access the full curriculum.

To develop students who are numerate and prepared for further study or employment and life we invest a significant proportion of curriculum time into maths. Students study maths for 4 hours in KS3 and for 5 hours in key stage 4. They follow a programme of study that was developed by schools engaged with Maths Hub. It has been further developed and refined since then. We follow a spiral curriculum where the topics taught in Year 7 are then retaught in Year 8, but at a more advanced level. Then there is a similar spiral for Year 9 and 10 following the KS4 Scheme of work. By the end of year 10 all GCSE content will have been covered and Year 11 is used to revisit topics in a personalised way and develop mastery of key concepts. In all Schemes of work there is a week dedicated to consolidation, where teachers can close any gaps identified during that half term.

We invest a significant proportion of time into Science to develop scientific literacy and an appreciation and understanding of the world our young people live in. In Science students follow a curriculum that we have developed. It teaches the knowledge skills and understanding from the national curriculum for Science and prepares our young people for the challenging KS4 science GCSE courses. At Key Stage 4 students can opt to study separate

sciences and are given an additional two periods each week to acquire the additional content and spend time exploring more challenging material to prepare themselves. All our students study the Core Science AQA combined option.

Touchstone 2:

A strong emphasis on an academic core including the ebacc subjects that develop cultural capital and prepare students for life in a modern democratic country

We do not narrow the curriculum. We offer a broad and balanced 3-year key stage 3 that has the ebacc subjects at its heart. We give more curriculum time to the subjects we believe will develop cultural capital; history, Geography and MFL. Our understanding of the term cultural capital is taken from the national curriculum definition provided here; 'It is the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.' History in particular will play a major role in providing students with that knowledge through its links to all other subjects; the study of ideas, concepts and thinking, the study of art and music and philosophy throughout history. We do however recognise the huge importance of the creative subjects in developing student's powers of imagination and self-expression and the confidence to believe that they can contribute to human creativity and achievement. We have evaluated our curriculum for all subjects. Our middle level leaders have audited their coverage of the national curriculum. They have identified the knowledge, skills and understanding students will need at the end of each academic year. They have produced overview documents that outline this content and enable an evaluation of the curriculum in each key stage. They have used these overviews to break down that identified content and write mid-term plans that sequence the learning to enable students to build knowledge and skills progressively and logically. They have considered carefully how to dovetail KS3 and 4. Where we have identified that we need to develop our curriculum further we have worked with other organisations to ensure that our curricula are of a very high quality. This allows us to focus our internal continuous professional development on the implementation of those curricula; teaching and learning. To this end we have adopted the ARK mastery curriculum for Key Stage 3 Geography.

Touchstones 3 and 4

A belief that the curriculum should be as broad as possible for as long as possible

A commitment to giving students the opportunity to study the arts and technology for as long as possible but with a commitment to allow students to personalise their diet as they move through the school

We are committed to developing our student's creative and technological abilities. We deliver a range of artistic and practical technology curriculum choices within our "creatives" lessons. These comprise art, food technology, graphics, textiles, design technology, and photography. They are taught on a carousel. We teach music discreetly as we feel it is

important for the development of cultural capital. We want students to appreciate the richness of the arts and recognise that this appreciation can help students know who they are, engage with the world around them and navigate choices in the future. Cultural capital can help young people to achieve their goals and it facilitates social mobility. This is very important for our young people. We do encourage a degree of personalisation in year 9. Students study one term each of music and drama and in the third term have the option to study music or drama according to their personal preference and preferred option/career route.

We believe that drama can play a vital role in developing student's confidence. In year 7 drama is taught through six drop down days. These drop down days provide sessions of a meaningful length for our specialist drama staff to deliver high quality tuition. In year 8 students develop their drama skills further with a designated lesson each week. In year 9 students have the option to personalise after 2 terms in preparation for their options as outlined above. A full appreciation of the different mediums of drama is really important to equipping our learners with cultural capital that they may not ordinarily be exposed to.

Touchstone 5

To develop students personal, social and health and health education including high quality careers advice and independent guidance.

We are committed to developing young people who know how to stay healthy both mentally and physically. We believe that participation in team sports and individual sports is incredibly important in teaching students about cooperation and determination. This is in addition to developing the knowledge and skills to participate in activities that will enrich their lives whilst at Vale and beyond. Education needs to be about enjoyment and we believe that giving students the time to play sports and games is fundamental to their development and growth.

We are intensely aware of the need for schools to provide students with outstanding personal, social and health education. The programme we have developed is delivered in tutor time. Tutor time is 25 minutes each day so our students receive just under 1 hour each week of time dedicated to the explicit teaching of statutory Sex and Relationships Education, statutory citizenship and aspects of the PSHE (personal and social and health education) programme that we think our young people need to know.

Touchstone 6

To develop student's entrepreneurial skills and qualities

We are an Aldridge school and the values that we prize at Aldridge are amongst the so called "soft skills" that are prized so highly by employers. We encourage our teachers and our students to exemplify the Aldridge qualities in their lessons:

- Passion
- Determination
- Risk taking
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Creativity

We further support the development of these qualities through our pastoral system and through our curriculum and wider school life enrichment programme; the “vale offer”

At Key Stage 4 we provide increased curriculum time for our core subjects and parity across the core. We provide 3 periods weekly for the students to follow their passions. We believe that this approach is representative of our curriculum touchstones.

We offer the students to study additional GCSEs in:

- Triple Science
- History
- Geography
- French
- Music
- Drama
- Art
- Photography
- PE
- Dance
- Business Studies
- Computer Science

We believe strongly that high quality Careers advice and independent guidance is essential to ensure that our students are selecting option subjects that are appropriate for their ability and are preparing them for further education and employment that they have identified as being a preferred route for them.

“The Vale offer”

We strongly believe that the wider curriculum must support the taught curriculum. We identify a series of encounters and opportunities that have been carefully mapped out and will support the taught curriculum whilst providing a rich diet of experiences which will develop cultural capital and are indicative of our curriculum touch stones.

AREA	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
CURRICULUM	Geography trip (White Scar Caves)	History trip – Museum French trip – Lille Markets	Work experience Science trip – university French trip – Lille Markets	French trip – Lille Markets Enterprise week at university	Careers fair
SPORT	Sports Day	PE fixture e.g. Lancashire Lightening	Duke of Edinburgh	Duke of Edinburgh	Duke of Edinburgh
TEAM BUILDING	Lake district residential			Lakeside – leadership training	
CULTURAL	Theatre Trip - Manchester/ London	London	Art gallery/museum – Paris (Disney land)	Manchester – libraries/galleries	Shakespeare theatre visit