

The English Curriculum at Our Lady's Catholic High School

The power of language and literature - be that non-fiction, poetry, plays, short stories, novels or novellas, Martin Luther King or Greta Thunberg, Shakespeare or Priestley, Dickens or Orwell - cannot be underestimated, and we believe in a curriculum that exposes pupils to a wide range of voices to help them find their own. By introducing our pupils to a wide literary canon and a wide range of non-fiction, we aim to create life-long confident readers with a critical voice and an understanding of their place in the world. We want to expose them to "the best that has been thought and said" so that they become critical thinkers able to articulate their knowledge and understanding in a wide variety of forms. By exploring writers' language in fiction and non-fiction, we strive for our pupils to appreciate the power of language and we teach them how to use it with purpose for different audiences as effective communicators. Through teaching an understanding of the craft of the writer and the mechanics behind this (for example, spelling, punctuation, grammar, paragraphing), we equip our pupils with the skills to write confidently across a range of genres for a range of audiences.

Pupils join us having followed the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum. Through having a strong understanding of this and the requirements of the Reading SATs, the assessment of writing at Key Stage 2 and the SPaG test, as well as the pupils' results from Year 6, we ensure that our curriculum builds on prior learning and that any gaps are identified and closed. One of the ways in which we close gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding is through the work of our English HLTA who coordinates and delivers an intervention programme. Our curriculum is challenging for all pupils, and those with SEND and / or gaps in their learning are supported through scaffolding and support to access the same curriculum as their peers. We stretch and challenge our pupils to be the best they can be and provide opportunities for pupils to show case what they can do. Frequent feedback and responsive teaching enable all pupils to make progress and we set no cap on achievement. (See Assessment Policy).

Our curriculum builds through Key Stage 3 with continual reinforcing of the reading and writing skills, gradually increasing in challenge through responsive teaching. In Year 7, for example, pupils are taken on a journey through Literature starting in Year 7 with Shakespeare where they learn about how his writing was influenced by Literature before and ending with a modern novel. (See Curriculum Journey Maps).

Pupils arrive in Key Stage 4 having experienced an enriching curriculum, ready to access the demands of their GCSEs in English Language and English Literature. Throughout Year 10 and Year 11 Interleaving of Literature texts and reading and writing skills, along with spaced practice, strengthens long term memory and enables depth of study. In Key Stage 3 the foundations for this have been set.

Developing pupils' vocabulary is integral to our teaching and we use a variety of strategies to teach Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary. We believe in the power of language and through our schemes of work and responsive teaching strategies work continuously to improve our pupils' vocabulary. Across the department we use the principles of the SEEC (Select, Explain, Explore, Consolidate) model to plan and explicitly teach vocabulary to our pupils. Texts are chosen for their quality and ability to fulfil our vision outlined above and we use strategies with our pupils to ensure that we are closing the vocabulary gap, not extending it, by ensuring that these texts are studied by all pupils, using scaffolding strategies and the SEEC principles to develop pupils' vocabulary and understanding of the texts studied. In addition, we want our pupils to be able to write analytically and therefore explicitly teach academic vocabulary.

We work as a department collaboratively through our Departmental Development Time and through sharing on our staff drive and informally in the department area. Best practice is shared and we discuss, trial and evaluate different pedagogical approaches feeding back to each other and continually developing the way we do things to achieve the best possible outcomes. Following external CPD, we cascade information, research, resources etc. within our Departmental Development Time. Teachers within the department take ownership of their own professional development, engaging with articles, blogs and books linked to subject knowledge, curriculum and pedagogy. There is a CPD library in the department for teachers to use and we allow time within department development time (as well as informally through our day to day interactions

with each other) to discuss our reading, share best practice and develop professional discussion of pedagogy, curriculum and subject knowledge. We believe this is a continuous development responsibility, that there is always more to learn, and that we are always developing our teaching practice.

In Key Stage 3 our pupils also participate in Accelerated Reader to further foster a love of reading and literature through choosing their own texts to read from our extensive library and further develop their reading skills. Accelerated Reading lessons take place once a fortnight in our well-stocked library and pupils' success in reading is celebrated.

We believe in enriching the experience of our pupils and therefore offer many opportunities outside of lessons for pupils to develop a love of our subject. There are regular opportunities for pupils to see theatrical performances, enter competitions, listen to visiting authors and poets, and write for real audiences. Every year all pupils in Year 7 and 8 take part in our internal Spelling Bee and Poetry Slam competitions. Two lunchtime clubs run for pupils to develop their creative writing: Fiction Addiction and Word Up. We also take part in the Rotary debating competition and in the academic year 2019/20 our senior team won the regional trophy.

As well as appreciating our subject for itself, its ability to help us see our place in the world and articulate it, and to be able to empathise with others and understand the human condition, we want our pupils to see that our subject opens the doors to many careers. English Language is not simply a gateway to a college course, but a subject that can be studied in its own right beyond GCSE, leading to a huge variety of opportunities in the working world. Likewise, further study of English Literature enables pupils to develop skills and knowledge, leading to many career choices. We aim to promote the career opportunities that our wonderful subject leads to.