

WeST English Curriculum: Overview

Subject Love – Subject Knowledge – Subject First

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1. A Note on Production

This curriculum is the product of collaboration between seven secondaries. It draws on this deep well of expertise and works to combine professional judgement with the best that has been thought and written both about our discipline and about education more generally.

However, creating a curriculum for any subject is a challenge; the challenge is not so much what to put in as what to leave out. For a subject as rich, diverse and complex as English, this is even more the case. As such, this curriculum – like any other – is a series of compromises. These compromises have been debated hard and there is a rationale for each and every one – but they are compromises nonetheless.

It is important to stress, therefore, that this curriculum has not been assembled as the final word in English – far from it. Some elements will work better than others and this is simply the first iteration of our collective efforts. No curriculum should stand still; we look forward to seeing how this one will evolve.

2. Recommended Reading

The following list is not exhaustive – far from it. The recommendations here are instead intended to provide a curated list of some of the reading that has informed the design of this curriculum.

General

- *National curriculum in England: English programmes of study* - <https://tinyurl.com/595dx37t>
- *Ofsted Research Review Series: English (May 22)* - <https://tinyurl.com/2a6bf34z>
- *Ofsted Education Inspection Framework* - <https://tinyurl.com/bdfbtjn2>
- *Ofsted Education Inspection Framework: Overview of Research* - <https://tinyurl.com/4rf7ddzm>
- *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools*, EEF - <https://tinyurl.com/yzpnmsxt>
- *Making Every English Lesson Count*, Andy Tharby
- *What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Psychology*, David Didau
- *Diversity in Schools*, Bennie Kara

Oracy

- *Accountable Talk: Instructional dialogue that builds the mind*, Lauren B. Resnick, Christa S.C. Asterhan and Sherice N. Clarke - <https://tinyurl.com/mr5ebp82>

Reading

- *Understanding and Teaching Reading Comprehension: A handbook*, Oakhill, Cain, Elbro.
- *Reading Reconsidered: A Practical Guide to Rigorous Literacy Instruction*, Driggs, Lemov and Woolway.
- 'Just reading': the impact of a faster pace of reading narratives on the comprehension of poorer adolescent readers in English classrooms, Westbrook, Sutherland, Oakhill and Sullivan
<https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12141>
- *Closing the Reading Gap*, Alex Quigley

Writing

- *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, What Works Clearinghouse - <https://tinyurl.com/5cuucnet>

Vocabulary

- *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, Alex Quigley
- *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, Beck, McKeown and Kucan

Assessment

- *English Inside the Black Box*, Bethan Marshall and Dylan William - <https://tinyurl.com/2p858a8h>
- *Teacher Feedback to Improve Pupil Learning* guidance report, EEF - <https://tinyurl.com/2p8ccuu5>
- *Making Good Progress*, Daisy Christodoulou

3. Why does English matter?

Put simply, English matters. Few would argue with the suggestion in the national curriculum that 'English has a pre-eminent place in education and society'. Partly, this is because of the functional role that English plays: it is through mastery of English that students are able to communicate with the world – and have the world communicate with them – in a frictionless way. It is through the medium of English, for example, that those we teach are able to fully access the rich knowledge of history, art, science and every other subject they encounter at school; it is through the medium of English that opportunities open up beyond the school gates. As such, it is a powerful tool for social justice.

Yet the subject we love is far more than 'functional skills' or 'communication studies', an empty vehicle for transmitting whichever knowledge we choose to task it with; rather it is itself a rich discipline with its own ways of thinking, speaking, reading and writing. It is a subject that revels not just in the word, but in the crafting of the word and which can introduce our students to nuance, to layers, to shades of grey in a world too often presented in black and white. Crucially, it is a subject which – particularly through literature, but not exclusively – can induct students into knowledge of the human condition; to both the universality and diversity of experience, to written works that can make the heart sing and the soul sigh; to cautionary tales about the world in which we live; to forms of creative self-expression that can capture an ephemeral moment in words like an insect trapped in amber; and to the analytical thinking, reading and writing that allows us to become critical consumers of the world around us.

Whether it be the basics of reading, writing and speaking, the knowledge of English as a discipline, or the cultural, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual and creative development gained through the subject, our subject is fundamentally about enfranchisement.

It matters.

4. What do we want our curriculum to achieve?

Because English is so rich and varied, almost overwhelmingly so, it is important to have clarity about what exactly it is that we're trying to achieve.

We want our students to:

- Understand what English is, the knowledge that constitutes it, and the inherent value of the discipline.
- Be highly competent and enthusiastic readers, writers and speakers generally.
- Be able to read, write and speak like English experts.
- Develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially, spiritually and creatively.

5. What are the overarching principles of our curriculum?

Our curriculum has been designed according to the following overarching principles:

- **Social justice:** English as a subject is a tool for social justice. We recognise that students who are unable to read, write, speak and listen effectively or who have not been supported develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually are effectively disenfranchised, and limited in the extent to which they can participate fully as members of society. Our curriculum is designed with the intention of enfranchising all.
- **Subject love:** English as a subject has inherent value and matters on a fundamental level; the richness of the subject is such that there is much to love. Our curriculum is designed to recognise this inherent value and to explicitly share it with students. Our intention is that students will love – or at the very least appreciate – English because of this intrinsic value.
- **Subject knowledge:** English is a complex and multi-faceted subject such that it can be challenging to explain what it is. Our curriculum recognises the need to define English as a discipline; to identify the knowledge that embodies it; and to precisely articulating this knowledge for students. Crucially, we want students to study not just the components of knowledge, but the broader composites they form and their relationship these have with the subject as a whole. To use an analogy, our intention is that students will study the individual tiles of the mosaic as well as the 'big picture' of how these fit together.
- **Subject first:** English exists as subject because of its inherent value (see above). While we have a duty to prepare students for exams, they are not the subject's *raison d'être*, representing as they do a point on the journey of English mastery rather than a final destination. Our curriculum is designed to approach the exams through the subject rather than the subject through the exams. As such, our intention is that students will experience the richness of English (and to do well in exams as a consequence of this).

Being faithful to our principles

Is our curriculum design – or our implementation of it – faithful to our guiding principles? The following questions provide a crude evaluation tool:

- Are we supporting all to be enfranchised members of society? Are we ensuring that everyone can read, write and speak effectively?
- Do students know what English is? Do they understand the value of it? Do they love it?
- Can we articulate the components and composites that constitute English? Can students? Can they apply this knowledge?
- Are we mentioning exams in KS3? Are we forgetting to mention the inherent value of English in KS4 and KS5? Do students see exams as the ultimate endpoint of English?

6. What are the main threads of our curriculum?

The multi-faceted nature of English makes it rich and varied, but also poses difficulties for us when we try to articulate what it is as a subject. To avoid perceiving the subject as an overwhelming collection of fragments, we have identified the main strands that we seek to develop over the course of the curriculum.

Core Knowledge

This is the knowledge that sits at the heart of English and which provides a common foundation for the modalities of reading, writing and oracy:

Text as constructs: We want students to know that all texts – whether spoken or written – are constructs and, as such, can be deliberately shaped by the speaker/writer.

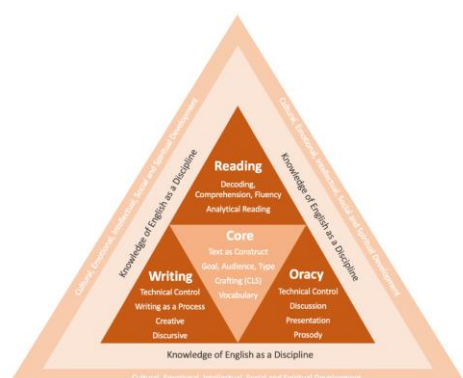
Goal, Audience and Type: We want students to know that texts are influenced by goal (what we want to achieve with a text), audience (who the text is being created for) and type (the type of text we're creating and the conventions governing it). We want them to know that these variables will affect how we *craft* a text (see below) and that we can remember this using the aide memoire of GAT-C (**G**oal, **A**udience and **T**ype influence how we **C**raft).

Crafting: We want students to know that writers (and speakers) have a range of tools at their disposal to allow them to deliberately shape texts. We want them to understand what the main tools as well as how (and when) to deploy them:

- *Content* – What to include in a text (and what to leave out).
- *Language* – Which words to select; what techniques to use; how to shape syntax; what tone to adopt.
- *Structure* – How to organise and cohere information in a text.

We support student to remember this using the initialism CLS (**C**ontent, **L**anguage, **S**tructure).

Vocabulary: Although vocabulary could be included as part of language (above), it appears here as a discrete item due to the weight of influence it has on all modalities of English. As such, we want students to have vocabularies that are both broad and deep.



How does the curriculum support students to acquire this knowledge?

- It supports the explicit teaching of these concepts.
- It revisits these concepts in every unit whether focusing on reading, writing or oracy and provides opportunities for practice.
- Understanding of these concepts is frequently tested.
- It supports the explicit teaching of the components that make up these composites (e.g. different text types, different language techniques etc.).
- It is text-rich, providing frequent exposure to high-quality exemplification.
- Indirect exposure to vocabulary is combined with explicit instruction of both light-touch and keystone vocabulary.

Reading

Teaching students to read is a fundamental aspect of teaching English underpinned as it is by a profound moral imperative. However, we need to be clear about what we mean by 'reading' if we are to be clear about how to teach it effectively.

In English, it is useful to distinguish **general reading** – basic word recognition, comprehension and fluency – from **analytical reading** – recognising texts as constructs to expose *what* a writer is trying to achieve, *how* they do this, and *why*. It is this disciplinary analytical reading which students must master if they are to 'read like English experts.'

General Reading

General reading – basic word recognition ('decoding'), comprehension and fluency – is a complex process consisting of numerous discrete elements. These are helpfully represented through Scarborough's Reading Rope¹:

While word recognition will continue to be a problem for some students in secondary school – and is something that will be supported through intervention and within lessons – fluency and comprehension are the main areas of focus for the curriculum.

In focusing on comprehension, we recognise the significant role that knowledge plays. As such, the curriculum is structured to develop each of the strands of comprehension as outlined in Scarborough's Reading Rope:

Background knowledge: general knowledge about the world

Vocabulary: the vocabulary students encounter *within* texts as well as the conceptual vocabulary necessary to *understand* texts.

Language structures: linguistic and syntactic knowledge

Verbal reasoning: being able to think beyond a literal interpretation of words e.g. interpreting metaphor; inferring meaning.

Literacy knowledge: knowledge of different text types and the conventions that underpin them

DISCIPLINARY READING: We recognise that while English departments have an essential role to play in the teaching of reading, it is necessary for this to be underpinned by disciplinary approaches to reading in schools. Reading can be highly text and context specific and can vary from discipline to discipline. It is, therefore, necessary for other subjects to help students to read like scientists, like historians, like mathematicians etc.

¹ Scarborough, H. S. (2001) 'Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis) abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice', in Neuman, S. and Dickinson, D. (eds), *Handbook for research in early literacy*, New York: Guilford Press (97–110).

Analytical Reading

Analytical reading is the process of not taking texts at face value, but rather interrogating them deeply as *constructs* to explore what the writer is trying to achieve; how they do this; and why they do this. Crucially, it is a process which allows us to step back from texts in order to objectively question them and to judge them, without getting lost in our subjective experience of them. It is this type of reading that is distinct to the discipline of English – both language and literature – and which students must master if they are to read like English experts rather than geographers, scientists or musicians (though there are, of course, elements of crossover).

Before detailing the active ingredients of analytical reading, however, it is important to note that analytical reading is impossible without basic comprehension: we can't discuss what a writer is trying to achieve and the tools they use to do this if we fundamentally don't understand what a text is saying. As such, we need to recognise that analytical reading is deeply-rooted in basic text comprehension and we should be cautious about rushing to analyse before securing this understanding; it is for this reason that we place such high value on basic comprehension in our curriculum. However, we also need to be wary of seeing reading and analytical reading as being entirely discrete as there is clear interplay between the two.

The ingredients of analytical reading:

- The understanding that all texts are **constructs**.
- The ability to **interpret** what the **writer** is trying to achieve (ideas, themes, effect on audience) including attempts at manipulation.
- The ability to analyse the **writer's craft** (especially **content, language** and **structure**) to expose the inner workings of a text and to explore how these choices are influenced by **goal, audience** and text **type**.
- The ability to synthesise knowledge of **context** (setting, literary, production, reception) with an understanding of what the writer is trying to achieve.
- The ability to **critically evaluate** texts: commenting on inherent quality and overall effectiveness; weighing other readers' interpretations; and applying critical lenses.
- The ability to support analytical reading with **evidence**.
- The ability to make **analytical comparisons** between texts (e.g. the crafting of a text, or the writers' intentions).

How does the curriculum support students to acquire this knowledge?

General Reading

- The curriculum provides frequent exposure to texts in lessons – fiction and non-fiction – that are both engaging and challenging, exposing students to a selection of the best that has been thought and written. This allows students to accrue 'reading miles'.
- This reading is supported and extended beyond the classroom by directed homework reading of thematically relevant short articles/extracts for comprehension (assessed through online MCQs).
- Students are provided with curated, thematically relevant reading lists for each unit to support independent reading. These texts are actively promoted by teachers within lessons. Where possible, this is underpinned by school libraries having the books from the reading lists available to borrow.
- Reading tasks systematically support students to set a clear goal for reading (e.g. through a question that demands high-level comprehension of the text).

- Reading tasks initially prioritise **general reading** over **analytical reading** on the basis that it is very difficult to analyse a text we only partially comprehend.
- This is particularly supported through the fast reading of literature texts – focusing on general comprehension – (see Westbrook et al.²). This is in contrast to approaches which intersperse the reading of a longer texts with various activities.
- We recognise that adjusting the way in which students access a text can adjust the inherent challenge presented by that text. For example, students can access far more challenging texts with support – such as when the texts are read aloud and/or comprehension is scaffolded by the teacher – than they can independently. Via this 'sliding scale' of support, we are able to pitch challenge appropriately.
- When reading aloud with students, approaches such as 'Control the Game'³ are used in order to ensure that reading is meaningful and highly leveraged (i.e. that passivity is avoided and as many students as possible are actively engaged with the reading process).
- Reading and writing are taught as two sides of the same coin so that, for example, knowledge of how to read a particular text type provides insights into how to write similar texts (see comprehension components above). Learning how to write a particular text type, meanwhile, is used to help students to read texts as writers and to be alert to the ways in which they have been crafted.
- Students are supported to read for pleasure (see below).

How does the curriculum support students to acquire this knowledge?

Analytical Reading

- It supports students to apply the **core** elements of the curriculum when reading analytically: thinking of text as a construct; thinking about GAT-C (the writer's goal, the audience, the text type – and how these have influenced the crafting); the specific elements of crafting that the writer has used: CLS (content, language, structure).
- It supports the explicit teaching of these concepts to support progression.
- It supports the explicit teaching of the components that make up these composites (e.g. elements of the writer's craft; words, phrases and sentence structures to support comparative thinking).
 - The curriculum is text-rich, providing extensive material for practice.
 - Weekly homework reading tasks also contain questions that require students to read like English experts e.g. thinking about the writers' intentions and how the text is crafted.
 - It provides examples of experts reading like English experts (e.g. other readers' interpretations).
 - As with general reading, analytical reading and writing are taught as two sides of the same coin.
 - It teaches students writing and speaking structures to support analytical reading (and thinking).

² Westbrook, J., Sutherland, J., Oakhill, J., and Sullivan, S. (2019) 'Just reading': the impact of a faster pace of reading narratives on the comprehension of poorer adolescent readers in English classrooms. *Literacy*, 53: 60– 68. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12141>.

³ Lemov, D., Driggs, C., & Woolway, E. (2016). *Reading reconsidered: a practical guide to rigorous literacy instruction*.

How does the curriculum support students to acquire this knowledge?

Reading for Pleasure

First and foremost, we support reading for pleasure by helping our students to become better readers who are less likely to view reading negatively because of the frustration it entails for them. In addition to this, we actively use lessons to 'light the fire' of interest:

- We plan a rich and engaging curriculum that makes students *want* to read around it.
- We choose texts for students to read and study that have intrinsic value.
- By prioritising general comprehension, we work to ensure that students don't become detached from texts.
- We model curiosity and interest in the texts we are studying.
- We often read texts aloud and do so with passion and energy to bring them to life for our students.
- We talk about books we like and, in particular, systematically recommend thematically relevant texts (see below).

Beyond lessons, we further support reading for pleasure through the following:

- The texts provided for homework tasks are also chosen for their intrinsic value.
- Students are provided with a curated reading list to take interest sparked by lessons further. Where possible, these texts are available to borrow from the school library.
- Parents are supported to know how they can help their children to read for pleasure.

Writing

As with reading, it is useful to think of writing in both general terms and as an aspect of English as a discipline. On the one hand, the curriculum is designed to provide students with the knowledge that will form the foundation of written communication in all subjects; on the other, it is designed to support students to write like English experts specifically.

Sitting at the heart of this is the core knowledge that we want students to have:

Texts as constructs: the knowledge that written texts are deliberately shaped by the writer.

Goal, Audience and Type: the knowledge that we **adapt** our writing according to what we want to achieve, who we are writing for and what type of writing we are engaged in.

Craft (CLS): the knowledge of the tools we use to create and adapt writing (**content, language and structure**).

Vocabulary: the deep and broad knowledge of words that allows writing that can be both clear and nuanced.

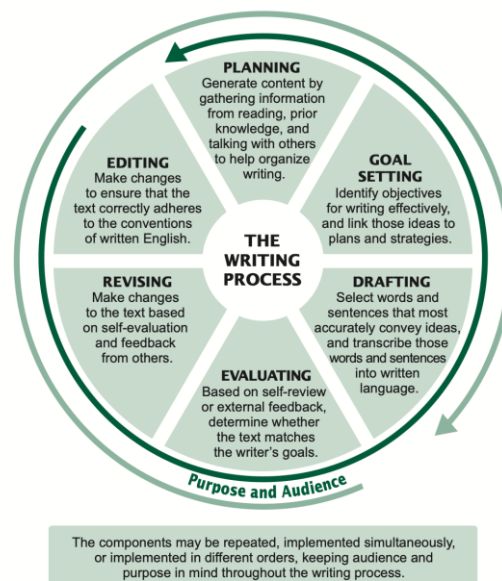
Beyond this core knowledge, our curriculum targets four main writing strands:

Technical control: We want students to be secure in their use of spelling, punctuation and grammar so that they are able to communicate with both nuance and clarity when writing.

Writing as a process: We want students to recognise writing as a process (see right), rather than as a spontaneous act. We want them to know what the stages in this process are; when to use (and not use) these stages; and strategies for doing each stage effectively e.g. how to plan.

Creative writing: We want students to understand what creative writing is; what it aims to achieve; the different forms it can take and the rules of these; what **quality** creative writing looks like; the different components required to produce creative writing; and how to deploy these effectively.

Discursive writing: We want students to understand what discursive writing is conceptually and what it aims to achieve; the different forms it can take (especially essays, articles, letters and speeches); the conventions and components of each of these forms; what **quality** discursive writing looks like; and how to produce it.



How does the curriculum support students to acquire this knowledge?

- It supports students to apply the **core** elements of the curriculum when writing: thinking of text as a construct; thinking about GAT-C (their goal as a writer, the audience, the text type – and how these will influence their crafting); the specific elements of crafting that they can use: CLS (content, language, structure).
- It supports the explicit teaching of these composites and their components.
- It is designed to develop schemata and to avoid cognitive overload through a big-small-big approach to teaching (i.e. starting with immersion in the genre, a sense of 'quality and overall effect; focusing on discrete components; then reassembling these components into a whole).
- It combines writing instruction with reading to support the internalisation of genre and the identification of key features; explicitly teach students that the same knowledge underpins reading and writing ('reading as a writer; writing as a reader'). Students are exposed to multiple models – some with explicit instruction (e.g. through teacher modelling), others with more passive exposure (e.g. through the weekly reading homework).
- It presents writing as having inherent value (rather than being an act designed purely for exam performance) and presents the production of a high-quality piece of writing as a worthwhile end in itself.
- It ensures that students have sufficient background knowledge prior to writing.
- It contextualises writing instruction.
- It provides multiples opportunities for spaced practice.
- It provides multiples opportunities for formative assessment (and builds in time for the teacher/students to build in time to respond to feedback meaningfully).

Oracy

Irrespective of the relative value placed on speaking and listening in GCSEs, we recognise that ‘a strong command of the spoken word is a crucial outcome of English education and that ‘becoming an articulate, effective communicator forms the basis of democratic engagement with wider society’⁴. Rather than talk simply being a pedagogical tool, therefore, it is given prominence here as knowledge that students need to be supported to acquire. Indeed, while talk is a powerful vehicle for thought generally, allowing ideas to be formulated, developed and challenged, it is of particular importance to English, a subject which has nuance, philosophical thinking and multiplicity of meaning at its heart.

As with reading and writing, therefore, it is important to stress that we are supporting students to develop both general oracy – such that they can communicate generally – and subject-specific talk so that they are able to talk like English experts.

Sitting at the heart of this is the core knowledge that we want students to have:

Texts as constructs: the knowledge that spoken texts (talk) are deliberately shaped by the speaker.

Goal, Audience and Type: the knowledge that we **adapt** our talk according to what we want to achieve, who we are speaking to and what type of talk we are engaged in. Particular emphasis is placed here on the idea of **academic talk** (i.e. day-to-day classroom talk) and the expectations related to this.

Craft (CLS): the knowledge of the tools we use to create and adapt talk (**content, language and structure**), focusing in particular on **Standard English**, formality and tone as part of day-to-day classroom interactions.

Vocabulary: the deep and broad knowledge of words that allows talk that can be both clear and nuanced.

Beyond this core knowledge, our curriculum targets four main areas:

Technical control: We want students to be secure in their pronunciation, vocabulary and use of Standard English.

Prosody: We want students to know that in addition to conveying meaning verbally (what we say) we convey it non-verbally (how we say it) and that prosody is the use of some of these non-verbal features. We want them to know what these prosodic features are – intonation, volume, speed and pause – and how variations in these features can suggest different meanings. We want them to understand how writing can suggest prosodic elements, but also how our use of prosodic elements can shape the meaning of writing. Finally, we want students to be able to master their own manipulation of prosodic elements when speaking e.g. reading aloud, discussing, presenting.

Discussion: We want students to know what discussion is, why it is important generally why it is important in English in particular. We want them to know the different forms discussion can take, what quality discussion looks like and what the ingredients of high-quality discussion are. We want them to know the particular features of discussing like an *English expert*. We want students to know the components that enable them to do these things themselves, such as the linguistic structures that will enable them to interact by agreeing, building on, challenging and asking questions about what others say. We want them to be understand the different roles individuals might take in discussion (contributing, reviewing, involving, managing). Crucially, we want students to be able deploy the knowledge of the above to engage in powerful discussions themselves.

⁴ Ofsted Research Review Series – English (May 2022)

Presentation: We want students to know what a presentation is and why presentation skills matter. We want them to understand why planning a presentation is important and how to do this. We want them to know why practice of presentations is important and how to do this. We want them to know what the features of a high-quality presentation are and, crucially, to be able to deploy this knowledge to plan and deliver effective presentations themselves.

How does the curriculum support students to acquire this knowledge?

- It presents oracy as a key strand of the curriculum and explicitly addresses it as part of the discipline of English. It is made clear that talk matters.
- Through the core elements, parallels are drawn between speaking and writing to develop links between schemata.
- It systematically supports the explicit teaching of these components and their composites (i.e. it teaches talk, rather than simply getting students *to* talk).
- It introduces *Accountable Talk* early on and maintains this as a constant in order to embed the principles of effective discussion.
- It builds in opportunities to practise talk (and, therefore, opportunities for meaningful feedback).
- It assesses talk.
- It works to ensure that students have sufficient topic knowledge to allow meaningful talk.

Knowledge of English as a Discipline

There are two elements to students having knowledge of English as a discipline. The first, crucially, is that we want them to be inducted as apprentices into the vast body of knowledge that constitutes our discipline. Substantial parts of our curriculum are dedicated to this goal.

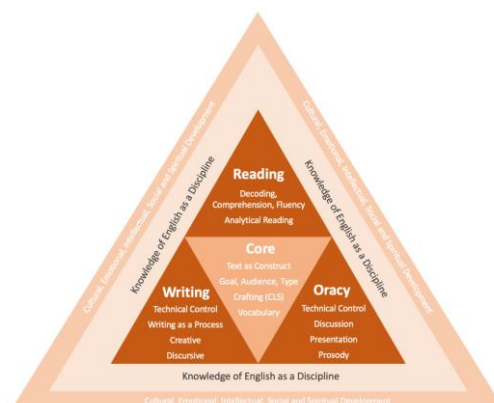
However, the subject of English is a broad church that combines a number of sub-disciplines and a range of ambitious aims. Consequently, it can be difficult for students to conceptualise what English is and to avoid seeing it as anything other than a loose collection of disassociated parts. All too often, what coherence there is comes from a focus on high-stakes assessments and exams are seen by students as the subject's *raison d'être*.

Our curriculum seeks to address this explicitly through the second element of knowledge of English as a discipline: helping students to develop a mental model of English as a discipline to which the important knowledge of our discipline can cohere. By explicitly teaching students about English as a discipline that has inherent value we aim to make knowledge 'stickier' by helping it to cohere to this broader conceptual understanding. To use an analogy, we want students to step back and see the mosaic as a whole rather than just looking at a small number of tiles intently, but in isolation.

In particular, we address the following:

Foundational knowledge: We want students to know the substantive and procedural knowledge that is at the heart of our subject.

Inherent value: We want students to know why English matters as a subject beyond a narrow focus on exams ('it's in the exam because it's important; it's not important because it's in the exam'). At best we want students to love the subject for this value; at worst, we want them to appreciate it.



Conceptual overview of the discipline: We want students to be able to understand what English is as a subject and how the different modalities of it fit together and overlap.

Conceptual overview of the main composites: We want students to have a sense of the 'whole' to enable the study of the 'parts' to be both meaningful and effective e.g. within the modality of writing, we want students to understand what discursive writing is, why it's worthy of study, and what it seeks to achieve, to be able to evaluate a piece of discursive writing in the round and to view this as more than the sum of its parts; with reading, we want students to understand exactly what analytical reading is and why it matters, rather than just being able to apply elements of it in isolation (e.g. single word analysis). Crucially, we want students to understand why the core elements are core i.e. what it is about them that means that they sit at the heart of our subject.

Disciplinary knowledge: We want students to know that part of English is about general preparation in reading, writing and oracy but that English as a discipline is much richer than, for example, a focus on functional literacy. We also want students to be apprentices to this knowledge and steeped in the traditions of how to read, write and talk like an English expert.

Conceptual understanding of literature as a discipline: Within the broader discipline of English, we want students to understand what the study of literature entails and why it matters; we want them to know the criteria used to judge whether literature is high-quality; we want them to be able to read like a literature scholar, employing analytical reading alongside literature specific knowledge (e.g. tragedy as a genre), text specific knowledge (e.g. specific contextual knowledge; other readers' interpretations) and knowledge of critical lenses and how to apply them.

How does the curriculum support students to acquire this knowledge?

- The content is designed to have inherent value, to represent (a necessary fraction of) the best that has been thought and written.
- It explicitly foregrounds the inherent value of what students are learning and presents exam performance as a goal of study only when necessary (in KS4), presenting this as a milestone on the journey of English mastery rather than being the endpoint itself.
- It is designed to explicitly teach students about English as a discipline.
- Introduction of components is framed within an understanding of composites and the discipline as a whole (e.g. the 'big-small-big' approach adopted in writing).
- It builds in frequent exposure to composites and opportunities to evaluate these in the round (e.g. extensive exposure to examples through reading).

Cultural, Emotional, Intellectual, Social and Spiritual Development

"But English is so much more than a gateway to success in other curriculum subjects. Through studying literature, pupils' eyes are opened to the human experience; they explore meaning and ambiguity as well as the beauty and power of language. English also has a strong creative and expressive dimension."

Ofsted Research Review Series – English (May 2022)

We recognise the fundamental role English plays in developing students not just as writers, readers and speakers, but as people. Consequently, while most prominent in literature, this developmental element permeates every aspect of our curriculum.

While the developmental aspects of the curriculum are too many and nuanced to practically list here, the curriculum is designed around thematic threads to help cohere students' understanding:

- **The human condition:** We want students to know what the human condition is and to be able to explore different facets of it, in particular fear, power and love. We want them to understand what these mean and how they can manifest themselves. For example, when looking at love, we want students to understand different types of love (romantic, tragic, patriotic, familial, platonic) and how these relate can shape our experiences as humans.
- **Experience and voice:** We want students to understand English as a vehicle for exploring their own experiences as well as exploring the experiences of others. As part of this, we want students to understand what we mean by 'voice' and what it means to have – and to be denied – a voice.
- **Power and conflict:** We want students to understand the nature of power, the nature of conflict and the relationship between the two. We want them to understand the different forms of power and how this power can be won, lost and expressed. In particular, we want them to understand the power of language, supporting them to realise this power themselves for benign purposes, while supporting them to notice when language is being used as a force of manipulation.
- **Morality:** We want students to understand what morality is, where it comes from, how it's reinforced/enforced and the consequences of transgression in different contexts.

7. What curriculum design decisions have we made?

- **Careful selection of curriculum content:** Every curriculum is a series of compromises. The content included in our curriculum has been selected for its inherent value and is in-keeping with our conception of English as vehicle for social justice underpinned by the principles of subject love, subject knowledge and subject first.
- **Key threads and sub-strands:** Rather than being a series of isolated units, our curriculum is designed around the key strands and sub-strands of what constitutes English (e.g. writing, drawing on core knowledge, and with technical control, writing as a process as key-threads; discursive writing and creative writing as sub-strands within this). These are introduced and developed over the course of the curriculum.
- **Curriculum as the progression model:** As a result of knowledge being carefully identified and sequenced (see above) the curriculum itself is designed to be a progression model.
- **Systematic revisiting and retrieval:** recognising that what is taught is not the same as what is learnt, the curriculum is structured to support systematic revisiting (see above) and retrieval of key learning. Resources are designed to call back to relevant prior learning (both recent and more distant) through starter tasks, knowledge quizzes and signposting within lessons.
- **Text selection:** Texts are selected because they have inherent value. They are progressively more challenging from a high base of desirable difficulty. They are sequenced to build on previous texts and to prepare for later texts. They are varied (heritage, genres, topics, eras, voices) and there is a judicious balance between reading whole texts and extracts. For literature texts, literary merit, the ability to broaden students' horizons and the experience of the texts collectively were key considerations.
- **12-week units:** Units are designed to be 12 weeks in length, rather than adjusted year-by-year according to the length of terms. The two weeks unaccounted for are left for schools to deploy as appropriate (and much of this time will likely be accounted for by activity weeks, bank holidays and loss of curriculum time for internal commitments such as standardised testing or events).
- **'Big-Small-Big' and the concept of quality:** Teaching of components is always framed within an exploration of broader composites. Students are taught to evaluate overall *quality* of these composites and to view them as more than the sum of their parts. Reductive and decontextualised teaching of components is avoided.
- **No mention of GCSE in KS3:** Students are taught the discipline of English, not preparation for an exam.
- **Thematic threads:** These run through each year and are intended to allow students to explore important aspects of the human condition. This starts in Y7 with a focus on what the human condition is conceptually before building on this foundational knowledge with different aspects of it in subsequent years (experience and voice; power and conflict; morality). These themes serve an important personal development function as well as introducing students to some of the key themes in literature (which itself is an exploration of the human condition, of course). The thematic threads also serve the purpose of providing a narrative thread to each year, helping to cohere the learning and making it 'stickier' as a result.
- **Fast-reading of texts:** The curriculum is built around the principle of the 'fast-reading of texts'. This refers to reading a text from start to finish with relatively little interruption, focusing almost exclusively on comprehension (which is scaffolded while reading). This is done to support comprehension (it is easier to follow the narrative) and to support analytical reading (it is difficult to read analytically without knowledge of the whole text and without secure comprehension). Further insights into this approach can be found by reading 'Just reading': the impact of a faster pace of reading narratives on the comprehension of poorer adolescent readers in English classrooms (see recommended reading).

- **An explicit focus on oracy:** The curriculum re-prioritises talk, both as a pedagogical tool and as a valuable body of knowledge to be learnt in its own right. Regardless of the extent to which talk is valued at GCSE, this curriculum takes the view that it is a fundamental part of our discipline and therefore worthy of curriculum time.
- **Weekly reading homework:** Every unit is supported by a weekly reading homework. These are short texts – whole texts and extracts as well as a mixture of fiction and non-fiction – designed to reinforce the curriculum content and to take students beyond it. They are also constructed to support both general reading (through comprehension tasks) and analytical reading (through questions about the text as construct, authorial intent and key elements of the writer's craft (content, language or structure)). Each weekly reading task is accompanied by an online knowledge quiz.
- **Weekly knowledge quiz homework:** Every unit is supported by weekly online knowledge quizzes. These are designed to reinforce learning through the retrieval of key knowledge (taught recently and in previous units/years) and to serve a formative function, allowing teachers to adapt the curriculum accordingly.
- **Responsive teaching time:** Every unit has time built in for responsive teaching. While all lessons have the potential to be responsive teaching lessons in their own way, a number have been designated as 'responsive teaching' simply as a practical means of ring-fencing time. As such, there is no expectation that these lessons happen where they appear on medium-term plans.
- **Vocabulary:** The curriculum is designed to develop vocabulary both indirectly (through exposure to an environment of rich texts and academic talk) and directly (through explicit teaching). For explicit teaching, vocabulary is conceptualised as 'keystone' and 'light-touch'. Keystone vocabulary is that which is fundamental to the curriculum and is extensively taught, consolidated and tested (in line with the SEEC model). Light-touch vocabulary which doesn't merit the same curriculum time and is therefore taught more briefly in way that is designed to overcome barriers to comprehension and to increase familiarity with a word (using a reduced SEEC model).
- **Curated reading lists:** Each unit is supported by a curated reading list designed to help students to find additional reading related to the topic of study. Rather than being exhaustive lists, these are intended to direct students towards high-quality reading (with a range of challenge).
- **Diversity:** we explicitly address diversity within our curriculum and take a principled – but nuanced – approach towards this (see below).

Diversity in Our Curriculum

"To be able to create a culture of diversity, the term 'usualise' is particularly useful. It is a term I first heard when I met Sue Sanders, the founder of Schools Out. She made it clear that the term was preferable to 'normalise' as the implication of normality is that there is a right way to be (We are Family, 2016). Normalisation, as a concept, was examined by Michel Foucault in his seminal work, Discipline and Punish (1975), in which he argued that 'normal' was used as a measure to exert social control. Those who fell out of the normative zone could be punished for it."

Bennie Kara, *Diversity in Schools* (p64)

Diversity in our curriculum has been a topic of consideration from the early stages of curriculum design and Kara's work has been particularly useful in this regard. Broadly speaking, we have sought to adopt the following approaches:

- Using the language of *usualisation* rather than *normalisation* (see above).
- Avoiding the presentation of diversity as a narrative of victimhood and seeking to include texts where diversity is incidental rather than foregrounded as a theme.
- Not limiting our conceptualisation of diversity to race and ethnicity.
- Avoiding narrow conceptions of 'cultural capital'.
- Recognising that English is only one element of the broader curriculum and that English cannot address diversity in isolation.
- Recognising that diversity is not the only criteria in text selection and that the universality of the human condition as well as literary merit in general are also important.
- Problematising the curriculum as part of our discipline e.g. teaching about the canon and literary heritage but also exploring the debates around these; recognising the imbalance towards dead white men in the curriculum; viewing texts through different lenses.

In practical terms, diverse voices in our curriculum are found mostly through the anthology texts (short stories, poems) and supplementary reading (e.g. reading homework texts). Where there is a lack of diversity, we actively problematise this. However, we do recognise that further diversity is still needed in our main text choices and this will inform future decisions as part of our ongoing curriculum development.