

Sands School



The ALTERNATIVE FACE of
EDUCATION

CURRICULUM POLICY

This policy describes the education that is on offer at Sands, the approach taken to teaching and learning and the expectations of students.

There are separate policies setting out the approaches to Personal, Social and Health education (PHSE) and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Each teacher's approach to Assessing, Monitoring and Evaluating student progress is described under their subject outline in this policy.

The approach to the delivery of the curriculum reflects the central ethos of Sands School of respecting the child's right to follow a unique path through their school life based on their needs and interests. Supported by tutors and resourced by small classes with lessons and activities targeting individual need we are able to offer a school experience based on making positive choices from a diverse curriculum. Students are free to be themselves, and to explore their own paths through education. Staff are able to teach their subjects as they choose, responsive to feedback from the students and colleagues but free of many of strictures of the National Curriculum which allows for a more flexible and sensitive approach to teaching.

The aims of the curriculum

1. To create lifelong learners ready to adapt to the changing conditions of the present social and economic climate..
2. To give students the opportunity to learn in a way that best makes sense to them.
3. To deliver a curriculum that prepares students for exams in a professional and successful manner.
4. To allow the curriculum to be a tool used by the student and teacher to make learning rewarding and a good preparation for life beyond school.
5. To create an environment that encourages children to take responsibility for their choices and introduces them to the concepts of challenge, self-motivation failure and success.

Principles of curriculum delivery

1. The emphasis to be on the student as learner.
2. Emphasise the student's character and needs in shaping the delivery and curriculum in the classroom.
3. Broad and deep knowledge is better than homogenised and restricted learning designed to pass exams.
4. Teachers should remain lifelong learners themselves and strive to innovate and improve their practice.
5. That education can happen throughout the school and that the classroom is only one of the many environments that offers the opportunity to learn.
6. Curriculum delivery will be most successful when students trust their teacher and can learn from their mistakes in a safe environment.
7. Learning should reflect the interconnection of curriculum, skills and knowledge.
8. The curriculum is best delivered in concrete ways that connect to each student's own experiences but still challenge and stretch their awareness of the knowledge, attitudes and experiences around them.

How Sands students access the curriculum

Sands has timetabled lessons like most schools in the country. Before choosing a subject, students are encouraged to sit with their academic tutors to find out about the course. When a student commits to a subject, they are then expected to attend all those lessons unless they have a good reason not to. If a student chooses not to study a subject, leaving them with a gap in their personal timetable, they are supported in finding a constructive activity to fill that time. This may mean using that time for extra art, science, maths, or helping to cook the school lunches. But we also accept and embrace the idea that children learn from each other, that social and moral development can take place throughout the school with and without staff input and that the curriculum at Sands extends way beyond the classroom. In fact the staff are often offering a varied and rich curriculum beyond the boundaries of the classroom and the conventional timetable. It is also true that the children at Sands value their right to build a social element into their day which we all feel compliments their academic programme. Therefore each student's

timetable is going to reflect their particular academic, social and emotional needs and may bear little resemblance to any other.

Lessons take many forms, from classic 'chalk and talk', to self-teaching with the guidance of a subject teacher. All teachers offer support outside the classroom and the trust between students and teachers means that this informal engagement plays a particularly important part in learning at Sands. Ultimately, Sands realises that each student learns differently, and we are able to be highly flexible so that the needs of the student are best met.

When a new student joins the school they are allocated an academic tutor who helps them design their learning programme. Younger students are encouraged to try every subject and activity on offer and over a number of months to make decisions about their future learning schedule. Some students choose to study all the subjects on offer to their group, while others choose to concentrate heavily on the few that they are really inspired by. Older students usually have a clear idea about what they would like to study in the school and sit between 6 and 11 GCSEs over a 3 year period.

The rationale behind encouraging students to make choices about what they study is a belief that students who are powerless and voiceless risk becoming disengaged and passive learners. It also reflects our belief that humans are naturally inquisitive and that it is often an inappropriate curriculum that pushes children away from learning. A timetable that is arrived in negotiation with each child often means that they are able to accept the challenges of learning with confidence and resilience. This does mean that some children vacillate between full and partial engagement in the conventional curriculum over their school career but the trend towards success and achievement, often beyond that expected on entry to the school, reinforces our belief that this flexibility leads to substantial progress.

While we encourage students to be active in their choices we still remain alert to common sense, namely that they should aim to leave school literate, numerate and with a broad knowledge of the sciences, arts and humanities, even if they acquire that understanding outside conventional classes. Of course students don't always make the wisest choices – being allowed to make mistakes is a crucial part of learning to take decisions and take responsibility for them. The academic tutors meet regularly with their tutees to review their choices and to help them set realistic and sensible goals for their studies

Sands Core Learning Principles

At the root of education at Sands there are some core principles, some of which lead to a different style and rhythm of learning than conventional schools.

- Some of the best learning happens outside the classroom

We believe that some of the best learning happens outside of the classroom when a student asks a question that is pertinent to their situation and interests at the moment. The question may arise within a lesson, come out of a school meeting, within a tutorial, or relaxing over a cup of each with staff and peers. We believe it is essential that each student has the freedom to respond to their own interests, curiosity and drives. This may manifest in them pursuing an interest or project instead of attending a timetabled lesson, or perhaps organising a school event. As such it makes sense to design school days that aren't crammed with lessons and give time for informal learning to take place.

This kind of learning makes up a significant part of the Sands experience but is difficult to assess and quantify and requires placing trust in both each student and the school.

- Each student experiences learning differently

At the very heart of our model of learning is the student, each unique and each with different needs. Learning is a very different experience for each student – even within the same classroom, and more fundamentally, for some, conventional classroom based study doesn't suit them at all and they need a different and tailored timetable. Because of our small class sizes and high staff-to-student ratio we are able to respond to each student's individual learning style and needs. Every staff member will get to know each student well and appreciate their strengths and areas of challenge.

- Close relationships with staff supports learning

Our staff enjoy the experience of Sands because they enjoy the company of and challenges of being with this age group. There is no staff room, nowhere to hide from the energy and demands of teenagers. We all believe that our students are so much more than automatons that move from class to class and we have created a school day that gives them and us time to be together socially and academically. Although this absorbs potential classroom time it does result in us having the chance to show the children over tea, lunch, on the spiral staircase, sitting on the lawn together, climbing, playing sport and music together that we are, like them, much more than classroom technicians.

- Children need supported challenge

When children are ready they all benefit from being challenged and brought away and out of their 'comfort zones'. The informality of the atmosphere in school doesn't preclude pushing individuals or groups to face difficult tasks – and discovering that overcoming challenges is a really worthwhile thing. Determination and motivation are necessary life skills if found at the right time and with sensitive support. So Sands students can be stressed about learning lines for plays, or face deadlines for projects or with exam work to complete that makes them stress and worry. We don't want to protect them from these events. They will receive lots of support and sympathy but also a fair amount of pressure and badgering to ensure they cross the hurdles and develop these essential life skills.

- Children need the freedom to make choices and learn from their decisions

Contrary to popular opinion, giving a degree of autonomy seems to reduce stress and anxiety. In fact, the invisibility students feel in bigger schools with lack of real choice often seems to be at the root of their unhappiness. The students who join us, often after being told they have failed in the mainstream education system, discover (or rediscover) their pleasure in learning once they feel they can control their school lives and make choices about what and how they learn.

Learning to use this freedom wisely is all part of the Sands experience. All students can make some unwise decisions and approach school life in ways that seem immature, but learning to make good decisions is not something that we naturally do or suddenly discover at eighteen. We believe that given the freedom to make mistakes, experiment with choice and learn about themselves in the process each student will become more and more skilled at making good decisions.

What's on the curriculum

The school has a six year curriculum programme that caters for students aged 11 to 17. The timetable is structured by age with each class having an age range not exceeding three years. Students are assigned to a class on balanced assessment of their age, their educational history and their ability as learners.

Some students may receive the some of the curriculum outside the class or before or after their age-related peers or may have it delivered in the classroom in a way different to the majority of their classmates through an individual helper or via their own learning programme.

Most subjects for the older students are taught as part of a programme leading to recognised qualifications. However important it is to secure these qualifications, the purpose of our curriculum is to offer and inspire accessible and enjoyable learning. Students should have the choice of pursuing subjects that are not examined and even in those that are examined the subject should not be constrained to what happens to be in the exam syllabus.

It is central to the ethos of Sands that all students are supported, encouraged and shown how to take up their role as a member of a democratic community. The processes of discussing and decision-making about the running of the school is hands-on learning about Leadership and Management.

Subjects

Within the limitations of being an unusually small secondary school Sands endeavours to offer a wide curriculum covering the following learning areas:

Core subjects

English - including separate Language and Literate

Maths

Science - including the option of separate biology, physics and chemistry

Humanities

History

Geography

Languages

French

Spanish

Arts

Art

Photography

Drama

Music

Other

Woodwork

IT

Sport

Outdoor Activities such as Duke of Edinburgh

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

General studies

Leadership and management

More information about what is offered in each subject can be found on the school Website.

The table below gives an indication of how much taught time is offered in subject: the exact times and subject choices will vary according to what staff can offer and what students want. For example in 2012-13 Y1 had seven-and-a-half hours of core subjects and a further fourteen hours and ten minutes of other timetabled lessons. The make-up of these other lessons depends on the choices made.

		Y1	Y2	Y3	O3	O2	O1
Core	English	2:30	2:30	2:30	2:00	4:00	4:00
	Maths	2:30	2:30	2:00	2:00	2:30	2:45
	Sciences	2:30	2:00	2:00	2:30	3:00	4:15
		7:30	7:00	6:30	6:30	9:30	11:0
Options	ICT	1:00	1:00	1:15	1:00	2:00	1:00
	Woodwork	6:40	7:10	8:20	7:35	6:35	6:35
	Humanities	1:00	1:00	1:00	3:00	2:00	2:10
	Art	5:05	4:20	5:40	5:20	5:50	5:50
	Modern Languages	2:15	3:00	4:05	2:20	3:10	3:10
	Drama	3:40	3:40	3:40	4:20	4:20	4:20
	Sport	3:20	3:20	3:20	2:10	2:10	2:10
	General Studies	1:00	1:00	1:00	0:00	0:00	0:00
	Music	3:55	4:25	5:05	4:30	4:30	4:30
	Photography	0:00	0:00	1:00	1:00	0:00	0:00
	Options timetabled	31:05	33:05	38:35	31:15	30:35	29:45
	Option hours	14:10	14:10	16:20	14:50	13:10	10:20
	Core plus option hours	21:40	21:10	22:50	21:20	22:40	21:20

Policy log

Last reviewed	Sean, Donald September 2016
Agreed by	Staff meeting
Review frequency	Annual
Comments	The example table of number of hours per subject should be updated over the course of the year to reflect current practice
Links	Website: Curriculum page, Choosing what to learning, subject descriptions
	Subject plans and schemes of work