**Walton High School**

**Curriculum**

At Walton we are proud of our curriculum. We believe that it lies at the heart of everything we are trying to achieve. It is the vehicle which enables our students to learn – that is to say, to acquire knowledge which will be useful to them not only for their public examinations, but for the rest of their lives. Our curriculum has been designed and refined over many years to match the needs and aspirations of the children of our community. We believe that our curriculum is central, therefore, to the success of our school and we want it to be as broad, balanced, deep and enriching as it possibly can be.

It is our view that our curriculum is so much more than simply a school timetable. It is vital that we devote serious time and serious thought to what it is that we teach and what the purpose is behind these choices. We need to plan carefully not only what we deliver but how we can ensure challenge and progression in order that our students have the opportunity to acquire a deep and thorough understanding of what it is that they are studying. We also need to ensure that we equip our students with the core skills they require to access and remember what we are delivering to them – that is to say, skills in literacy, numeracy and the transfer of knowledge into their long term memory. After all, it is difficult to argue that you have “learnt” something in life unless you are able to remember it!

At Walton High School each student is entitled to study the following subjects at Key Stage 3 (KS3):

English

Mathematics

Science

History

Geography

A Modern Foreign Language (French or German)

PE

Technology (via a rotation through Food, Textiles, Resistant Materials and Graphics)

RE

Music

ICT

Art

Performance and progress in these subjects is measured through our internal “Platinum”, “Gold”, “Silver” and “Bronze” assessment system in which, crucially, each student, whatever their starting point, has the opportunity to progress to our very highest standard of “Platinum”.

We took the decision two years ago to move to a three year Key Stage 4 (KS4). Whilst there has been some debate nationally about this practice, mainly because it is seen to narrow curriculum choice, our philosophy has been quite the opposite. We consider that this decision has allowed us the opportunity of being able to offer as wide a range of GCSE courses as possible.

The main reason for our decision was to preserve our cherished “free option choice” system at KS4. All of our students are free to choose four options at KS4, without the hindrance of an option block system. In many schools, choices are limited to only two or three options; subject combinations are limited by unwieldy options blocks and free choice is limited by a student’s prior attainment. Unfortunately, in many schools subjects which we consider to be important are not offered at all and have been replaced by subjects which gain the school greater credit in the Department for Education Performance Tables. The opposite applies at Walton High School: students are free to choose four subjects that they want to study (with the only proviso being that one choice must come from the EBacc group of subjects: History, geography, Modern Foreign Languages or Computer Science). We then endeavour to make our timetable fit our students’ preferences (and we have an annual success rate of approximately 98%) – i.e. our timetable serves our curriculum, as opposed to determining it.

There is, of course, a downside to the decision to move to a three year KS4 which is that students have to “drop” subjects a year earlier than they otherwise would have done. This is why we are trialling our new system in these first few years in order to gauge its effectiveness and popularity. Our feedback suggests that over 90% of our students believe that it has been the correct decision to take and that an even greater percentage of parents are of the opinion that not only have we made the right decision but that their children have matured as learners as a result of it. Tellingly, only a tiny minority of parents regret the fact that their children were denied the opportunity to continue with subjects that they chose to drop.

We consider that there have been two major benefits of moving to a three year KS4. Firstly, we have been able to increase the time devoted to core subjects (and the increased rigour of the GCSE specifications has demanded this) without losing other subjects (e.g. Arts or Technology based subjects) from our curriculum. Art, PE, Technology, RE, Astronomy, Media Studies and Business Studies all thrive at Walton High School and we are able to offer Music, Drama and a second Modern Foreign Language to every student who wants to study them. Secondly, our Heads of Department have reported that the extra time afforded to options subjects following this change has allowed them to explore their subjects in greater depth and also to introduce techniques such as interleaving and retrieval practice which allow their students to develop a deeper understanding of what they are learning, as opposed to merely rushing through the content of a GCSE syllabus. Our Heads of English and Maths have chosen to retain a three year KS3 in their subjects as they see this as the best method of ensuring a broad base and requisite skills development in preparation for KS4. We are very pleased that our system has the flexibility to facilitate this.

The fact that we have been able to retain such a broad offer at KS4 feeds in perfectly to our Post 16 (P16) curriculum which, we believe, stands up to scrutiny against any school in the country. Through the use of “twilight lessons” after the end of the normal school day, we are able to offer:

English Language & Literature

English Literature

Mathematics

Further Mathematics

Biology

Chemistry

Physics

History

Geography

French

German

Product Design

Textiles

Philosophy & Ethics

Psychology

Sociology

Art

Business Studies

Economics

PE

Photography

Media Studies

Film Studies

Music

at A level whilst also offering vocational courses in:

Forensic Science

Business

Food & Nutrition

Sports Science

Digital Media

for our students who do not wish to pursue a more traditional A Level route.

We consider our curriculum to be contemporary, fit for purpose and wide-ranging. We feel that it is popular and that it meets the needs of our students. We know that there is much still to do (for example, we are currently engaged in a review of all of our schemes of work to ensure that there is sufficient purpose, challenge and progression in all that we offer) but we are excited by this work which we feel will improve what we believe already to be an extremely effective curriculum.

Neil Finlay

Headteacher

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