

Curriculum Policy

The Altius Trust puts curriculum design at the heart of its improvement model. It has evolved over recent years as we have understood more fully the deficits in cultural capital that the vast majority of our students experience, and in response to an ever-changing educational landscape, to put knowledge at the heart of what we do.

The Altius curriculum consists of two strands:

- **The Fantastic Futures or pastoral curriculum.** This is the ethos, expectations and standards we hold dear as a trust as we constantly strive to broaden students' horizons through a range of experiences, challenges and opportunities that they would be unlikely to encounter if we did not provide them.
- **The academic, exam-tested curriculum.** This is the curriculum offer we provide for students to enable them to leave with the best exam results they possibly can.

Together, these two strands are central to our vision of providing a Fantastic Future for All.

Curriculum Principles

The Altius curriculum model is based upon the principles best expounded by Daniel T Willingham, namely:

- ***Factual knowledge precedes skill.*** Students need knowledge to provide context to their learning. Without knowledge, students will not be able to think critically.
- ***Memory is the residue of thought.*** By thinking about things, students are more likely to remember.
- ***Deep knowledge is our goal.*** However, in order to achieve this, students will need shallow knowledge first.
- ***Proficiency requires practice.*** To achieve deep knowledge, students must practice. Alongside this, we must also test how proficient students are becoming.
- ***Intelligence can be changed through sustained hard work.*** Successes and failures need to be discussed in terms of effort, not ability, meaning that all can achieve.

These principles are embedded in our two-stage curriculum model – a Foundation Knowledge curriculum in Y7 and 8, known as 'Know It', and a KS4 Examination curriculum in Y9 to 11.

The aim of the Know It curriculum in Y7 and 8 is to:

- Ensure students are 'Key Stage 4 Ready' for subjects they will continue with in Y9 – 11.
- Ensure students have enough essential knowledge so that if they stop studying that subject at the end of Y8 they have sufficient knowledge to function effectively when discussing that subject and are aware of the broader implications of that subject.
- To experience a broad curriculum including a range of arts and technology subjects to complement maths and english, sciences, humanities and languages.
- Ensure students have an awareness of how all subjects impact on broader aspects of their life.

The aim of the KS4 curriculum is to:

- Ensure students choose a broad and balanced portfolio of subjects to take to examination level.
- Achieve the best grades they can to equip them for a fantastic future.
- Prepare students for future destinations, either with the Altius Trust or elsewhere.

Underpinning the academic curriculum is the Fantastic Futures curriculum, which includes pastoral, social, emotional, cultural and personal education. Our schools are in urban areas characterised by high levels of deprivation and the majority of our students do not experience the gamut of more rounded, cultural and

developmental opportunities available to their more affluent peers elsewhere. Being based in areas with endemic issues associated with poverty, we believe that we have to do all we can to bridge this gap as most of our families are unable to do so themselves. This manifests itself through our Pledge Programme, where we expose students to an array of cultural, religious, geographical, aspirational and activity based opportunities that they would not otherwise encounter. The purpose of all this is to provide a fantastic future for all – we know that good exam results alone are not enough to secure a positive future. We also have to equip students with the necessary communication, social, networking and emotional intelligence skills to thrive in the future.

Curriculum Structure

All subjects produce a Big Picture, which outlines the main knowledge areas students will study throughout the academic year. Unit Plans are then written for each unit, which specify the weekly breakdown of lessons before teachers plan the individual lessons. The basic structure for Unit Plans is to include a mixture of Know It lessons (where students acquire knowledge) and Show It lessons (where students apply knowledge). This structure is mirrored in the Extended Learning tasks students receive. Student progress is assessed through regular Mini Test assessments (fortnightly in core subjects) before a Big Test takes place once per term. At the end of the academic year, all students sit Progress Exams in subjects. Big Pictures are published on our website and updated annually.

Towards the end of Spring in Year 8, students choose their options for KS4. These options are structured such that we have the flexibility to ensure an appropriate suite of subjects is available to everyone. We encourage the EBacc pathway where appropriate and our academic, knowledge based curriculum helps prepare students for this route, leading to high levels of uptake. However, with no 'options blocks' in the process, students have the freedom to create the right set of qualifications for them. This is supported by lessons in the Fantastic Futures curriculum, and a one-to-one interview with a senior leader to help informed and appropriate choices. Further information on the process can be found in the option guidance booklet in Appendix 1.

At MEA, students in year 7 and 8 are split into two bands, x and y for EBacc subjects. In year 7 these are determined by their KS2 SATs scores and the other intelligence from primary's on the needs and complexities of individual students, these are reviewed during year 7 to ensure they are effective, and opportunities to move band are always given. In year 8, those bands are reviewed in conjunction with EBacc curriculum leaders. Within the bands, Maths and Science are free to assign classes; English classes also define the Humanities and MFL classes. Foundation subjects are taught in mixed ability classes, with some taught as part of our KS2 carousel. In Years 9 to 11, all students study largely for GCSEs although some vocational courses (for example BTEC, NCFE etc) are also taken. Maths, English and Science teach whole year groups at once, allowing for complete freedom to assign classes. Other EBacc subjects teach their cohorts together allowing for assigning classes the most effective way in each case.

At MEA Central, because we do not yet have a full complement of students, we have two ability pathways. These pathways are then divided into two strands – Communication and STEM. Students are assigned a pathway based largely on their SAT scores (although other intelligence is taken into account) as follows:

- X Band: Students ranked in the top 50% of the year
- Y Band: Students ranked 50% to 85%
- Foundation Learning: Students with the lowest 15% SAT scores or those who need to be in the group based on other intelligence.

Both schools run a two-week timetable to provide a more nuanced approach to the allocation of curriculum time for subjects. In designing the timetable, we try to ensure that the two weeks are as similar as possible.

Full details of the pathways for different years are published on our website and updated annually. The full pathways document can be found in Appendix 2.

A Robust System for Setting Targets and Monitoring Performance

A Fantastic Future for All

Our vision is for all students make the most progress possible regardless of their starting point. Integral to this is the need for a target system that is easy to understand, clearly demonstrates progress and is suitably robust and relevant. We believe that intelligent target setting has a key role to play in raising aspirations, emphasising expectations and monitoring on-going performance of students and subjects.

In the past, we set very ambitious targets for students based on 4 levels of progress in most subjects. However, recent national changes to the exam system have led us to re-examine how we set targets to ensure that targets remain realistic and useful in evaluating performance.

What makes an effective target?

For a target to be meaningful and effective it needs to be:

- Owned by students and teachers
- Ambitious at improving rates of progress
- Based on prior attainment where possible
- Lead to improvements in learning and teaching
- Something that is regularly tracked and reviewed

The most important of these criteria is the ownership aspect. A target without buy-in is meaningless. One that students and staff subscribe to can have enormous power.

The Target Setting Process for Year 7 and 8

Year 7 students are assigned a Notional Grade, based on their KS2 performance. This is not a target, but is an indicator of their relative performance, and might be considered what they would achieve in year 11 if their relative performance stayed the same.

Stage 1 – Assigning an initial target grade and Destination Pathway

By comparing a student's individual SAT score to national data it is possible to see where a student is positioned in comparison to their peers nationally. We can then apply approximate GCSE comparable outcomes grade boundaries to get a sense of a likely destination GCSE grade. Of course, these students are five years away from taking their actual GCSEs, but just as schools have been judged for years on the percentage of students that make 'expected' progress, so we can begin to estimate the grade they are most likely to achieve if they make national rates of progress. The score used is an average across the reading and Maths test (i.e. it does not include GPVS) as this is how KS2 fine levels are set for the Progress 8 calculation. (See '*Progress 8 measure in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools. September 2016*' for more details of this.)

This target grade is called a student's Notional Grade taken from their KS2 SATs. The process is completed for English, for Maths, and then a combined notional grade for use in all other subjects. This gives additional information on students' performance and expectation.

The combined values for the 2018 year 7 Notional Grades:

| Average Score | Notional Grade | National Cumulative % achieving this score | Most comparable GCSE number grade |
|-----------------------------|----------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 118 – 120 | 9 | 3.1 | 9 |
| 115 – 117 | 8 | 8.5 | 8 |
| 112 – 114 | 7 | 19.2 | 7 |
| 109 – 111 | 6 | 31.2 | 6 |
| 106 – 108 | 5 | 49.5 | 5 |
| 102 – 105 | 4 | 69.6 | 4 |
| 98 – 101 | 3 | 84.2 | 3 |
| 93 – 97 | 2 | 92.9 | 2 |
| 85 – 92 | 1 | 98.5 | 1 |
| Below the level of the test | 0 | 100 | 0 |

Stage 2 – Ensuring ownership of target grade

It is, of course, very hard for staff to take ownership of this target grade until they know enough about a student's abilities as demonstrated in lessons and assessments. However, once the first round of Big Tests are complete at the end of Autumn 01, staff should be able to make a judgement.

Stage 3 – Monitoring student progress

We have to be able to answer the question 'How are year 7 doing?' when reviewing their performance. In previous years, we have used criteria-based outcomes to do this, but in a comparable outcomes assessment system this, on its own, is no longer satisfactory. Staff need to be able to give an indication of how students are performing compared with a view to eventual GCSE grades, but we have to have a check and balance that the data submitted is realistic. To support staff we have moved to the system that considers two key indicators. We set target scores for each test based on Notional Grades, and we consider ranking within the year to identify students whose direction of travel is the wrong way.

Target scores are initially set centrally, but after the first Big Test of the year, there is an option for staff to request to raise them where students have performed above expectation (or where KS2 data was missing) or to lower them (with clear rationale that are signed off by the senior leader responsible for KS3). This may be to further challenge a student, or to 'coach' them back on track where they have fallen behind.

Before the tests, all students will be provided with a set of target scores so they know exactly where they are aiming in each subject.

Once the tests have been completed and marked, we will then compare student performance to their target score.

| Red – well below target | Amber – just below target | A student on track to achieve the following grade in Year 11 | Suggested Target Score | Green – on target | Dark Green – well above target |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| N/A | N/A | U | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| N/A | 0 – 15 | 1 | 16 | 16 – 25 | 26 – 39 |
| 15 and below | 16 – 25 | 2 | 26 | 26 – 39 | 40 – 49 |
| 25 and below | 26 – 39 | 3 | 40 | 40 – 49 | 50 – 59 |
| 39 and below | 40 – 49 | 4 | 50 | 50 – 59 | 60 – 69 |
| 49 and below | 50 – 59 | 5 | 60 | 60 – 69 | 70 – 79 |
| 59 and below | 60 – 69 | 6 | 70 | 70 – 79 | 80 – 89 |
| 69 and below | 70 – 79 | 7 | 80 | 80 – 89 | 90 – 94 |
| 79 and below | 80 – 89 | 8 | 90 | 90 – 94 | 95 – 100 |
| 79 and below | 80 – 94 | 9 | 95 | 95 – 99 | 100 |

Following a Big test there are a number of key processes that are completed:

- Staff input question level data into our bespoke software, EDDI Assessor. This gives instant feedback to class teachers on the performance of their class, strengths and weaknesses, and gives cohort breakdown to highlight areas such as performance of boys and girls or pupil premium students. Teachers then complete a class feedback sheet and spend some time in class addressing issues identified
- Curriculum leaders get the whole year information in EDDI, along with class feedback sheets and begin their analysis of trends, which are discussed with their SLT line manager.
- At whole school level we complete who main pieces of analysis. We compare student performance against their target score, as a measure of absolute performance, and report the proportion of students who are on or above target back to departments, broken down by cohort. We also calculate a ranking and long-term ranking (that compares rank in KS", and previous round of Big Tests once available) to spot students who are dropping in relative performance and where intervention is needed.
- Reports are produced for SLT, curriculum leaders and governors, all of which feed into department and whole school development plans with clear future actions
- Student reviews are produced, students reflect on their own performance in tutor time, and the reviews are sent home to parents.

The Target Setting Process for Year 9 – 11

Target setting at KS4 is more straightforward. We use FFT20 targets, with teachers and curriculum leaders always having the flexibility to move those targets up as student performance dictates. Our analysis after a Big Test or progress exam follows a similar pattern to that described above. There are a couple of variations. Once we reach the middle of year 9, we will begin to collect a predicted grade as well as a current grade (based on actual test performance). Before that, performance is reflected back to students based on a comparison with the average result in each subject, divided into thirds. Once data is collected, a review process takes place as above, with the following key steps:

- Use of EDDI Assessor at class and department level to identify exactly where the strengths and weaknesses are to address through teaching
- Analysis of predicted and current data is done both in EDDI for QLA cohort analysis and in SISRA for more detailed exam performance analysis.
- Reports are produced for teachers, middle leaders, SLT and governors to ensure that everyone updates development plans and has clear and measurable actions between this point and the next assessment window.

Appendices:

1 – Options booklet

2 – Pathways Document