

ST MARGARET WARD CATHOLIC ACADEMY

Curriculum Policy



Let us remember we are in the presence of God "

Policy Adopted	Next Review	Author
September 2025	September 2026	S Bennion

Agreed by Governors	Date
	September 2025

St Margaret Ward Catholic Academy Curriculum Policy

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Rationale

As a Catholic School, with a Lasallian identity, we must aspire to overcome the inequalities of disadvantage through high quality education and enable all our students, no matter what their background and starting points, to compete on equal terms as informed and educated citizens, now and in the future, with their peers.

Our aspiration must be to focus upon ‘the best which has been thought and said’ (Matthew Arnold).

We are all the inheritors of the greatest ideas, writings and discoveries of the past. Our purpose is to design a curriculum to enable our pupils to learn about these ideas, taught by our teachers with great expertise and expert subject knowledge. Of course, we want our students to leave with the highest of qualifications but in addition to this we must aim for them to have a rich and challenging education where they will have read great literature, studied the ideas of philosophers, appreciated art and music, explored the most fascinating scientific discoveries and much more, becoming thoughtful and educated human beings in the process.

This policy sets out how we aim to achieve this.

“Teaching Minds” Curriculum

The curriculum is the students’ whole learning experience during their time at St Margaret Ward Catholic Academy. It encompasses the knowledge-rich content that is explicitly taught and learned in lessons through our “Teaching Minds” curriculum.

The curriculum also includes our “Touching Hearts” programme – the wider curriculum that supports our young people in all aspects of their personal development and which very much has a focus upon formation. Through our Catholic life, collective worship, bespoke Signum Fidei time, timetabled Touching Hearts lessons, systems, policies, pastoral care, personal development opportunities, extra-curricular programme and educational visits we aim to develop the character of our young people to help and guide them to become responsible and independent young people of faith who are inspired to make a significantly positive contribution to society in the future.

In addition, our curriculum encompasses a diverse range of enrichment opportunities and activities designed to enhance our students’ lives.

We ensure that all of our curriculum development is on-going and that all those involved understand the principles which underpin decisions regarding the whole curriculum.

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This policy reflects the aims and values of our taught “Teaching Minds” curriculum and is based on a set of principles that lie at the heart of any knowledge-rich school:

- Through the curriculum, all students are able to develop their individual God given talents, as we recognise that we are always in the presence of God in each and every aspect of our lives.
- All students are entitled to a broad, balanced, coherent and aspirational knowledge-rich curriculum that meets their individual needs and provides them with the opportunity to learn the best of what has been thought and said in all academic disciplines. In doing so, our students should grow in confidence and develop their ability to engage, interact and contribute to and with society at all levels.
- All students have access to a wide range of appropriate qualifications that will facilitate their future academic and career progression.
- The learning process is rigorously academic, engaging, motivating and supportive as well as allowing students to develop lively, resilient, imaginative and enquiring minds.
- All students have full access to the curriculum, irrespective of gender, SEND, ethnicity, academic ability, social or cultural background.
- The curriculum develops active citizens within the academy, the local community and wider society.
- At all times, the curriculum encourages high expectations and aspirations and allows all students to be the best they can be in whatever aspect they are called to serve.
- The curriculum encourages all students to enter to learn, and leave to serve.

Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the **Directors** to:

- Ensure that the Academy’s Lasallian values are the foundations on which the Academy’s curriculum is built.
- Ensure the Academy’s curriculum is appropriately broad, balanced and offers a suitable level of challenge and support to all students.
- Understand the pedagogical principles which underpin the Academy’s curriculum model.
- Be involved in the constant monitoring, evaluation and review of the curriculum, including holding Senior Leaders to account.

It is the responsibility of the **Governors** to:

- Understand how the five principles of Lasallian education manifest themselves in and across the Academy’s curriculum.
- Regularly review the Academy’s curriculum and make any amendments to reflect students’ needs.

- Have an overview of local and national developments that may have an impact on the curriculum.
- Understand the necessity for strong progression routes; this should include a clear understanding of our “all-through” curriculum approach and subsequent effective transition from primary school, progression throughout the five years from Years 7 to 11 and into Key Stage 5, employment, training, Further and Higher Education.
- Have an understanding of the curriculum model and the impact that this has on student progress and achievement, as well as staffing and the school budget.

It is the responsibility of the **Principal and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)** to:

- Ensure that our students experience and benefit from the five principles of Lasallian education and in so doing fulfil their potential to become fully human.
- Keep abreast of local and national changes.
- Review the curriculum annually, making changes, for example, in response to any local or national initiatives, new pedagogies, staffing and budgetary situations that will maximise student learning and achievement.
- Clearly communicate the rationale and expectations of the Academy’s curriculum.
- Ensure the curriculum allows clear progression from, through and to all key stages.
- Monitor curriculum impact on achievement, learning and progress and adapt as necessary in order to maximise these.
- Have a thorough understanding of the curriculum in the subjects they line manage and the academy as a whole.
- Ensure that the curriculum model leads to a timetable that supports knowledge-rich learning.
- Are committed to the development of an “all-through” curriculum across the Academy and its partner primary schools.

It is the responsibility of the **Heads of Department (HoDs)** to:

- Ensure every opportunity is taken to support, contribute to and enhance the Catholic life of the Academy and the five guiding principles of Lasallian education.
- Know what is the best that has been thought and said within their specific subject area(s) and ensure they and all members of their department keep up to date with subject knowledge.
- Have a clear rationale for their curriculum content including a concise and foundational “curriculum driver” that is communicated to all departmental members.
- Keep abreast of changes/curriculum developments in their subject area, how these could impact on the curriculum and implement these where appropriate in discussion with SLT line managers.

- Design and implement a sequential knowledge-based curriculum that ensures student progression within the subject and meets the principles set out in this policy.
- Monitor the impact of the curriculum on standards of student learning and progress.
- Support the devising of the timetable within their subject.
- Work collaboratively with colleagues across our family of schools to develop an “all-through” curriculum for their subject area(s).

It is the responsibility of all **teachers** to:

- Be committed to our Lasallian charism and ensure all students are guided to be the very best version of themselves that they can be through planning and delivering knowledge – rich lessons.
- Know and understand the rationale of the curriculum for the subject they teach, including the subject’s “curriculum driver”.
- Deliver the curriculum in line with the Academy’s teaching and learning policy and their subject area’s schemes of learning.
- Take responsibility for keeping their own subject knowledge up to date.
- Scaffold, adapt and personalise the curriculum to allow all students to access the required content.

In line with our equality policy, we aim to provide all students with a curriculum that meets their needs, and to ensure that access to the right curriculum does not depend on a student’s prior attainment, gender, ethnicity, social or cultural background or religion. In designing the curriculum, we consider all students to be equal.

Curriculum design at St Margaret Ward Catholic Academy (SMW)

St Margaret Ward Catholic Academy aims to provide a curriculum for all of our students that, as a minimum, meets our statutory obligations and wherever possible goes beyond these by providing extensive opportunities for personal development.

Our timetable spans ten days, with each day consisting of five one-hour lessons.

We operate a flexible system of allocation to teaching groups that is designed to cater for the benefits of mixed ability/setted teaching and the differing requirements of particular subjects.

From the beginning of Key Stage 3, we offer a broad and balanced taught curriculum, providing all students with opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding and to maximise their potential. The aim is that they become knowledgeable learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens serving others. Building on young people’s experiences from the primary phase, we offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects, including

Religious Education as a core subject for all. Literacy, particularly Reading, Oracy and Numeracy are all important within and across our curriculum.

“Excellence is a Habit” is central to our entire curriculum whereby students are guided and encouraged to self-regulate their own actions and approach to their learning and the way in which they conduct themselves throughout the school in general and to life beyond the classroom.

From the very start of the secondary phase, our aims are to:

- support and nurture all young people to be the best version of themselves they can be in all aspects of their lives using our guiding Lasallian values as our foundations.
- achieve high standards.
- develop independent learners.
- challenge and motivate.
- encourage aspiration, ambition and participation.
- develop knowledge, understanding and skills in all subjects and curriculum opportunities.

At Key Stage 3 all students study Art and Design, Drama, English Language, English Literature, Geography, History, ICT, Mathematics, Modern Foreign Languages, Music, Physical Education (including Dance), Religious Education, Science and Technology (Graphics, Food Technology, Product Design and Electronics) and our Touching Hearts curriculum.

In the majority of subject areas, students are placed in mixed ability classes. Levels of attainment provided by the primary schools and our own early baseline assessment data allows us to place students in regularly reviewed appropriate groups and for teaching and learning to be tailored to the needs of individuals from the beginning of Year 7.

From Year 10, there is an opportunity for students to enjoy a more personalised experience by making informed choices about the subjects they wish to pursue to a higher level from a wide field of academic and vocational courses. For some, this includes following an English Baccalaureate programme.

All students in Years 10 and 11 study English Language and Literature, Mathematics, Science and Religious Education at GCSE, History or Geography together with a core entitlement to Physical Education and our bespoke Touching Hearts.

We encourage and support our students in achieving excellent GCSE grades in subjects that will allow them to meet the Progress 8 measure and qualify for the English Baccalaureate, where appropriate.

In addition to the compulsory element of the taught curriculum, students choose to follow further courses that match their abilities, interests, skills and aspirations. Courses may be drawn from the following:

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Additional English and Maths, Art & Design, Enterprise/Business Studies, Computer Science, Digital ICT, Drama, Electronics, Food Studies, French, Geography, Graphics, Health and Social Care, History, Music, Physical Education and Product Design.

Vocational Education

There are some school based optional courses that have a strong vocational focus, including BTECs, NCFE Level 1 and 2 qualifications and OCR Technical qualifications.

The Options process

Students selecting their optional courses ready for teaching from Year 10 are provided with course details via the “options booklet” which is distributed at the start of the options process in Year 9. An options assembly, a parents’ evening, a designated Microsoft Teams Channel and individual student interviews also form part of the process. Responsibility for providing additional advice lies with Year 9 tutors, the Year 9 Head of Year, the CIAG team and the Senior Leaders in charge of Year 9, CIAG and the curriculum.

Individual student interviews with members of the SLT, followed by a careers interview, if appropriate, form part of the process and helps to ensure that suitable choices are being made in line with future aspirations.

The outcomes from this process are used to construct timetable blocks. The number of classes (in each subject) and the range of subjects in each block are designed to maximise the number of students who can study all of their preferred subjects dependent on their suitability for the courses they have selected.

Subjects which are unpopular will not run. We usually consider ten students to be the absolute minimum number for which a class could run. We reserve the right to re-allocate students by using their reserve choice(s) when their first choice is not viable.

Once the blocks are formed the subjects in each block remain fixed. Additional classes can however be added to blocks if the demand for a subject in that block is high and staffing availability allows for this.

The sixth form curriculum is planned and agreed by the Curriculum Managers and the Principals of the schools/academies who, together, form the Trinity Sixth Form. The chair of the Trinity Sixth Form’s Curriculum Managers’ group co-ordinates regular meetings and oversees the decision-making process to ensure that the Post-16 courses and the enrichment opportunities on offer provide a broad and balanced curriculum that allows for progression to Higher Education. A mix of academic and vocational subjects and qualifications are on offer across the three centres and are identified below:

Trinity Sixth Form 2025-2026		
Core Aim subjects		Complementary/Enrichment activity
A Levels	Vocational	
Art	Applied Science	Charity fund-raising
Biology	Business Studies (single or double)	Core Maths
Business Studies	Creative Art	Clubs (Eco/Book etc)
Chemistry	Digital Media	Core RE
Computing	Health and Social Care (AAQ, double or triple)	Debate
Classics	Law	English or Maths GCSE resit
Drama	Performing Arts (Music)	English Speaking Board
Economics	Soccer School	Extended Project Qualification
English Language		Guest speakers – Speakers 4 Schools
English Literature		HE+ with Cambridge University
French		Independent Learning Programme, including appraisal process, UCAS guidance
Further Maths		Law online internships
Geography		Leadership opportunities
German		Literacy Champions
Government and Politics		Mentoring – academic
History		Mentoring - pastoral
Mathematics		MOOCs
Music		National Citizen Service
Philosophy and Ethics		Sixth Form Newsletter
Physics		Summer schools
Physical education		Unifrog – careers guidance
Product Design		University visits
Psychology		Visiting university lecturers
Sociology		Volunteering
		Whole year group event organisation
		Work experience/placements

Specific entry criteria applies to the Trinity Sixth Form and to particular post-16 courses. All students who apply for a place should be mindful of these entry requirements before making an application and whilst completing Year 11 to ensure they meet the required standards.

Following CIAG guidance, open evenings and individual interviews throughout Year 11, part of the application process to the Trinity Sixth Form involves identifying preferred subject choices from which “option blocks” are created on the basis of a “best fit” model where the aim is to facilitate the maximum number of students’ subject choices/combinations. Where

a student's choice(s) cannot be accommodated, reserve choices will be considered after discussion with the student.

Where class sizes are too small to make a course viable, a course will not run and alternative subject choice(s) will need to be made.

The broad range of enrichment opportunities throughout Years 12 and 13 are designed to enhance students' learning, develop their independence as young adults and prepare them for life beyond the Academy and at university, in training or employment. Supplementary courses are available as is a strong careers, advice and guidance programme designed to ensure effective progression from Key Stage 5.

The Catholic life and Lasallian values remain an integral part of the sixth form curriculum and as our most senior students, there is an expectation to lead by example and model our distinct characteristics.

Further information regarding the Post-16 curriculum and the sixth form in general can be found on the Academy's website*, in the Trinity Sixth Form prospectus and from each of the individual partner schools/academies.

* <https://stmargaretward.co.uk/sixth-form/>

Key Stage 3/4 Class sizes

When building timetable blocks and creating classes we aim to maintain an average number of thirty students in each class, although this number can vary and is significantly less in some areas.

In practical subjects, the size of the room and availability of resources will determine the maximum class size. All relevant national recommendations for maximum safe class sizes are adhered to.

Key Stage 3/4 Setting

Where students are taught in sets, it is done where subject leaders and the Senior Leadership Team believe it is advantageous to the learning of students. The responsibility for placing students into sets lies with the subject leaders and is done initially by using Key Stage 2 information and our own early baseline assessment. Setting is reviewed regularly to ensure each individual student is best placed to maximise his or her learning potential.

In other curriculum areas, students are taught on a mixed ability basis.

Parents wishing to appeal against the placement of their child into a particular set should do so in writing to the subject leader in the first instance. If they are not satisfied with the response they should then write to the Principal highlighting their concerns. In this instance, the Principal is likely to delegate the issue to the Senior Leader who line manages the subject(s) concerned.

In Year admissions

When accepting “in year” admissions we will make every reasonable effort to match the curriculum which the student has studied in their previous school. Any inability to do so will only occur if we do not run a specific course or subject, all of the classes for a subject have reached a limit based on safety or if we have strong pastoral concerns about interactions with specific students.

When deciding on the student’s sets we will take into account information from their previous school and from any tests conducted on entry to St Margaret Ward Catholic Academy. We cannot guarantee to match their previous set if some classes are already full, but every effort will be made to ensure that their curriculum meets their needs.

Complaints relating to the curriculum

All complaints relating to the curriculum should be directed to the relevant subject leader and, if not resolved, to the Senior Leader i/c of the curriculum and then the Principal. If these are not dealt with to the satisfaction of the parents/carers then the Academy’s complaints procedure can be brought in to force.

Alternative Provision

Students who find it particularly difficult to engage with the Academy’s curriculum and/or Academy’s expectations of behaviour for learning may be considered suitable for alternative provision whereby their timetable is reviewed and a bespoke offer put in to place either temporarily or on a permanent basis. External agencies and/or providers may be considered and utilised to enhance the individual student’s provision. At the heart of this highly individualised process lies the student and their specific needs.

Related policies:

PSHE/Touching Hearts, CIAG, Teaching & Learning, Assessment and Reporting, Equal opportunities, SEND, Complaints procedure, Trinity Sixth Form Admissions.

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