



Innovation, Aspiration and Excellence

Curriculum Policy

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1. Our Curriculum – an overview

Houlton School is an academy within the [Transforming Lives Educational Trust \(TLET\)](#); we define the term 'curriculum' in its broadest sense; therefore, our curriculum comprises all learning and other experiences that are planned for our pupils. Annually, we review the intent of the curriculum, its implementation and how its impact is assessed through our Staff Forum and our Academy Improvement Management (AIM) Board. We plan the content pupils need to know; how we deliver and sequence the teaching and learning; and the skills required to access the curriculum's content with confidence. We then evaluate the impact of the curriculum's impact through formal and informal assessment (see Assessment Policy), quality assurance (e.g. learning visits, work scrutiny and TLET Health Checks) and independently administered pupil, staff and parent voice, which is triangulated through both Trust-level comparisons and national comparisons via our external provider.

Our academy's curriculum is underpinned by the [Secondary National Curriculum Programmes of Study for England \(2014\)](#). There are also areas of our academy curriculum that extend pupils' learning beyond the requirements of the NC PoS (for example, our offer of discrete teaching in the Performing and Expressive Arts as an historic link to our campus' heritage as a global centre of excellence for communications). This supports our mission to provide an **excellent**, World Class education through an **innovative** and **aspirational** experience for all.

2. Curriculum Intent

We provide an ambitious, broad and balanced curriculum for all, in accordance with [our Academy's ESFA funding agreement](#).

We promote high academic standards that lead to the rapid and sustained progress from individuals' end of Key Stage 2 starting points. The development of widely-educated, confident and responsible young people who are prepared today for the world of tomorrow is the core aim of our curriculum for **excellence**.

In line with the Government's expectations for all schools in England, our pupils experience a curriculum with the rigour of the [English Baccalaureate \(EBacc\)](#) at its heart. All pupils are expected to fill all three slots of the Progress 8 EBacc element, and almost all are entered for the full, academically rigorous [EBacc suite of qualifications](#). Therefore, pupils prepare at Key Stage 3 for the expectation that at Key Stage 4, their core curriculum will include: **English Language; English Literature; Mathematics; Biology; Chemistry; Physics; Geography and/or History; Spanish and/or French**; as well as two further qualifications from across the rest of our KS4 offer (10 qualifications in total). Within this framework, pupil choice and aspiration is prioritised to give each individual the opportunity to proceed to destinations that

meet their hopes and dreams for their futures. Pupils then transition into our Sixth Form, or other local post-16 providers, depending on their future aspirations and career plans.

Our curriculum prepares pupils for a rapidly changing world whilst learning from the best that has been thought, said and written. We promote and recognise success in a wide range of extra-curricular activities (e.g. The Brilliant Club Scholars' Programme; Anti-Bullying Ambassador Programme from the Diana Award, Warwickshire Well-being Peer Champion Award; the accredited World Class Schools programme; the Duke of Edinburgh's Award; local, national and international educational visits; graded Music examinations; Shakespeare Schools' Festival and annual whole-school productions; county sports fixtures) to enable pupils to discover and develop lifelong interests and talents. This rich set of experiences develops pupils' strength of character, their cultural capital and enables them to become empathetic, resilient and independent young people.

3. Curriculum Implementation

Pupil Grouping

What's the Houlton difference? Firstly, there are no stressful, high-stakes tests or examinations for entry to Houlton School. We are a local school, for local children, and we want everyone to be included in our outstanding provision, regardless of their attainment levels when they arrive. We assess pupils' inherent cognitive ability on arrival through nationally standardised (GL Assessment) CAT4, Reading, Spelling and Mathematics tests, and diagnose where they are with their reading and spelling so that we can set ambitious targets for their progress with us and ensure they have equity in terms of their access to our exciting offer.

Pupils at Houlton are grouped in mixed-attainment classes of up to 30. Successive researchers over decades have found time and again that (despite a common misconception that strict setting or streaming pupils will lead to the best progress and outcomes) **children make the most and fastest progress when grouped with pupils with a range of different talents, attainment levels and skills**. They are also proven to be much happier and less anxious during their education as a result of being grouped in this way for their learning.

Our pedagogy is based on the latest research from the Education Endowment Foundation: [Education Endowment Foundation \(EEF\)](#).

In an established school it can be difficult to challenge the status quo and 'received wisdoms' based on parents' own experiences of how schools were organised in the past. However, evidence from [John Hattie \(Visible Learning\)](#) and [Scheeren & Bosker's work on school effectiveness](#) finds that teaching pupils different

materials in strict attainment sets has one of the weakest impacts of everything a teacher might do in terms of pupils' progress and attainment.

We have, therefore, 'taken the pledge' in support of the work of eminent educational researchers [University College London \(UCL\)](#), which confirms what academics have known for years: enquiry-based, mixed-attainment teaching leads to the fastest progress, best conduct, highest esteem, and greatest self-confidence for children.



UCL's work has found no positive impact of grouping pupils by attainment, even though it can be hard to challenge some parents' and carers' intuitions that this 'must' be the best way to improve pupils' progress and experience at school as this may reflect their own experience of attending school; however, at Houlton we have the great privilege of being able to start as a brand new Free School from the evidence rather than crooked thinking and wonky intuitions – and we have.

A prospective parent recently asked our Principal, 'When will you set the children so that they can be really pushed?'. This crooked premise is understandable in Rugby Borough, one of few districts in the country where there remains an 11+ examination and selective (grammar) schools. However, the answer? We **never will**: as successive research finds that this way of working does not support progress, and even hinders it in most cases. The evidence demonstrates that in mixed-attainment groups pupils can make between six months and a year's **more** progress across Year 7-11. Of at least equal importance is that pupils were also happier, less stressed and much less anxious when grouped in mixed-attainment classes. This is complemented by a programme for our highest attaining pupils, who are offered the opportunity to take part in the [national Brilliant Club scholars' programme](#) throughout Key Stage 3 - university-style investigations, delivered by PhD students, including visits to prestigious universities and the opportunity to have essays graded by university professors.

Our vision for our Houlton's energetic and immersive curriculum is inspired by impressive, research-led great thinking, such as that from [Mary Myatt](#) and [Professor Dame Alison Peacock](#). All teaching at Houlton encourages 'deep learning without limits' through our use of 'the Big Question', which has **curiosity** and **story-telling** at its heart. Children acquire knowledge through investigation and then revisit key facts and skills throughout the academic year/key stage so that memorability and skilful encoding within the brain becomes second nature.

Eminent Cognitive Psychologist [Daniel T Willingham](#) once wrote, 'Our brains privilege story...human beings are curious. Thinking is hard'. But we know that **children like challenge** so long as the threat is low. We provide a safe space for children to think hard and evolve into the young adults they become by the time they leave us in Year 13.

The timetable

The Academy operates a two-week timetable (See Appendix 1). There are five 60-minute periods per day as well as 20-minute slots each day for form-time or assemblies at the end of the school day. There are 50 periods in each fortnightly timetable cycle and ten college/assembly slots. There is a ten-minute registration, check-in and preparation slot each morning.

The timings of our school day are as detailed below:

8:30am	Pupils Expected on site
8:40 – 8:50	Morning Registration
8:50 – 9:50	Period 1
9:50 – 10:50	Period 2
10:50 – 11:10	<i>Mid-morning break</i>
11:10 – 12:10pm	Period 3
12:10 – 1:10	Period 4
1:10 – 1:50	<i>Lunchtime</i>
1:50 – 2:50	Period 5 (inc. legal afternoon registration)
2:50 – 3:10	Assembly / Tutor Programme Time
3:10pm	School day ends

4. General Principles

In addition to the formal, taught curriculum, an extensive range of co-curricular clubs and activities, subject enrichment and trips and visits are offered to all pupils:

- Aspects of religious education are covered through form time, assemblies and the statutory Religious Studies curriculum. Houlton School does not have a specific religious character, so this is be a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes pupils' cultural awareness of the major world faiths and religions in order that they become accepting, global citizens who embrace diversity.

Religious Studies is a discrete, timetabled opportunity in both Key stage 3 and 4 (see Appendix 1). We follow the [Warwickshire Agreed Syllabus for RE](#).

- There is a programme of Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) education throughout a pupil's time at Houlton. This is accessed through form time, assemblies, collapsed-curriculum days and specific events/interviews with specialist staff. This programme begins in Year 7.
- At Key Stage 4, pupils continue to be taught in mixed-attainment groups for all of their 'options' subjects and for English. In Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics pupils are also taught in mixed-attainment groups, though in Year 11 there is an increased focus on the specific rubric of the tier of GCSE paper (Foundation or Higher) for which pupils will be specifically preparing at this stage where relevant.
- Up-to-date [Learning Journeys](#) are available for all subjects on our website.
- At post-16, in the Sixth Form, pupils are guided towards courses that will maximize their opportunities for success based on the qualifications they hold on entry. A mixture of GCE 'A' level and applied qualifications are offered, which can be taken in combination.

Key Stage 3 (KS3 – Years 7-9)

KS3 is delivered over **three years**.

Our curriculum is designed to allow all pupils to experience a wide a range of subjects in Key Stage 3; therefore, all pupils study an ambitious, broad curriculum of 50 periods a fortnight:

English Language and English Literature (7); Mathematics (7), Science (Biology / Chemistry / Physics – 6), History (4), Geography (4), French (3), Spanish (3), Religious Studies (2), Computer Science (2), Physical Education (3), Design and Technology (1); Food Preparation and Nutrition (1), Art and Design (2), Performing Arts: Acting (1); Performing Arts Dance (1); Music (2); PHRSE (inc. LORIC, Relationship & Sex Education, Careers and Citizenship - 1).

Key Stage 4 (KS4 – Years 10 and 11)

KS4 is conducted over **two years**.

In line with the government's expectations, all pupils must continue to study a broad, balanced and academically rigorous curriculum at KS4, with the [EBacc](#) at its core. This begins with **GCSE Religious Studies [Short course] (1), PHRSE inc. Careers Education (1) and Core Physical Education (3).**

Next, all pupils¹ study:

GCSE English Literature (4); GCSE English Language (4); GCSE Mathematics (8), GCSE Biology (3), GCSE Chemistry (3), GCSE Physics (3), at least one of either **History** or **Geography (5)**, and at least one of either **French** or **Spanish (5)**.

[8 core qualifications].

Pupils will study **10 Level 2 qualifications** in total; therefore, in addition to their core 8 GCSEs, pupils are then able to choose **two** further subjects from this list:

Computer Science; Design and Technology; Food Preparation and Nutrition; Music; Performing Arts – Acting; Performing Arts – Dance; Physical Education, Religious Studies [Full course] (5 hours per option subject).

[10 qualifications]

The Principal has powers in relation to the day-to-day management of the curriculum by virtue of this office and may delegate this responsibility to the Vice Principal. Any requests relating to an adaptation of a pupil's curriculum must be made in writing to the Vice Principal in the first instance. Where necessary, the Principal will make the final decision relating to any changes. This may include the number of subjects studied and the qualifications for which pupils are entered.

A table of the Key Stage 3-4 curriculum is at Appendix 1 below.

PHRSE and Careers Guidance

Our Personal Health, Relationships and Sex Education (PHRSE) curriculum includes Careers Guidance. A comprehensive learning journey and scheme of learning for this is available to view on our website and a statutory separate policy covers our approach to Relationships and Sex Education.

The Sixth Form (Years 12 and 13)

Our Sixth Form curriculum will be further refined ahead of our first cohort's entry in **September 2026**. This will respond to the local and national expectations and needs at that time. It is envisaged that pupils will be able to study GCE 'A' levels, Applied qualifications, or a combination of these at Houlton School, as we hope to attract students to join us from all local secondary schools, but in particular from the two 11-16 schools, one of which is our nearest

¹ On very rare occasions, an alternative curriculum is offered for children with an EHCP for High Needs that means they may be unable to access the full curriculum. In this instance, a specialist programme is created in partnership at a professionals meeting led by the Vice Principal and Head of Faculty for Inclusion (SENDCo).

geographical neighbour and specialises in the arts, so we will ensure there are appropriate progression pathways for these pupils at Houlton's School Sixth Form Centre.

5. Curriculum Impact

The impact of the academy's curriculum is assessed by considering:

- Full details of the approach to assessment can be found in the separate policy. In summary, at KS3 Houlton School's 4-level descriptors (SC, RI, Gd, WC) are used to describe how 'on track' pupils are with their understanding and knowledge of the curriculum. Internal progress data is collected twice each academic year (more frequently in Year 11). At KS4, end of Year 11 Targets are generated for pupils' progress based on the likelihood of their achieving particular grades at FFT20 (Minimum Expected Grades - MEGs) and FFT5 (Aspirational Grades - ASGs). In the Sixth form, data will be collected at least three times a year and L3VA Value Added Scores (MEGs) and L3VA +1 (ASGs).
- Progress data from preliminary examinations (commonly referred to in other contexts as 'mocks') in examination courses.
- Progress data from external examination results in GCSE and non-GCSE qualifications at Key Stage 4.
- The range and variety of extra-curricular and enrichment activities and pupils' participation in them as tracked by the Houlton School P.R.I.D.E. Award.
- Pupils' 'Getting it Right' awards scores and attendance data inform an analysis of their personal development, conduct and safety.
- The retention of pupils from Year 11 into the Sixth Form.
- The numbers of pupils applying to join the Academy in Year 7.
- The destinations of our leavers at Years 11 and 13.
- Annual reviews of the PHRSE and assembly programme.

Should parent/carer(s) require any further information about the curriculum they should contact the Principal at principal@houltonschool.org.uk

6. Complaints Procedure

If a parent/carer feels that the academy is failing to comply with its legal requirements as to the curriculum or is unreasonable in the way that it complies with them, he/she can make a

formal complaint, in writing to the Principal in the first instance in line with [Houlton School's Complaints Policy](#).

7. Appendix 1: Visual Curriculum Plan

Curriculum Plan							Curriculum Plan		Key Stage 5		
Key Stage 3			Key Stage 4				Hours	Year 12	Year 13		
Hours	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y10						
1	English Language / English Literature (7)	English Language / English Literature (7)	English Language / English Literature (7)	English Language / English Literature (8)	English Language / English Literature (8)	1	Option 1 taught (9)	Option 1 taught (9)			
2						2					
3						3					
4						4					
5						5					
6						6					
7						7					
8	PA Acting (1)	PA Acting (1)	PA Acting (1)			8					
9	Mathematics (7)	Mathematics (7)	Mathematics (7)	Mathematics (8)	Mathematics (8)	9	Option 1 NTSP (1)	Option 1 NTSP (1)			
10						10					
11						11					
12						12					
13						13					
14						14					
15						15					
16	Science (6)	Science (6)	Science (6)	Biology, Chemistry, Physics (9)	Biology, Chemistry, Physics (9)	16	Option 2 taught (9)	Option 2 taught (9)			
17						17					
18						18					
19						19					
20						20					
21						21					
22						22					
23	PHSRE (1)	PHRSE (1)	PHRSE (1)			23	Option 2 NTSP (1)	Option 2 NTSP (1)			
24	Core PE (3)	Core PE (3)	Core PE (3)	RS Short Course (1)	RS Short Course (1)	24	Option 3 taught (9)	Option 3 taught (9)			
25						25					
26						26					
27						27					
28						28					
29						29					
30						30					
31	Religious Studies (2)	Religious Studies (2)	Religious Studies (2)	PHSRE (1)	PHSRE (1)	31	Option 3 NTSP (1)	Option 2 NTSP (1)			
32	MFL: French/Literacy (3)	MFL: French (3)	MFL: French (3)	Core PE (3)	Core PE (3)	32				Academic Enrichment (5)	Assembly/PSHE (1)
33	MFL: Spanish (3)	MFL: Spanish (3)	MFL: Spanish (3)	Option A: Geography or History (5)	Option A: Geography or History (5)	33				Supervised Independent Study (5)	
34						34					
35						35					
36						36					
37						37					
38						38					
39						39					
40	History (4)	History (4)	History (4)	Option B: French or Spanish (5)	Option B: French or Spanish (5)	40	Assembly/PSHE (1)	Supervised Independent Study (12)			
41	Geography (4)	Geography (4)	Geography (4)	Option C (5)	Option C (5)	41	Sixth Form Sport (2)	Sixth Form Sport (2)			
42						42					
43						43					
44						44					
45						45					
46						46					
47						47					
48	Computing / Broadcast (2)	Computing / Broadcast (2)	Computing / Broadcast (2)	Option D (5)	Option D (5)	48	Supervised Independent Study (12)	Independent Study (12)			
49	Art (2)	Art (2)	Art (2)			49					
50	DT/Food (2)	DT/Food (2)	DT/Food (2)			50					
51	PA Music (2)	PA Music (2)	PA Music (2)			51					
52	PA Dance (1)	PA Dance (1)	PA Dance (1)			52					