

English Department

Curriculum Statement



Intent

The English Department curriculum is designed to develop ambitious, independent and diligent learners. It does so in a way that fully embraces the school ethos. Students are encouraged to:

- Develop an enthusiasm for reading and writing and share that with teachers and peers. (Intellect)
- Become creative, autonomous and critical thinkers. (Courage)
- Explore how literature opens your mind to broaden your cultural, social and historical understanding. (Empathy)

All three Key Stage Curricula maps are designed to promote and celebrate these aspects of the school motto, with opportunities for cross-curricular links embedded. They are also designed to promote challenge and progress through a variety of Literature and Language schemes. Within these are opportunities for stretching the most able, including writing and presenting competitions, and numerous extracurricular events.

Implementation

a) Content & Skills

The KS3, Year 9, KS4 and KS5 IB Curricula (see pages 4-9 of the Department Handbook) are coherently planned and sequenced in a way that gives students the experience of a range of challenging whole texts. Language skills are taught both explicitly in discrete non-fiction units and implicitly through responses to literature, and in a way that builds on previous learning and knowledge. Students who are not showing expected progress are identified by classroom teachers and monitored and supported both in class and also through intervention support lessons in Y7, Y8 and Y11. Reading is promoted and monitored through regular timetabled library lessons in Year 7, and continued in Years 8 and 9; students also maintain a Reading Journal in their planners. This is overseen by classroom teachers as well as being promoted by tutors in Academic Monitoring. Parents are also asked to encourage their child's reading via this Journal.

b) Learning environment

The English department has seven specialist teaching rooms, each well decorated with informative, useful display work and resourced with stationery and a variety of teaching aids including interactive whiteboards and mini-whiteboard sets. Students are taught in form groups by the same English teacher for the first two years to provide continuity. They are set again into mixed ability groups for Year 9 (by the Director of Studies) and again in Year 10, this time by the English HoD, allowing for the even distribution of the highest achieving students, whose input is then spread across the classes. 1:1 in-class/additional lesson support is provided for targeted students by the SEND team, with whom the Dept liaises closely. There is a wealth of extra-curricular opportunities: Creative Writing Club; four different Reading Groups; English Prefects offering mentoring; visiting lecturers; theatre and museum trips.

c) Assessment & Feedback

Assessment is regular and student-focused. Dialogue marking is central across all year groups, with students encouraged to reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement. Mark schemes are clear and simple and feature in all students' books, which from Years 7-9 are ones that we have designed and tailor-made for our curriculum. Marks are centralised on spreadsheets so that teachers and Key Stage leaders can monitor progress and develop centralised intervention strategies. Small group 'Skills Support' sessions happen in Year 7 (with a focus on reading), Year 8 and Year 11. Work is also assessed regularly in the Sixth Form, and small group 'Unseen Text Booster' sessions are offered in the run up to exams.

d) Monitoring

There is a centralised system of assessment spreadsheets across all year groups, which are monitored by the three Key Stage Leaders, and used to inform intervention. This is led by the Leaders in conjunction with the school Literacy Coordinator, and takes the form of small group sessions at lunchtimes and after school. Reports are also monitored for consistency between classes.

In addition to the annual formal Performance Management lesson observations, formal Work Scrutiny and Learning Walks occur as part of Learning Team Department Reviews, the most recent of which happened in the Summer Term of 2019, as well as Department Key Stage reviews, such as a KS3 one that happened in July 2022. Learning Walks are also recorded as informal observations in BlueSky.

All teachers maintain Context Sheets allowing them to track and reflect on the latest personalised information on their students, including SEND data, and these are centralised so the HoD and KS Leaders can monitor and support differentiated provision. Extra-curricular opportunities are promoted to encourage the most able - an active English Prefect system means that there are Junior and Senior Book Clubs, Creative Writing and Poetry Clubs and numerous 'Culture Club' trips to the theatre, opera, dance and more.

Impact

English outcomes at both GCSE and IB are consistently impressive (2022 - GCSE Lang 7-9 67% [highest since the new spec introduced]; Lit 7-9 64%; HL and SL IB 4-7 100%). This year eight Year 13 students chose to continue their study of either English or Film at a number of Russell Group Universities. Over the last eleven years, there have also been thirteen students who gained places at Oxford or Cambridge to read English Literature/Language. We feel the rigorous, varied nature of Literature studies within the IB, including the demanding research project - the Extended Essay - provides students with an exceptionally good grounding for undergraduate level education.

We have also been a member of the Prince's Trust Research Programme for the last decade, an association which has offered several members of the department the opportunity to run projects that are beneficial to themselves professionally and to their students, including one that saw the introduction of a high-level lecture series, another that improved the quality and effectiveness of our intervention strategies and the most recent that encouraged us to improve the diversity of our curriculum.

Finally, the department's belief in reading being the key to improved exam outcomes and to the development of well-rounded, intellectually curious and empathetic people is borne out in a number of our initiatives. We work closely with Mrs Carey, our innovative and inspiring school librarian, who oversees the delivery and content of regular library lessons for years 7 to 9, and the maintaining of Reader's Journals (in all students' planners). There are four Literary Prize Shadowing Reading Groups (Bexley Literacy Award, Carnegie, Excelsior and the Trinity Schools Book Award), a Junior and Senior Book Club, numerous themed reading weeks throughout the year (Mental Health Awareness, LGBTQ+ events) and of course the annual World Book Day which is celebrated across the school by students and staff. This features, amongst other things, the 'Read for Good' Sponsored Read, raising money for books for children in hospital, visiting author workshops, Prefect-led book quizzes and the school wide 'Drop Everything and Read'. In 2020 a 'Virtual Library' allowed students to discuss books and join virtual author events. A click and collect system allowed students to continue borrowing books when the school was closed. The latest library lending statistics show a marked year-on-year improvement and we think reflect the growing reading culture that we are so keen to foster at Bexley Grammar School.