



Curriculum Rationale

The Varndean curriculum - why do we make KS4 three years long?

At Varndean we set the highest expectations for our students whatever their background. We have worked hard with our senior and middle leadership teams to ensure our curriculum is ambitious for all of our students and provides the breadth and depth they need to succeed in examinations and in life. Our intent and implementation statement sets out the principles we work by and these are reflected in the statements for each of our departments. [☰ The Varndean Curriculum - visual](#)

Integral to our ambitions is our decision to run a two year KS3. We are adamant that KS3 must build on KS2 and prepare students for KS4. In doing so it must make demands of students that stretch them academically, engage their interests and introduce them to the wonders that the curriculum can reveal. Our subject leaders have worked hard to develop curricula built on these principles and this means that all of our students study at least two modern languages, history and geography as separate disciplines and four arts subjects including the chance for everyone to learn a musical instrument.

We make sure that these programmes of study are well sequenced so that the expectations of the national curriculum are met and students progress well and quickly learn the skills and knowledge they need to progress to GCSE courses at the start of year 9. We don't believe we should hold them back. The breadth and depth of our KS3 curriculum is supported by our unique specialist schools programme, LED days, the enrichment week and our extensive extra curricular programmes, all of which extend and enrich our students' experiences especially in languages, the arts and sport.

These ambitions underpin our approach to KS4. Organising KS4 over three years allows us to continue to offer our students four option subjects. This is critical to maintaining breadth as it means that the vast majority of our students study modern languages, a creative subject (arts or technology) and history or geography right through to GCSE. We are clear that a 2 year KS4 would limit student choices to three options and so reduce the proportions of students who follow these routes to the detriment of the breadth and depth of the curriculum.

We want all of our students to make these choices and increasingly that is the case. In 2017 EBACC entry was c40% of the cohort yet we are now in a position where over 70% of our students are opting for one foreign language or more. This figure will continue to increase and our aim is to have languages for all. With this in mind we have transformed the approach to teaching languages at KS3, strengthened our heritage languages programme and extended language enrichment to support this objective.



We have the same aspirations for the creative subjects. Already 75% of our students study at least one and we would like this to increase so that it matches the 95% who complete history or geography.

Our students are well prepared for their further studies by this structure and we are confident that this is the right approach for them.

Gareth Hughes
Deputy Headteacher

Sources:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-and-early-education-inspection-update-academic-year-2021-to-2022/schools-and-early-education-inspection-update-september-2021#curriculum-narrowing-and-key-stage-3>

<https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/09/making-curriculum-decisions-in-the-best-interests-of-children/>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/what-works-at-key-stage-4-two-or-three-years-of-study>