



CURRICULUM POLICY

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Date of Approval: 8 th March 2026	Approved By: Georgina Mendez (Proprietor)
Effective Date: 8 th March 2026	Next Review Date: 9 th March 2028

Curriculum Policy

Introduction

At Orion School, we recognise that many of our pupils arrive having experienced significant challenges in mainstream education, particularly in relation to their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). As a small and nurturing school, we place relationships at the centre of everything we do. We understand that pupils must feel safe, valued and understood before they are able to engage meaningfully with learning.

Our approach is therefore relational and trauma-informed, prioritising connection and trust as the foundation for both personal growth and academic success. Staff take time to know each pupil as an individual, enabling them to respond with consistency, empathy and high expectations. Through this, pupils are supported to rebuild confidence, develop emotional security and re-engage with education.

We believe that personal development and academic achievement are equally important and deeply interconnected. When pupils develop confidence, resilience and the ability to manage their emotions, they are better able to succeed in their learning. Our curriculum reflects this belief and is designed to support pupils to achieve success both in school and in their future lives.

Curriculum Intent

The curriculum at Orion School is designed to provide a safe, structured and supportive environment in which pupils can re-engage with education, develop emotionally and achieve meaningful outcomes. It is built around two interrelated strands: academic achievement and personal development.

The academic achievement strand focuses on developing knowledge, skills and recognised qualifications. Pupils follow personalised pathways that reflect their individual starting points, needs and aspirations. These pathways may include GCSE courses, Functional Skills qualifications, vocational courses such as BTEC or Motor Vehicle Studies and AQA Unit Awards. This ensures that all pupils, regardless of their prior experiences, can achieve success that is both meaningful and appropriate.

Alongside this, the Personal Development Curriculum supports pupils to develop the social, emotional and life skills necessary for success beyond school. This includes supporting pupils to understand and regulate their emotions, build positive relationships, develop resilience and become more independent. This strand is particularly important given the SEMH needs of many of our pupils and underpins all aspects of school life.

These two strands are intentionally interwoven. Progress in personal development enables pupils to engage more successfully with academic learning, while academic success reinforces confidence and self-belief. The curriculum is therefore designed to be relational, inclusive, adaptive and ambitious, ensuring that all pupils are supported to succeed.

The curriculum also plays a central role in safeguarding. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including online safety, healthy relationships and how to recognise and respond to risk. Through the Personal Development curriculum and wider school

experiences, pupils develop the knowledge, confidence and understanding needed to make safe choices and seek support when required.

Reading is prioritised across the curriculum as a fundamental life skill and a key enabler of learning. Pupils are supported to develop reading fluency, comprehension and confidence through targeted interventions, regular opportunities to read and exposure to a wide range of texts. Vocabulary development is explicitly taught across subjects to ensure pupils can access and engage with the full curriculum.

The curriculum actively promotes equality, diversity and inclusion. Pupils are supported to understand and respect differences, including the protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010. Learning experiences challenge stereotypes and promote an inclusive culture where all pupils feel represented and valued.

A strong focus is placed on preparing pupils for adulthood. The curriculum supports pupils to develop independence, employability skills, decision-making and the ability to manage everyday challenges. Learning is designed to be meaningful and relevant, enabling pupils to apply their skills in real-life contexts and prepare for their next steps.

Curriculum Implementation

The curriculum at Orion School is implemented through a relational, adaptive and trauma-informed approach. Staff prioritise the development of strong, trusting relationships with pupils, recognising that this is essential for engagement and progress. Consistent routines, clear expectations and emotionally available adults help to create a safe and predictable environment in which pupils can learn.

The academic curriculum is delivered through a range of core and foundation subjects, including English, mathematics, science, history, art, physical education, PSHE, business studies, digital ICT and vocational subjects such as motor vehicle studies. Teaching is carefully adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils, ensuring that learning is accessible while maintaining appropriate levels of challenge.

In all subjects, the curriculum is carefully sequenced to ensure that knowledge and skills build progressively over time. Key concepts and vocabulary are revisited and reinforced to support long-term retention, enabling pupils to make connections in their learning and apply their knowledge with increasing confidence. Opportunities are planned for pupils to apply knowledge and skills across different subjects, supporting deeper understanding and making learning more meaningful.

Personal development is embedded throughout the school day and is not limited to discrete lessons. It is developed through pastoral support, daily interactions and explicit teaching. Pupils are supported to develop emotional regulation, communication skills and the ability to form positive relationships. Staff use restorative and therapeutic approaches to support behaviour, helping pupils to understand their actions and develop more effective ways of responding to challenges.

Teaching and learning at Orion School is informed by evidence-based practice, including Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction, while remaining responsive to the needs of pupils with SEMH. Lessons are structured and clearly sequenced, with new learning presented in manageable steps and supported through modelling, questioning and guided practice.

Frequent checks for understanding are used to ensure that pupils are secure in their learning, and opportunities for repetition and retrieval are built in to support long-term retention.

The curriculum is planned to use a “teaching backwards” approach, where clear end points are identified and learning is sequenced to enable pupils to achieve these outcomes. At the same time, teaching remains flexible and responsive, allowing staff to adapt in the moment to meet pupils’ emotional and learning needs.

Assessment is used as a supportive tool to inform teaching and monitor progress. Pupils are assessed regularly throughout the year, with a focus on their progress from individual starting points rather than comparison with others. Assessment information is used to identify gaps in learning, inform planning and provide appropriate support and intervention.

Curriculum Impact

The impact of the curriculum at Orion School is reflected in pupils who are increasingly engaged in learning and able to make sustained progress over time. Academically, pupils achieve outcomes that are appropriate to their individual pathways, gaining knowledge, skills and recognised qualifications that support their next steps.

Equally important is the impact on pupils’ personal development. Pupils develop greater confidence, improved emotional regulation and a stronger ability to build and maintain positive relationships. They become more resilient and better able to manage challenges, both within school and beyond.

As a result of this integrated approach, pupils leave Orion School as more confident, independent and capable young people. They are prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training, equipped not only with qualifications but also with the personal skills and self-belief needed to succeed.

Inclusion and Personalisation

Inclusion is central to the curriculum at Orion School. We recognise that pupils have a wide range of needs, particularly in relation to SEMH, and that many have experienced barriers to learning in the past. As a result, the curriculum is highly personalised to ensure that all pupils can access learning and experience success.

Baseline assessments are used to identify pupils’ strengths, needs and starting points. This information is then used to plan learning that is appropriately challenging and supportive. Pupils can follow flexible pathways and may move between levels as they develop. Additional support is provided where needed to ensure that pupils are able to make progress both academically and personally.

Pupils are encouraged to take an active role in their learning. Their views are sought through discussion and feedback, and this pupil voice is used to adapt teaching and curriculum design to ensure it remains relevant, engaging and effective

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development (SMSC)

The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is an integral part of the curriculum. Through a wide range of experiences, pupils are supported to reflect on their values, understand the perspectives of others and develop a sense of responsibility within society.

This aspect of the curriculum is particularly important in supporting pupils to build relationships, develop empathy and engage positively with the world around them. SMSC is embedded across all subjects and is further supported through pastoral work and enrichment opportunities.

Careers Education (CEIAG)

Careers education is an important part of the curriculum and is designed to support pupils in preparing for their future lives. Through a structured programme aligned with the Gatsby Benchmarks, pupils are supported to understand their strengths and interests, explore different pathways and make informed decisions about their next steps.

Political Impartiality

At Orion School, we are committed to maintaining political impartiality within the curriculum. Staff ensure that personal political views are not expressed or promoted, either directly or indirectly, through teaching or interactions with pupils. Any visiting speakers or external contributors are carefully vetted and monitored in line with the school's safeguarding procedures and No Platform Policy, ensuring compliance with the Prevent duty.

Where political issues arise within the curriculum or through wider school experiences, they are presented in a balanced and age-appropriate way. Pupils are supported to understand that a range of perspectives may exist and are encouraged to consider different viewpoints critically and respectfully. This may take place within lessons, discussions or enrichment activities.

We recognise that learning about political ideas, public institutions and democratic processes is an important part of pupils' development. Subjects such as history and PSHE provide opportunities to explore these areas in context, helping pupils to develop an understanding of fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect.

Throughout this, care is taken to ensure that pupils are not subject to indoctrination or undue influence. Instead, they are supported to develop their own informed views within a safe, respectful and balanced learning environment.

Strong Relationships

At Orion School, our curriculum is built on the understanding that pupils learn best when they feel safe, supported and valued. By placing relationships at the heart of our approach and giving equal importance to personal development and academic achievement, we provide a curriculum that enables every pupil to succeed.

