

INTENT: A powerful, knowledge-rich curriculum

By the end of their education, a student of English at Dixons Fazakerley Academy:

- DFA students of English will be competent, critical and literate readers and writers of texts. Students will be well-versed in a range of fictional forms such as poetry, plays, novels and short stories; non-fiction forms studied will include letters, speeches, diaries, essays and articles. They will know how to craft their writing to match a wide range of audiences, purposes and forms. Students will be able to make judicious choices regarding voice, language, structure and grammar to control readers' responses.
- DFA students of English will have a highly developed ability to analyse texts. Students will be able to express critical and exploratory interpretations and views of texts, using the disciplinary knowledge of a literary critic.

Our uniting 'sentence' is:

The English Department inspired the students of Dixons Fazakerley Academy to be: empathetic, inquisitive and insightful readers; skilful, creative writers; and confident, competent orators.

In order to deliver a powerful, knowledge-rich curriculum we have selected knowledge by:

- Considering, debating and making decisions regarding the threshold concepts and powerful knowledge within literature. This includes professional associations and through the Dixons Academies Trust Cross-Cutting meetings. Specifically, this has included consulting a range of texts on the significance of the literary canon including a range of texts enabling students to prepare for university and ideas from a range of literary periods, such as: medieval, Shakespearean, Victorian to contemporary debates on colonialism, feminism, racism and prejudice.
- Making decisions about which contexts to privilege in our curriculum, based on the criteria that these should open up students' ability to explore literature and 'English' as a discipline by making connections across these contexts. Additionally, these contexts are foundational in terms of building students' schema, both during their study at DFA and during further study at Key Stage 5 and beyond.
- Codifying substantive and disciplinary knowledge related to the uses of written word, including: the purposes of text; distinguishing features of different genres and forms; how to use and manipulate sentence structures and vocabulary; structuring texts to control the reader or audience's response.
- Selecting a range of exemplars, writers and speakers who embody the best that has been thought and said, as well as those who have fundamentally changed the discipline of English and the direction of the world. This multiplicity of voices and texts enables students to make connections from text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world with increasing complexity and nuance throughout the curriculum.

The threshold concepts in our subject are:

- Meaning and interpretation: there are often multiple, competing meanings of a text and these can be held simultaneously. Students' ability to hold competing interpretations in mind as they read and evaluate texts is vital to understanding the nuances and complexities of the subject. This develops and extends to applying different critical lenses to texts that unlock new worldviews for our students. Furthermore, students should be shown how the meaning of texts is not static and can change over time.
- Language can affect readers: the choice of language impacts the readers' response. This can be through choices of vocabulary, descriptive techniques (such as sensory imagery, hyperbole), through the interplay of language (extended metaphor, allusion) and so on. By understanding how writers use language to manipulate readers' responses, students will be equipped to do the same when producing their own texts.
- Grammar and meaning: understanding the fundamental 'rules' of grammar enables a basic ability to communicate but appreciating how grammar can affect meaning will lend a sophistication to their own writing whilst helping unlock a myriad of possibilities with interpretations of texts (mentioned above). This includes: use of punctuation, specific sentence structures being used at particular moments and much more.
- Structure: how a text is structured has a significant effect on its meaning, both when considered in part and when considered as a whole. This is true with both fiction and non-fiction texts. By understanding different structural techniques and options, students will be empowered to detect and analyse others try to influence them through written and spoken word whilst also utilising these same strategies themselves.
- Context: it is widely accepted in literary studies that context is foundational in understanding and interpreting texts. Students should have an understanding of: key details about writers' lives, beliefs and cultural historical periods, and how they have influenced literature and thought at the time; religious and political movements and views, and how these have changed over

time; the literary traditions that precede each new movement or writer and how these shape our understanding. Additionally, students should understand how their own context shapes their reaction to texts – whilst they avoid anachronistic readings they should also appreciate that meaning is not static.

- Form: form shapes meaning and aids interpretation. Fundamentally, a poem is different from a play, which is different from a novel or a speech, and writers make conscious choices about the form of their texts in order to understand how and why writers either adhere to these or subvert them in their own writing.
- Universal human ideas: all great literature speaks to what it means to be human and connects with readers. Students should explore a range of concepts (such as power, love, loss, death, nature, time) and how writers have responded to these ideas and themes over time. By appreciating how these universal ideas are at the heart of great storytelling, students will also be supported to produce more affecting and effective writing themselves, thus achieving a principal aim of our curriculum: producing empathetic members of society.

In order to achieve a true understanding of English, topics have been intelligently sequenced based on the following rationale:

- Each year, students are exposed to a range of thematic topics that enable them to develop an appreciation of English both over and within time. In each of these topics, a range of ‘core’ texts have been carefully selected and sequenced to tell a story of English that unlocks the powerful knowledge of English whilst developing students’ ability to be critical and hold competing interpretations.
- By using a thematic rather than purely chronological approach, students are supported to see the connections between literary periods, forms and texts over time and how these ideas have developed. This means that students’ understanding of each of the threshold concepts outlined above are continually being revisited, evaluated and updated, as any schema should.
- Some topics clearly need to be covered before others, since they are foundational, and this helps unlock students’ understanding of more complex topics and ideas. For example, concepts such as myth, ballad and characterisation are covered in Year 7 so that students can more effectively approach later topics that make use of these ideas. The same is true of ‘rhetoric’ which is explicitly taught through ‘Rhetoric’ in Year 7 and this is continually revisited in subsequent topics before and during the course of GCSE studies.
- Working with our partner primary schools, the Key Stage 3 curriculum is ambitious from the beginning: our topic and text choices have been carefully selected to build on our feeder schools’ curricula to ensure we do not unnecessarily repeat topics. Additionally, our approach to writing has a clearly defined, codified and sequenced approach that builds on the demands of the Key Stage 2 curriculum whilst recognising the requirements of Key Stages 4 and 5 for writing and language.
- The disciplinary and pedagogical requirements of English – reading, writing and speaking - have been interwoven throughout our curriculum so that students are continually developing expertise in these areas. As students’ knowledge of literature develops, they are given opportunities to apply this new understanding to their own writing (such as writing about their own heroic characters in Year 7, or by writing their own gothic story in Year 9).

The English curriculum will address social disadvantage and actively seeks to tell the stories of the marginalised by:

- Reading is at the heart of the study of English. Using a range of strategies, including the ‘Faster Read’ (University of Sussex) and a consistent approach to teaching comprehension in the classroom (‘Rigorous Reading’ and strategies from *Reading Reconsidered*), we ensure students develop as readers from the first day through to their last. Students read a wide range of carefully curated texts that vary in complexity but which speak to one another, exposing students to the joy of reading both for pleasure and academic study. Reading in class is a blend of whole-class and individual reading at carefully selected points. Our approach to assessing reading provides us with two key markers: students’ ability to decode and comprehend, and students’ ability to apply this in their analysis of texts. The ‘Rigorous Reading’ strategy used across the school ensures that students read in every lesson and have clear accountability for their reading, which teachers identify and act upon responsively at all times.
- The English curriculum is designed to build students’ cultural capital by teaching a wide range of important, thematic topics and concepts (such as politics, power, and equality) by exposing students to a wide range of challenging texts (which include a consistent focus on the literary canon and culturally enriching texts). Additionally, through the conscious design of our writing units and activities that take students beyond their own everyday experiences.
- Whilst the literary canon is crucial in giving student access to culturally enriching and important texts that have stood the test of time, our curriculum also embodies the diversity of our context and a globalised world. We continually review our text and topic choices to ensure we have a range of writers and texts from diverse backgrounds, conscious of the importance of telling a range of varied stories from these contexts (thus avoiding stereotyping or victim stories). For example, in Year 9, where students study *A Very Large Expanse of Sea* in Year 9, with its complex presentation of marginalised groups.
- Beck et al, identified the ‘word gap’ that negatively impacts those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Within our curriculum, we have a clearly identified programme of explicit vocabulary instruction that is taught in a structured, coherent way in every classroom and frequently tested through recall tasks and embedded into the success criteria of our writing tasks. This

approach ensures that students are continually equipped with the vital 'tier 2' and 'tier 3' vocabulary that they need to be successful within English and beyond.

- Our approach to teaching writing is clearly mapped and sequenced throughout our curriculum, developing in complexity and enabling all students to be equipped with the tools to communicate effectively and accurately at Key Stage 4 and beyond using a blend of bespoke approaches and strategies from *'The Writing Revolution'*, we have mapped out the expectations for every student by the end of each year and key stage, so that all students are supported and competent writers. To demonstrate the efficacy and importance of writing we have built in opportunities to write for real audiences including a speech to their fellow peers. By giving students live audiences to interact with we demonstrate the importance of competent, literate communication and empower students to recognise that they each have a voice that is valuable within society.

We fully believe English can contribute to the personal development of students at Dixons Fazakerley Academy by:

- Exploring sensitive and important topics and ideas in a safe space where students can question and evaluate these topics. This gives students the chance to reflect on their own and others' opinions and stories, whilst recognising the need for sympathy and empathy at all times. Examples of challenging topics covered include what it means to be different (Year 9), how we respond to power and authority (Year 8) and many more.
- Students are exposed to a range of ideas from across literary canon and tradition, as well as contemporary voices. This allows students to identify, reflect upon and evaluate the impact of a range of ideas, ideologies and events throughout history and even today. This supports students to develop respect, empathy and a sense of personal responsibility. We have made connections with our History department in the sequencing of our topics and in some of the choices we have made regarding texts, ideas and definitions so that students are encouraged to make connections between these subjects and to see how they each contribute to our development as citizens.

At KS3 and KS4, our belief is that homework should be interleaved revision of powerful knowledge that has been modelled and taught in lessons. This knowledge is recalled and applied through a range of low stakes quizzing and practice.

Opportunities are built in to make links to the world of work to enhance the careers, advice and guidance that students are exposed to:

- We have integrated opportunities for students to be exposed to the careers linked to English and the arts. For example, there are at least 2 'Careers Spotlights' where students learn about the ways English enables purposeful, happy lives.
- There is at least 1 school trip booked for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
- We have extra opportunities student as a creative writing club and 'Debate Mate'. These opportunities enable students to develop their ability to create a clear, cohesive piece of writing that engages with the target audience, all skills that are vital for the world of work and employment.

We teach beyond the requirements of the National Curriculum by:

- Ensuring that our choice of topics and texts is truly global and covers a vast time-period. Whilst we started with texts rooted in the literary canon, we have broadened this by considering literature from different continents and worldviews (for example, Iranian-American in Year 9).
- A distinctive feature our curriculum is writing and performing for a live audience (through our Speaking Endorsement work) and this goes beyond the National Curriculum requirement to 'be taught' how to write for a range of audiences and purposes; our students genuinely do get to write and perform for a range of audiences.