The Abbey

Curriculum Policy

The Abbey School, Reading

Reviewed by:	Assistant Heads Junior School Deputy Head Academic Senior School	September 2025
Ratified by:	Whole School Leadership Committee and Governor Audit	September 2025
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Introduction

The Abbey School has a firmly established academic tradition and provides full-time education for students aged 3 to 18 years. It offers a rich experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, spiritual and moral, physical, aesthetic and creative education.

The Abbey School offers a broad and balanced curriculum, going well beyond the National Curriculum, embracing the best of the traditional and the modern and allowing students increasingly to personalise their studies as they progress through the school.

The Abbey School recognises the importance of ensuring full access to the curriculum for all students so that all students have the opportunity to learn and progress. The curriculum provides for the different ages, aptitudes and needs of all students within the Abbey context. Where appropriate, students receive extra support and special arrangements to cater for individual needs. This policy should be read in conjunction with the SEND Policy.

The curriculum is subject to regular review under the direction of the Head and Senior Team in discussion at academic meetings and in consultation with governors through the Education Committee.

Aims

We seek to provide an academically challenging environment which is vibrant and stimulating. We have high expectations and ensure we provide appropriate support and challenge to encourage each student to achieve her full potential.

We favour a creative and problem-solving approach and aim to develop curiosity, a love of learning and confidence in independent thinking.

We place high value on the learning which takes place outside the classroom and encourage all our students to participate fully in the extensive extra-curricular programme. Our Abbey Learner Profile articulates the broader learning characteristics which we seek to develop.

Junior School Overview (including Early Years Foundation Stage)

We believe that the acquisition of factual knowledge goes hand-in-hand with creativity, problem-solving and analysis, that knowledge and skills are intertwined – ‘discovery favours the well-prepared mind’ (after Louis Pasteur). Equally, we recognise that much learning takes place outside the classroom and place value on this extra-curricular/hidden curriculum in which we encourage all girls to participate.

We deliver a dynamic and challenging curriculum that offers breadth and depth of learning, supporting and extending all students to explore ideas that are relevant to them and the modern world. To complement this, we have developed our own bespoke Outcomes and Expectations that incorporates, and goes beyond, the National and EYFS Curriculum objectives, ensuring academic rigour.

Our aims in delivering this unique and child-centred curriculum are to

- Instil in students a life-long love of learning and support them in becoming self-aware learners
- Enable each student to achieve the highest possible academic success of which they are capable
- Ensure curriculum breadth by offering rich and diverse opportunities within the timetable and beyond
- Provide a holistic educational experience combining age appropriate expertise with specialist subject knowledge
- Provide further enrichment through wide-ranging extra-curricular opportunities

At the end of their time at the Junior School we expect students to:

- Be confident, flexible and resilient learners who are able to work both independently and cooperatively;
- Be able to express themselves creatively and imaginatively;
- Take a pride in their achievements and to have a desire to succeed;
- Be caring, balanced and well-rounded individuals;
- Show respect to all and to embody international-mindedness.

Junior School Roles

The Head, Assistant Heads and Teaching & Learning Coordinator are responsible for ensuring that the overall curriculum experience is rich, broad and balanced.

The Director of Studies is responsible for the consultation, planning and writing of timetables to ensure that teachers have appropriate timetables, given their strengths and responsibilities.

All teachers are responsible for the quality of their own teaching, regularly reflecting upon their practice and sharing ideas with one another. Subject co-ordinators are responsible for leading their subject and overseeing the delivery of high-quality experiences in their curriculum area, in collaboration with the Assistant Heads.

Junior School Development & Progression

The Teaching and Learning Coordinator works with subject coordinators to ensure progression across the curriculum. Together they develop planning and assessment guidance which is shared with all staff. The Junior School Leadership Team regularly discuss curriculum matters as well as staff led Learning Innovation Groups.

Junior School Curriculum

Our curriculum is based on the six components in the diagram below and cross-curricular links are made as appropriate.

Elements to Consider when Planning

Our bespoke Outcomes and Expectations describe the expected achievement in each subject by the end of each year.

In drawing up the academic timetable, we provide a combination of form teaching balanced by the use of specialist staff.

Nursery and Reception girls are taught by trained Early Years staff with specialist teaching for Music, Drama, French and PE, including Ballet. Each student's form teacher has an overview of her development and maintains close communication with parents.

Students in Key Stage 1 (LPrep and UPrep) spend the majority of their time with their form teacher. LPrep and UPrep have specialist teaching for Computing, Music, PE, Spanish and Drama.

More specialisation is introduced as the girls pass through Key Stage 2 (Lower I – Lower III) so that in the Upper Juniors the girls receive specialist teaching for several subjects. Specialist Science lessons for all girls begin in Lower I. Technology is integrated into lessons to enhance digital literacy, as well as learning and teaching throughout the school (in addition to timetabled Computing lessons for KS2).

Where possible, form teachers are able to timetable their own lessons for the week to give the best distribution of subjects. Time spent on each subject is fixed although adjustment may be made from week to week as long as the overall balance is maintained. Focus is also placed on the Learning Awareness and Engagement (LAE) of the girls, the attributes of which complement the Abbey Learner Profile (ALP).

Early Years Curriculum

The curriculum for the girls in Nursery and Reception incorporates the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. It provides a secure foundation for later learning and ensures that girls acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to learning to access the curriculum at Key Stage 1 (LPrep and UPrep). Careful planning ensures that all aspects of the areas of learning are covered and that our curriculum is rich, broad and balanced. Time spent on each area varies according to the needs of students, whilst ensuring that the timetable is proactively planned and managed.

These areas are:

- Communication and Language

- Literacy
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

Focus is also placed on the EYFS Characteristics of Effective Learning – Playing and Exploring, Active Learning, Creating and Thinking Critically. These characteristics of learning are complementary to our Abbey Learner Profile (ALP) and Learning Awareness & Engagement (LAE).

Library

The library has a wide selection of books covering all curriculum areas as well as computers and/or iPads with internet access for individual research. Girls are encouraged to use the library and its resources.

A dedicated TA runs the library, assists staff and girls in choosing books to support curriculum learning and helps deliver guided reading or library research skills to students. Each class from UPrep upwards has a timetabled library slot where a group visits the library on rotation.

Digital Literacy

Our students benefit from a bespoke Digital Literacy curriculum that encompasses current and emerging technologies, including AI. It focuses on using technology creatively, ethically, and deliberately to enhance learning. We focus on using technology responsibly, for a specific aim, and to consider how it can aid us to achieve more. Opportunities to develop digital literacy are incorporated across the whole width of the curriculum and within lessons. The integration of digital devices provides an exciting opportunity to invigorate learning and teaching.

Senior School Curriculum Content and Delivery

Our curriculum seeks to stretch and challenge every student, in and outside of the classroom, in a manner consistent with the School's core principles and, most importantly, joy. We seek to make each learner's journey as personalised and bespoke as possible to enable students to flourish and to gain a lifelong love of learning. Teaching and Learning is informed by the Abbey Learner Profile and actively seeks to inculcate ways of thinking and approaching life.

The curriculum is taught by subject specialists throughout the Senior School, ensuring students receive the best possible learning experience.

Biology, Chemistry and Physics are taught in specialist laboratories and dedicated rooms are also used for Art & Design, Food and Nutrition,), Drama, Music and Computer Science. Most subjects have subject areas on the School site and most lessons are taught within these areas.

French, German and Spanish are offered at GCSE level and are often delivered by native speakers. Additionally, Mandarin is available at Key Stages 3 and 4 and Italian is available in the Sixth Form as a taster. In Lower IV and Upper IV students have the ability to make bespoke and personalised language choices over which and how many languages they study.

Students' ICT skills are strong and ICT is embedded into the KS3 curriculum, with Computing taught throughout Upper III to Upper IV. At Key Stage 4 Computer Science is an optional GCSE subject available for those who wish to further specialise.

Philosophy of Religion is delivered as a core subject from Upper III to Upper IV and encompasses the exploration and understanding of a variety of faiths against a Christian background. We also actively use this and other subjects to teach the principles of critical thinking and disagreeing well, including on potentially controversial topics. Our 'Upper IV project' teaches students memory and thinking skills which should help them throughout their school careers and beyond. Key Stage 3 students also have access to a centre-designed World Studies programme that seeks to expand their horizons and thinking.

The Skills 4 Life programme encompasses PSHE, Citizenship and Careers and is delivered by form tutors, specialist teachers and outside speakers throughout the School in a dedicated period once a week. More detail on this programme can be found at the end of this document.

Physical Education is a core subject throughout the Senior School and a wide range of indoor and outdoor, team and individual sports are taught with an emphasis on personal health and fitness.

The School also has a very extensive programme of extra-curricular activities that extend and complement the timetabled curriculum. Subject departments run clubs in either a lunchtime or twilight slot and there is a particularly wide variety of drama, sport and music activities available. Enrichment is carefully planned and audited throughout the school, for example by the lower school digital portfolios, and is understood to work hand-in-hand with what is going on in the classroom.

Senior School Curriculum by Year Groups

Key Stage 3

The school's aim at Key Stage 3 is to offer a curriculum that is broad and balanced as well as being bespoke and personalised. We seek to promote personal choice and autonomy alongside excellent grounding in the core subjects. Students are introduced to a wide range of subjects from which they can then choose their GCSE options for Key Stage 4. All students receive grounding in Art (including Textiles), Music, Drama, Computing and Food & Nutrition which they can then pursue to GCSE or through one of the many extra-curricular activities.

All Upper III (Year 7) students follow the same course of study and are generally taught in their form groups. Biology, Chemistry and Physics are taught as separate subjects in dedicated laboratories. Students have a languages carousel enabling them to study some French, Spanish, German and Mandarin as well as a language investigation/linguistics module. All students also have some teaching of Classics. Specialist teachers deliver the curriculum in all subject areas.

In **Lower IV** (Year 8) students are taught in teaching forms which are different from their tutor groups to help them to mix with as many of their peers as possible. They can make choices about which languages they pursue, choosing to study two modern foreign languages, one modern foreign language and Latin or, if they wish to undertake an accelerated course of study, two languages together with Latin. More formal setting, based on Upper III results, is introduced in Mathematics. Food & Nutrition and Textiles continue as extra-curricular programmes. All subjects continue to be taught by subject specialists.

In **Upper IV** (Year 9) students can further personalise their curriculums by choosing two/three subject options from: Art & Design, Drama, Food &Nutrition, Latin and Music. Students may choose to study one or two modern foreign languages or to pursue the accelerated route of two modern foreign languages plus Latin. Those who choose to study only one language will have the opportunity to study a further optional subject plus a single period of World Studies. The Upper IV Project teaches students memory and thinking skills. Mathematics continues to be set and English is timetabled across the year with one more group than forms and an element of setting. Science is taught in six groups, again allowing some informal setting. The number of teaching groups may vary from year to year depending upon year group sizes.

There is a themed Curiosity Festival once a year for all Key Stage 3 students (for example 'change') in which all subject lessons link to that theme and there is an off-timetable cross-curricular day in which students will learn actively and in groups, completing a project that links to the week's theme.

Key Stage 4: Lower V (Year 10) and Upper V (Year 11)

A large range of subjects is available for (I)GCSE allowing students to personalise their curriculum to reflect their strengths and talents. The GCSE core includes English Language and Literature, Mathematics and the strong encouragement to study a Modern Foreign Language. In addition, all students continue to participate in Physical Education and Skills 4 Life lessons. Students have three periods each of Biology, Chemistry and Physics. The decision as to whether a student will be entered for Double or Triple award GCSE Science is made at the end of Lower V.

There is the opportunity to specialise in Classics and a number of students opt to study Classical Greek. These students often continue their interest into the Sixth Form, some winning places at Oxford and Cambridge. Certain students may choose to study 'Gratin', which involves taking accelerated Greek and Latin GCSEs from four periods of study per week (i.e. the amount given to most single subjects). Many students choose to take two languages at GCSE.

For those students with a high extra-curricular commitment or who would prefer to focus their studies the option to take one fewer GCSE is offered. These students are timetabled with Supervised Study periods. Internal examinations take place in the summer term of Lower V and before the Christmas holiday in Upper V.

Students are encouraged to choose a broad range of subjects that complements their interests and talents. Students may take 10 or 11 GCSE subjects from the list below:

Core	Options
English Language	Art & Design - Fine Art or Art: 3D Design
English Literature	Computer Science
Mathematics	Drama
Science; Biology, Chemistry, Physics (Double or Triple Award)	Food & Nutrition

One Modern Foreign Language (French, German, Spanish or Mandarin) encouraged	French
	Geography
	Greek
	History
	Latin
	Music
	Physical Education
	Art & Design – Textiles

Sixth Form

In the Sixth Form our Abbey: RE-IMAGINED curriculum offers a unique degree of optionality, personalisation and flexibility based around A level study. Our Sixth Form pathway enables students who want the greatest breadth to study four main subjects, entirely freely chosen, and an EPQ, plus additional courses if desired. Critical thinking, inquiry, an independent project and a commitment to volunteering and activity are part of the offer for all.

Students have:

- A wide choice of subjects and a bespoke timetabling process
- Specialist teaching
- Small groups
- Access to sport and/or fitness sessions
- Skills 4 Life

Curriculum learning is supported by a hugely wide-ranging and exciting extracurricular programme and the majority of Sixth Form students take part in one or more of the following (among other activities):

- The Tycoon Scheme
- The Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award
- Volunteering
- The School Officer programme
- House Activities & Competitions
- School sports teams
- Choir
- Debating
- Social Enterprise Hub
- Orchestra and other instrumental groups
- The School Production

and a variety of other exciting opportunities, sometimes in collaboration with other schools.

A Level

A Levels allow students to specialise in subjects that appeal to them and in which they can excel. Students may choose either 3 or 4 A Level subjects (Further Mathematicians choose four including Further Maths and students generally study four subjects through the Lower VI as part of our 4Thought programme). Generally, those students on four A Levels will reduce to three in the Upper VI.

Art & Design – Fine Art or 3D Design	Geography
Ancient Greek	German
Biology	Greek
Business	History
Chemistry	Latin
Computer Science	Mathematics
Art & Design: Textiles	Music
Drama & Theatre	Philosophy and Ethics
Economics	Physical Education
English Literature	Physics
French	Spanish
Further Mathematics	

The School aims to run the subjects in the list above but reserves the right not to run a subject chosen by a very small number of students and/or which might create staffing difficulties. There is also the possibility that, were a small number of students to choose a subject, its number of taught periods could be reduced with some directed private study and/or there could be co-teaching of subjects within a class. Only one such special arrangement would be likely to be made per student.

Assessment at A Level is predominantly examination-based, with practical endorsement for the Sciences and some non-examined assessment in other subjects. Examinations are taken in the summer of Upper VI.

The Abbey Core
All students take:

- **Three or four A Levels**: studied for two years and allowing students to gain a depth of understanding respected around the world.
- **One new Extended Project Programme**: studied for one year. This is a brand-new and sector-leading programme teaching the thinking, research and time management skills needed for university and wider study. As part of the programme, all students have the opportunity to complete a substantial independent project. This project may

be submitted for an EPQ: a national qualification, worth over half an A level, highly valued by universities. Alternatively, students might complete a smaller-scale, more personal project. All completed projects may be submitted for the Scholars' Award, a grant towards study at university.

The Abbey Award
In addition to their academic studies, all students are asked to complete either Gold DofE or our own Award, comprising three elements – Move, Make, Volunteer. To support the Award, all students will have access to a sports and activity programme within their timetables.

The Abbey+
All students may choose an additional course or courses for one year, with huge flexibility to suit each individual. Abbey+ courses include:

- An AS level: some subjects are available for a one-year course leading to an AS level
- A WJEC certificate in Food Science and Nutrition, equipping students for independent life and enabling them to earn money as students
- An Abbey certificate: some subjects are available to study as a shorter, 4-period course leading to an in-house Abbey certificate qualification
- Abbey tasters: some subjects are available for 2-period tasters allowing students to develop or maintain their skills in a range of areas

Examinations

Internal examinations take place in the summer term of Lower VI and the spring term of Upper VI with final examinations taken in every chosen subject in May or June of the Upper VI year.

Senior School Skills 4 Life

The Skills 4 Life programme encompasses statutory RSE within PSHE, and careers. It is timetabled weekly on a Wednesday and a detailed scheme of work, based on the Senior School thematic spiral programme and designed by the Head of Year, guides staff and students through the schedule. Topics are divided into three broad areas of Living in the Wider World, Relationships and Health & Wellbeing. More detail is available in The RSE Policy.

The Abbey School aims to provide a community for its students and staff in which learning flourishes and where students may reach the highest standards academically and personally. Skills 4 Life is a curriculum subject, delivered mostly by form tutors with occasional specialist and outside speakers, to ensure that a high standard of personal and social development is achieved by all students.

Senior School Aims and Objectives of PSHE

To promote the development of self- awareness, self-respect and self-confidence;

- To raise students' self-esteem;
- To enable students to develop good study skills;
- To enable students to make informed choices;
- To help students develop skills of sensitivity and tolerance in their personal relationships;
- To encourage awareness of other people's problems;
- To develop listening skills;
- To promote a corporate ambiance within the form which is friendly, supportive and respectful of others;
- To broaden students' outlook, exploring community and global issues.

Careers

Careers guidance at The Abbey is based on a student-focused approach to allow students to explore possible academic and career pathways. The Gatsby Benchmark framework is central to this philosophy and provides the school with a structured approach to supporting students on their individual journeys. This is facilitated through the use of the Unifrog platform and students will be guided along “The Abbey Way Ahead Pathway”. This is a holistic programme for the whole school, which aims to support students’ choices of academic options and career aspirations.

The Careers Department provides two regular lessons per term during the weekly Skills 4 Life slot for all year groups. These are structured around the use of the Unifrog platform and provides opportunities for all students to complete and update, amongst other elements, a range of online questionnaires in the areas of Interests, Personality, and Skills. This data is stored in their individual Careers Profile and allows students to explore subjects and career options linked to their results.

Students will update their profiles at least annually as they grow and mature, to take into account their changing interests and skills. The platform is constantly updated with career options and regular profiling will help the students to narrow down their choices as they progress up through the school.

Academic lessons will also provide an opportunity for students to discover career options related to the specific subjects and this is added to their individual Careers Profiles, as and when the links arise in the Schemes of Work.

In the Lower School (Upper III, Lower IV and Upper IV), the KS3 curriculum project will enable students to add further information to their Careers Profile, based on their specific area of study.

In the Upper School, Lower V students are offered taster lessons in Sixth Form only subjects and in Upper V they receive comprehensive feedback on these profiles which are discussed at the “Next Steps Interviews”. These interviews are conducted by a senior member of teaching staff and are an opportunity for each student, together with their parents, to discuss their next steps including Sixth Form options, University or Apprenticeship pathways and future career aspirations. Upper V students also have a full day experiencing life and classes in the Sixth Form to prepare them for the next stage of their school journey.

In the Sixth Form, Unifrog profiling continues with the students completing a further questionnaire that builds on their existing profile and suggests specific universities and courses to investigate. To introduce the Lower VI to the experience of university life, students will have the opportunity to participate in a tailored visit to the University of Surrey. UCAS applications are also incorporated into the Unifrog platform, providing a seamless transition and allowing students to build on the profile data to make their choices about university courses, as well as completing their Personal Statements. Where a student wants to explore the Apprenticeship pathway, the data will also support these aspirations fully.

Supporting this student-focused approach is the Aspire Programme which includes a series of careers lectures from outside speakers and Alumnae, a biennial Careers evening and an annual Higher Education evening. The Aspire Programme is designed to provide additional information and ideas to the students, delivering a fully-rounded and student focused approach to Careers guidance at The Abbey.