



Curriculum Update

Dear Parents

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to provide a further update on curriculum and assessment matters at Sir Thomas Rich's School. As always, we continue to seek ways to develop and improve our curriculum provision for all pupils.

Year 9 Teaching Groups

Following the introduction of separate teaching groups for Year 9, I am pleased to report that this arrangement has been well-received and has worked effectively. We intend to repeat this approach for the current Year 8 cohort when they enter Year 9 in September. As in previous years, Maths, and Languages and Technology will be taught in separate groups. Maths groups will be set by ability, with setting decisions informed by the Year 8 examinations, assessments throughout the year, and teacher assessment.

PSHE in Key Stage 4

Following our expansion of the PSHE curriculum in Key Stage 4, which introduced additional lessons throughout Year 10 alongside the existing content delivered in the summer term, and continued delivery into Year 11, I am pleased to report that the implementation of this new approach has been a success. We intend to continue this pattern of delivery going forward.

Curriculum Maps

A reminder that work on our standardised curriculum maps has now been completed. These maps give pupils a clear sense of how the topics they are currently studying fit into the broader picture of their subject. Curriculum maps can be found on the relevant department pages on the School website, and teachers will also be displaying them in their classrooms and referring to them as part of their teaching.

Artificial Intelligence

AI continues to be a significant area of focus for schools nationally, and we have been working hard to ensure that our approach to this rapidly evolving technology is both measured and forward-thinking.

Staff have received further training in this area, addressing both the challenges and the opportunities that AI presents. In terms of the challenges, colleagues have been given guidance on procedures for dealing with the unethical use of AI in assessments. Our initial response to such cases will be an educational one, although repeated offences may lead to sanctions in line with our behaviour policy.

On the opportunities side, staff have been exploring the use of AI "recipes" – structured prompts that allow pupils to interact with an AI application in a way that simulates a one-to-one tutoring conversation. When pupils use AI to ask themselves questions and receive feedback on their responses, this represents a genuinely positive harnessing of new technology in the service of learning.

I would also like to reassure parents that we continually review our safeguards around AI and the possibility of inappropriate content being generated or delivered. Only approved AI tools may be used on the School network, and only where we have verified that adequate protections are in place.

Mobile Phones

Following the Government's updated guidance on mobile phones in schools, we have been reviewing the way in which mobile phones intersect with our curriculum. Our aim is to design out the reliance on mobile phones within the taught curriculum, so that pupils are not expected to reach for their phone as a learning tool during lessons.

This work is already underway. Departments are currently reviewing their Key Stage 3 schemes of work, where we anticipate only minimal changes will be needed. We will then move on to Key Stage 4, with the aim of strengthening our policy from September. For some departments, alternative approaches may need to be carefully considered in individual cases where the current supervised use of a mobile phone enhances the learning experience or supports assessment and feedback within a lesson.

For pupils, there are some practical implications to be aware of. Since mobile phones will not be available as a substitute for equipment, it is important that pupils ensure they have the appropriate tools with them for their lessons – this includes a calculator, where one is required. In addition, pupils must check Satchel One before any Private Study lesson, as they will not be able to use their mobile phone to do so during the lesson itself. We would be grateful for parents' support in reinforcing these expectations at home.

Super-Curriculum

One area we have been keen to develop this year is the School's Super-Curriculum. We define this as activities related to curriculum subjects that allow pupils to develop interests and pursue challenges beyond those specifically required by classroom lessons or examination specifications.

In the Autumn Term, I delivered an assembly to raise pupil awareness of the range of super-curriculum opportunities available to them. These range from accessible activities such as reading from a subject's recommended reading list or watching a relevant documentary or lecture, through to more structured activities such as academic societies, competitions, and enrichment trips that broaden and contextualise the knowledge and skills developed in the classroom.

Heads of Department are currently reviewing and developing their super-curriculum offer, and we are also working to signpost opportunities more explicitly to pupils. You will begin to notice our super-curriculum logo appearing in more places, particularly on SharePoint.

Monitoring

Mrs Roche and I carry out regular monitoring throughout the year, with the twin aims of celebrating the excellent work taking place across the School and identifying opportunities for sharing best practice with all staff. This includes regular lesson drop-in visits; this year, we have been pleased to invite Heads of Department to join us on these, enabling them to observe strengths both within their own subject area and across the broader curriculum.

We continue to sample pupil work regularly, and it is encouraging to note a continued improvement in the presentation and pride pupils take in their work. We also hold curriculum conversations with groups of pupils – these are always illuminating. Pupils speak with great eloquence about their experiences, frequently demonstrating pride in and gratitude for their education, and occasionally highlighting areas where we might refine our approaches, which we then seek to address through staff training and development.

Government Curriculum and Assessment Review

As referenced in my previous email, the Government commissioned Professor Becky Francis CBE to lead an independent review of the national curriculum and assessment framework. The final report was published in November 2025 and can be read in full here: [Curriculum and Assessment Review – GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/106822/curriculum-and-assessment-review-2025.pdf).

This is a wide-ranging and detailed document, and we are studying its recommendations carefully. The review's overarching philosophy is one of "evolution, not revolution" – it affirms much that is already working well in schools while identifying areas for development. Among its most significant themes for secondary schools are the following:

- A continued commitment to knowledge-rich teaching, with a strong emphasis on careful curriculum sequencing and the development of skills within subject disciplines – an approach already central to our own curriculum aims at Sir Thomas Rich's.
- A reduction in overall GCSE examination time of at least 10%, aimed at reducing curriculum narrowing without compromising rigour or reliability.
- The abolition of the EBacc performance measure, which the review found had unnecessarily constrained pupils' subject choices at GCSE.
- New diagnostic assessments in Maths and English at the end of Year 8, designed to help teachers identify and address gaps before pupils begin their GCSE courses.
- A new entitlement for all pupils to study Triple Science at GCSE, addressing a current disparity in access; we already offer Triple Science to all GCSE pupils and for most cohorts all pupils take this option.
- A greater emphasis on oracy, with a new secondary framework for speaking and listening to complement existing frameworks for reading and writing - this aligns well with our already strong offer in this area.
- Revised and broadened curricula in a number of subjects, including Computing, Citizenship, and Religious Education.

A revised national curriculum is due to be published in 2027 for first teaching from September 2028, with updated GCSE specifications following from 2029.

As a school, we are approaching this review thoughtfully. We have been meeting with senior leaders from a number of other grammar schools to share thinking and to consider together what the recommendations may mean in practice. These conversations have been valuable in helping us assess both the direction of travel and the implications for our own curriculum planning. Our guiding principle throughout will be to ensure that any changes we make continue to serve the best interests of our pupils. We will, of course, keep parents updated as the picture develops.

Government Data and League Tables

I am delighted to share that our value-added score at A Level for 2025 stands at +0.22, meaning that, on average, students achieved more than a fifth of a grade above what would be predicted based on national benchmarks. This is the second-highest score among state-funded schools in Gloucestershire. As you will no doubt be aware, we are also very pleased to be ranked 32nd in the country in the Parent Power School League Tables 2026 – a tremendous achievement of which the whole school community can be proud.

As ever, if you have any questions regarding any of the above, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards



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