

BROCKWOOD PARK SCHOOL



CURRICULUM POLICY

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This policy outlines the philosophy underpinning our curriculum, how it is administered, how it is structured, and a brief overview of the different elements of provision.

Curriculum Philosophy

The curriculum has been designed to meet closely the intentions of the school, which themselves reflect the ideas of the school's founder, J Krishnamurti. These intentions are:

- To educate the whole human being;
- To explore what freedom and responsibility are in relationship with others and in modern society;
- To see the possibility of being free from self-centred action and inner conflict;
- To discover one's own talent and what right livelihood means;
- To encourage excellence in academic studies;
- To learn the proper care, use and exercise of the body;
- To appreciate the natural world, seeing our place in it and responsibility for it; and
- To find the clarity that may come from having a sense of order and valuing silence.

From these, the particular intentions for the curriculum follow:

- Active learning that involves students' and teachers' input in the curriculum content;
- Extended immersion in activities of learning and inquiry (to uncover rather than cover the curriculum);
- Development of interdisciplinary activities, projects and portfolios in exploring themes and topics that cut across the fields of science, humanities, arts and craft, and human ecology; and
- Individualised supervision and support for students' investigations and work (allowing contact time for independent learning, peer-supported learning and teacher-supported learning).

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Administration of Curriculum

The curriculum is developed and reviewed by the Teachers' Group (TG). This group comprises:

- The Co-Principal responsible for curriculum;
- The Curriculum Coordinator; and
- Members of staff (both full staff and apprentices) who are willing to commit to working through issues relating to curriculum.

The TG meets as needed, though in practice this is often weekly, and at minimum four times a term. The group considers:

- Changes to the curriculum;
- Cases where students may need additional support; and
- Procedural Matters.

Topics can be raised by students, mature students and staff, and are collated into an agenda by the Curriculum Coordinator who ensures that there is an allocated chairperson for the meeting. A nominated minute taker takes minutes at all meetings, which are distributed to the whole staff body, and available under the 'Curriculum' directory on the school staff server.

In cases of particularly significant changes to the curriculum, the TG may seek students to engage in the development process (for example in the curriculum review of 2015, 6 students worked with the TG for a week, generating and assessing ideas, and 3 of these students subsequently worked with the Curriculum Coordinator to develop detailed proposals).

Structure of Curriculum

The curriculum contains a number of elements. Students will determine what combination of these elements will be taken at the start of the year in consultation with their academic advisor.

The following description of the curriculum elements is an outline. As the school does not operate on a year group approach, rather than outlining the curriculum based on age groups, it is outlined in terms of elements. Each student will take a unique combination of these through their time in Brockwood.

1. Induction

The first week and a half comprises induction for all students, with a tailored programme developed each year by staff members, with some elements developed by members of the student 'Core Group'. The intention of the induction is to explore:

- How we study whilst at Brockwood;
- How we can look after the place;
- How we can create the school (relating to each other, decision making etc.); and
- How we can learn about ourselves.

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This is often achieved through a number of activities, including trips, games, concerts, workshops, and many others.

2. Common Courses

All students spend two mornings a week working on common courses, alongside staff members. These are:

- K-Class: an investigation of the founder's teachings;
- Inquiry time: a group investigation on pressing issues (e.g. use of technological devices); and
- Human Ecology

These activities take place as a whole school, or in groups. These groups are of mixed ages to enable different perspectives to be explored, and connections to be developed across the school.

3. Foundations

For younger students (14/15 at start of school year) arriving at Brockwood, three courses on fundamental issues and skills will be required:

- Human Development (for one year only);
- English as an Additional Language (for non-native speakers only);
- Humanities (including English for native speakers);
- The Arts;and
- Science and Mathematics.

These first two courses operate on a weekly schedule throughout the year. The latter three courses run in rotation through the year, giving 8 weeks of intensive work in each.

4. Topics

One core element of our course offering is through topics. Topics run for seven weeks, at the end of which there is a presentation of the work, followed by another topic. There are three blocks of such topics in the year.

The time requirements of topic courses will vary from topic to topic, but will usually be two mornings a week. Two or three topics are made available for students to choose from in each block. A small group of teachers develops each topic, with a clear set of starting activities and questions. The topic then develops as students and teachers work together and explore issues that seem most engaging and relevant.

All students not running their own projects or taking a large number of exam courses will take topic courses, and so there is significant demand for these courses at the beginning of the year. Over the course of the year, however, many students will develop their own projects following on from work they have engaged in during a topic course, or from their own explorations. As a result, attendance in the topic courses is expected to reduce through the year.

5. Projects

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Another core element of our course offering is supporting students to develop their own projects. Students may propose their own project(s) which they will follow through the year (or part thereof) and form a significant part of their learning. Many projects are proposed in the first two weeks of term, and are considered by the Teachers' Group, which determine whether the student will benefit from the proposed project. The TG also takes into account the student's ability to pursue such a project, their other planned activities, and the likelihood of them completing it to a sufficient standard. If a project is agreed to, an appropriate academic advisor may be chosen to support the project throughout the year. Students may also propose their own projects at any other point during the year, when they will again be assessed by the TG.

Projects can be of two broad forms:

- **Focal Project:** A single project which demands at least 50% of the students' time. These are often undertaken by senior students, and include art portfolios. A number of these projects could be undertaken consecutively; and
- **General project:** A project where a variety of things are directed by the students themselves, but none dominates their studies. For example a student may wish to work on their creative writing, pottery work, computer programming and prepare for a GCSE in Geography.

The nature of each project is, of course, dependent on a student and their needs.

Students taking their own projects will be expected to present their progress in February/March, and then give a final presentation in June, which will form an element of their assessment.

A project (of whichever form) is a substantial commitment, and requires exploration, dedication and excellence.

6. Examinations – GCSEs

The provision of Mathematics IGCSE is currently under review and will be confirmed at the end of August 2016. There is no other provision of GCSEs..

7. Examinations – A-Levels

Brockwood supports a number of A-Level examination courses, with the exact courses offered determined by a combination of student demand, suitability of a syllabus, and availability of teachers. Examinations will be offered in the May/June session. We will support students who have a strong reason for taking exams in October/November.

The criteria for students being allowed to take an A-Level course are:

- Any student under the age of 16 at the start of the school year will not be permitted to take an exam course unless there are particular strong reasons for doing so. We feel that younger students benefit from time to develop an understanding of learning, motivation, and excellence through studying without the pressure of exams.
- Students may take up to three exam courses each year, as it is felt that taking more imposes unnecessary stress on students, as well as significantly limits their opportunities to explore more widely and engage with the common courses. An

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exception may be if the student has previously studied one of courses they are seeking to take.

The criteria for students being allowed to take an exam (both GCSE and A-Level) are:

- Students will have attended sufficient classes and completed sufficient homework to take an exam;
- Students who are not properly prepared will not be encouraged to take exams, unless they are in their last year and it is their last chance to get some sort of qualification; and
- If there is doubt regarding a student's preparation, they may be asked to sit a mock exam and achieve a grade (i.e. greater than unclassified) to be allowed to subsequently sit the exam.

These criteria are designed to ensure that students only take an exam when they are ready, as it can otherwise be a potentially damaging experience.

8. Examinations – Pre-A Courses

Towards the end of the academic year there is a three week period after the topic courses finish that is available for students who are eligible to sit the A-Levels in the following years to attend intensive pre-A courses.

The pre-A courses are primarily designed to ensure that students intending to take specific A-Levels have sufficient knowledge and skills to commence the course. They may also, if the group is ready, commence the A-Level course. Following the three weeks there is additional work given to students to complete in advance of the following academic year.

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APPENDIX – A DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF THE BROCKWOOD CURRICULUM

The following is a more discursive description of the curriculum, and how it fits within the broader life of the school. It is appended for information.

Brockwood's staff members have come to the School because they recognise in Krishnamurti's teaching a unique clarity about the value of life and education. Out of these teachings have come the intentions for the School and the curriculum we design and continue to develop.

Brockwood is deeply concerned with a sense of excellence which comes from a depth and breadth of understanding of ourselves and the world around us. This sense of excellence permeates all aspects of our daily life: academic studies, non-academic activities and conduct; hence the study programme here is not a "soft option" as it supports and demands sustained attention, inquiry and diligence.

A vibrant curriculum is one that provides a rich terrain for learning. By uncovering rather than covering a syllabus (where one is used), it is possible to learn with breadth and depth, and to perceive the necessity but also the limitations of acquiring knowledge and skills. While learning can be deadened by merely following a syllabus to deliver knowledge and skills from teacher to pupil; instead learning can be brought alive by attention and inquiry. The curriculum at Brockwood provides occasions for this attention and inquiry.

In what way does an environment inhibit or nurture learning? Does the environment "tell" the student to come in, sit down, and wait for the teacher; or does the environment itself invite initiative and participation? What is the position of the teacher and the student in these scenarios? Is it possible to dislodge the teacher's central position and the students' roles as passive recipients of knowledge and skills? The learning environment and curriculum at Brockwood provide possibilities for initiative, rich participation, independent study, student collaboration, and teacher-to-teacher collaboration. The environment and the curriculum provide opportunities for students and teachers to learn together. The natural beauty of the school campus the gardens and grounds, and the care for the earth program, provide an abundance of resources for outdoor learning.

At Brockwood the process of learning is seen as an end in itself, in and out of the classroom. The academic curriculum is based on the view that the subject matter itself can foster an understanding about learning and about the actualities of our daily lives. Through the study of maths we learn about order; through the sciences we engage with and learn from the world around us, and we can see the place for precise observation and thinking. We learn about ourselves and our values through the study of history. Courses are not limited by disciplinary boundaries and specialties but are integrated within broad areas for the humanities, science and mathematics, arts, social and environmental studies, etc. This allows for the discovery and exploration of questions, themes and projects within and across disciplinary boundaries.

The students' study programme is intended to nurture an integrated human being with breadth and depth of understanding. Conversations are held with each student at the beginning and throughout the year to discover particular needs, interests, and talents, and to work out a balanced programme of study. Classes have an average student teacher ratio of 9:1.

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Exam preparation is fully supported and done with a view toward excellence for its own sake. Doing well on an exam can itself be seen as a project by figuring out ways to 'crack' the test so to speak. Thus, exams skills and preparation are given their due importance without conflating them with the breadth and depth of learning that we wish to nurture. Moreover, when there is an ongoing sense of excellence and learning, exam performance is also enhanced.

Each school year brings a new curriculum with new questions, projects, activities and opportunities. The list of possible topics, themes and courses varies somewhat each year, according to interests and available resources: not everything may be available in a given year; on the other hand, more things may be offered than are listed.

Throughout the year friends and visitors will enrich the school with workshops and other events. Examples of such workshops are as follows: Bee-keeping, Street Theatre, Concerts, Exhibitions, Open Dialogue, Body Awareness, Business & Human Values, Problem Solving, African Drumming, Language Trips in Europe, Health & Nutrition, Electronic Music, Chinese Cooking, Songwriting, Shakespeare, Creative Writing, Web/Graphic Design, Sound Engineering and much, much more.