

# Ascend Curriculum Principles

## Our Mission

**The curriculum is at the heart of a Ascends purpose and vision:**

‘Together we Belong, Believe, Become’

As a community of schools, our curriculum reflects our values of ‘Compassion, Aspiration, Respect, Dedication and Integrity’ for all of our students, with the potential of every individual within our community valued.

At Ascend, we recognise that **improving educational outcomes** is the biggest way we can positively impact our students’ futures. We take the term ‘educational’ in its most broad sense: this means more than just a set of results. It includes a child’s **intellectual development, social and emotional development, citizenship** and responsibility, happiness and success.

We hope that this vision is ‘lived’ in the way teachers develop the curriculum and the way students experience it.

We want a curriculum that is designed effectively and implemented with passion and expertise, that develops a **love of lifelong learning**, and creates work to be proud of, expertise, fascination and wonder.

## Why We Educate

All Ascend pupils are entitled to a curriculum and to the powerful knowledge which will open doors and maximise their life chances:

1. **Personal Empowerment:** Education provides individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to take control of their own lives and make informed decisions.
2. **Cultural Transmission:** It celebrates and ensures we pass down important cultural values, traditions, and knowledge from one generation to the next.
3. **Preparation for Citizenship:** Education prepares individuals to be active and informed citizens, giving pupils agency and a voice, so they will contribute positively to society.

4. **Preparation for Work:** We equip pupils with the skills and knowledge necessary for the evolving workforce, to be ambitious and knowledgeable about the possibilities of higher education and work.
5. **Character Building:** We will ensure all students have their curiosity and interests sparked, inspiring and memorable experiences beyond the classroom that broaden horizons and preparing students to be interested, responsible members of society
6. **Lifelong Learning:** Ascend curriculums instil the value and love of lifelong learning, gives pupils the knowledge and skills to question, create, debate and innovate.

‘Certain aspects of our way of life, certain kinds of knowledge, certain attitudes and values are regarded as so important that their transmission to the next generation is not left to chance in our society but is entrusted to specially trained professionals (teachers) in elaborate and expensive institutions (schools)’. (Lawton, 1975: p.7)

“A good curriculum empowers children with the knowledge they are entitled to: knowledge that will nourish both them and the society of which they are members.”

*Clare Sealy*

## Why Do We Need Ascend Curriculum Principles and How Will They Drive Improvement?

A curriculum breathes life into a school’s or teacher’s philosophy of education; it is purpose enacted.

### Shared Vision and Purpose

- Curriculum principles articulate a common educational philosophy across Ascend and provide a common language.
- They ensure all schools are connected in their goals for student learning and development.

### Consistency with Flexibility

- While allowing for local context and creativity, principles provide a consistent framework for curriculum design and delivery.
- Principles encourage teachers and leaders to be continuously evaluating, adapting and evolving their curriculum to ensure all students receive a high-quality education.

## Equity and Inclusion

- Principles help ensure that all pupils, regardless of background, circumstance or school, have access to powerful knowledge, high expectations and opportunities.
- They support the development of inclusive and responsive practices **across the trust**.

## Professional Collaboration

- A shared language and set of expectations enable teachers and leaders to collaborate more effectively across schools and beyond within subject communities and networks.
- It fosters a culture of shared learning, resource development, and peer support.

## Strategic Leadership and Accountability

- Curriculum principles provide a benchmark for evaluating curriculum equity, quality and impact.
- They support leaders at all levels in monitoring standards and driving improvement

## How Curriculum Principles Improve Standards

- **Improved Teaching Quality:** Clear principles guide professional development and curriculum planning, leading to more effective teaching.
- **Stronger Pupil Outcomes:** A coherent, well-sequenced curriculum helps students build knowledge and skills more effectively.
- **Reduced Gaps:** Consistent expectations help close attainment gaps between different groups of pupils.
- **Better Transitions:** Shared principles support smoother transitions between key stages and schools, not only within Ascend but beyond.
- **Evidence-Informed Practice:** Principles rooted in research promote the use of proven strategies and discourage fads

# CURRICULUM DESIGN KEY PRINCIPLES

REFERENCE William, D. (2013) Principled Curriculum Design.  
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A curriculum breathes life into a school's or teacher's philosophy of education; it is purpose enacted. Different philosophies of education — personal empowerment; cultural transmission; preparation for work or preparation for citizenship — place different emphasis on aspects of curriculum design. Curriculum design involves seven key principles which operate in tension with each other.



## BALANCED

Promotes intellectual, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, creative, emotional and physical development as equally important.



## RIGOROUS

Seeks to develop intra-disciplinary habits of mind; the subject matter is taught in a way that is faithful to its discipline.



## COHERENT

Makes explicit connections and links between the different subjects/ experiences encountered.



## VERTICALLY INTEGRATED

Focuses on progression by carefully sequencing knowledge; provides clarity about what getting better at the subject means.



## APPROPRIATE

Looks to avoid making unreasonable demands by matching level of challenge to a pupil's current level of maturity/knowledge.



## FOCUSED

Seeks to keep the curriculum manageable by teaching the most important knowledge; identifies the big ideas or key concepts within a subject.



## RELEVANT

Seeks to connect the valued outcomes of a curriculum to the pupils being taught it; provides opportunities for pupils to make informed choices.

## Using the Principles to Support Curriculum Development

The curriculum: what students are taught and why. At Ascend, we acknowledge that this involves a conscious choice and is part of a decision-making process on the part of our teachers and leaders.

The aim of curriculum is to build up the content of long-term memory so that when students are asked to think, they can think in more powerful ways than before.

Therefore, the curriculum is designed to be remembered rather than encountered, and so the impact of our curriculum depends on the quality of teaching and how teachers and leaders embed Ascend principles of Teaching & Learning within curriculum plans.

At Ascend all our teachers and leaders spend time, collaboratively thinking, planning and evaluating the curriculum, so that we can assure and ensure the Ascend Curriculum principles are having the intended impact – that a high-quality subject curriculum exists for all pupils, so that Ascend pupils know more, know how to do more and remember more.

Curriculum thinking and planning – at Ascend our leaders and teachers are thinking about their subject curriculums alongside the T&L model considering how we are:

1. Developing a child's intellect and ability – whatever their starting point.
2. Planning for success and achievement for all.
3. Improving all student outcomes.
4. Developing a love of learning and subject.
5. Ensuring the curriculum is useful and meaningful for our students.
6. Choosing what to teach, what we don't, when we teach it, and why.
7. Ensuring consistency of delivery and experience.
8. Meaningfully assessing the curriculum and responding to what data tell us.
9. Staying true to the disciplinary nature and truth of each subject.
10. Building our students' knowledge, expertise, skills, and understanding.
13. Building our students capacity to question, engage in disciplinary dialogue and communicate with confidence.
14. Developing alterations in long-term memory – ensuring they can remember more.
15. Refining and improving the curriculum.

More information on what has helped to inform our thinking, and rationale can be found here:

Wiliam, D. (2013) Principled Curriculum [Wiliam-Principled-Curriculum-Design.pdf](#)