



# St Swithun's WINCHESTER

ST SWITHUN'S SCHOOL

SUPPORTING THE MOST ABLE PUPILS POLICY (SENIOR SCHOOL)

Policy History	
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## Reviewed by:

Deputy Head Academic

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Date: September 2024

The Education Committee

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Date: October 2024

All girls at St Swithun's are able. We are, however, always looking to challenge the most able girls through appropriate learning and teaching approaches and diverse and stimulating co-curricular and enrichment opportunities. The ethos of the school is one whereby we hope that all girls aspire to be confident learners and high achievers, and this resonates in our High Performance Learning (HPL) approach to learning and teaching.

Throughout the school a wide range of teaching methods and strategies are used to ensure all pupils achieve well in relation to their capability. Our aim is to encourage girls to develop their full potential, and we are committed to matching what is taught and how it is taught to pupils' abilities and aptitudes. The school recognises the need to identify and provide for those girls who display particularly high achievement across the full range of curricular and co-curricular areas of school life. Our academic enrichment programme is rooted in a desire to develop those students of outstanding intellect, character and commitment. The programme provides another elevated and enriching academic layer for those exceptional students needing rigorous academic challenges and stimulation.

### **Definition**

As an academically selective school, St Swithun's defines its most able pupils, relative to their year-group peers, as:

- Those students who show exceptional ability and skill in curricular areas;
- Those students who possess a general academic learning ability and commitment that is significantly greater than most of their peers.

The above points are clearly not exhaustive, and academic departments are encouraged to establish their own subject-specific criteria that match these general principles. The school recognises that pupils may display exceptional abilities in a wide number of areas, and that they might therefore qualify as 'most able'. The following should also be borne in mind:

- In comparison with their peers, when engaged in their area(s) of expertise, most able pupils will tend to:
  - Show a passion for particular subjects/areas of interest and seek to pursue them;
  - Master the rules of a domain easily and transfer their insights to new problems;
  - Analyse their own behaviour and hence use a greater range of learning strategies than others (self-regulation);
  - Have the skills and academic agility required for independent and self-directed study;
  - Make connections between past and present learning;
  - Have a synoptic approach to learning and make coherent links between varying areas of study;

- Demonstrate intellectual curiosity;
  - Practise and seek to enhance their ability to construct, develop and maintain clear and coherent argument;
  - Show intellectual maturity and enjoy engaging in depth with subject material;
  - Actively and enthusiastically engage in debate (verbally and/or on paper) and discussion on a particular subject; and
  - Produce original and creative responses to common problems.
- In addition, the most able students may develop particular characteristics as they progress through school, such as:
    - A tendency to question rules and authority;
    - A well-developed sense of humour;
    - Growing self-determination, stamina and powers of concentration.
  - Some of the most able pupils may also appear on the learning support register in recognition of behavioural, social, physical/sensory or specific learning difficulties.

### **Identification**

No single criterion or method for identification is adequate on its own, both since subject-specific criteria are very important at secondary school level, and because 'most able' is essentially a qualitative, relative term, though quantitative data can be helpful.

The school endeavours to reflect national best practice in identification of most able pupils. Therefore, the school maintains a list of girls so identified, which is available at [S:\ACADEMIC ADMIN\Most able pupils](#).

We identify our most able students in the following ways:

- 1) First and foremost, teacher identification through departmental meetings and annual departmental pupil identifications;
- 2) Internal and external assessment results, including: progress reviews; written reports; results from school examinations and assessments; results from public examinations.
- 3) Standardised assessment results from baseline testing: MidYIS (L4 to L5), Yellis (M5) and ALIS (L6).
- 4) Parent, peer and self-identification: input from parents, peers and pupils themselves.
- 5) Through involvement in our academic enrichment programme activities, which are open to all.
- 6) Awarding of scholarships in a variety of areas: academic; art; drama; mathematics; music; and sport.

The school recognises that this is an area requiring great sensitivity, as there is a risk that the self-confidence of girls identified as most able could be adversely affected. Therefore, we place particular value on the experiences of the teaching staff, who recognise that pupils, who may appear difficult, unhappy or disengaged, may equally have 'hidden' abilities that need to be elicited and engaged.

Academic departments set out their own criteria for identification in their individual departmental policies, which are contained in their departmental handbooks.

### **Provision for the Most Able**

Each department develops and reviews regularly a learning and teaching programme for the most able, which is detailed in its departmental handbook. Heads of departments ensure that opportunities for extension and enrichment are built into departmental schemes of work. In addition, departmental handbooks cover approaches to differentiation and personalising learning to support the most able pupils.

Most subjects at St Swithun's are taught in mixed-ability groups throughout the school, however in certain subject areas setting is used for some year groups to allow the most able to be taught with their ability peers in divisions (sets): English language and literature (M5 and U5); Latin/Classical civilisation (L5); mathematics (L4, U4, L5, M5 and U5); and modern languages (L5, M5 and U5, timetable permitting).

The following strategies are used where appropriate:

- Differentiation by resource, task, dialogue, support, pace, content and independence;
- Differentiated homework where appropriate;
- Skills-based activities with an emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, e.g. problem-solving, decision-making, predicting, evaluation;
- Learning tasks which are creative and have an open ceiling of achievement;
- Independent learning opportunities;
- Enrichment and/or extension activities.

Within the curriculum we also provide:

- A whole-school enrichment programme, 'Stretch', which is followed by all year groups for one hour each week;
- In the sixth form the opportunity for all girls optionally to complete the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

Outside of timetabled lessons we aim to provide:

- An extensive co-curricular programme, including activities at lunchtime, after school and at weekends;
- Participation in regional and national competitions;

- Access to additional classes for non-curricular subjects, e.g. Mandarin;
- Visits to school by experts, e.g. scientists, academics, authors, artists, musicians, etc.
- Access to external masterclasses, summer schools, etc.

In addition to the above, the academic enrichment programme offers the following activities:

- Break and lunchtime activities, e.g. student-led academic lunch seminars and reading groups; academic journal club (Oracle); drop-in junior STEM club; student-led initiatives such as Philosothon, one-off projects and language taster sessions.
- Competitions, e.g. one-word essay competition; support and encouragement for entering external competitions; poster competitions; whole-school quizzes.
- Conferences, e.g. academic conference event for M5 and U5 and the lower school critical thinking conference;
- Specific courses within the Stretch programme, such as the Oxbridge questions lessons for sixth form and podcast research for M5.

Scholars benefit from a mentoring programme tailored to the area of their scholarship (academic; art; drama; mathematics; music; sport), with the support of a designated teacher mentor whose role is to encourage and help them to develop their interests and to take advantage of the wide-ranging provision outlined above.

### **Coordinating Provision**

The transfer of good practice across the school is important and coordinated by the head of academic enrichment. The following arrangements are in place to encourage this:

- A list of pupils identified as most able is maintained and made available to all staff at <S:\ACADEMIC ADMIN\Most able pupils>. This is intended to raise teachers' awareness of girls' particular abilities across all areas of school life. Teachers are expected to note in their mark books those pupils identified not only in their own subject areas but also in other subjects, in order to make reference to those pupils in their planning for differentiation.
- MidYIS, Yellis and ALIS data are made available to all staff at <S:\ACADEMIC ADMIN\MidYIS, Yellis and ALIS tests>.
- All staff have access to pupil performance data for internal examinations and assessments in years 7-11, which is cross-referenced with MidYIS and Yellis data: <S:\ACADEMIC ADMIN\Year exam results>.