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CONTEXT

In September 2015 Ofsted published a report entitled **Key Stage 3: The Wasted Years?** The report was based on 1,600 routine inspections, 318 monitoring visits, 100 interviews with senior leaders, almost 11,000 questionnaire responses from students and 14 good practice visits. It unearthed the following:

- Too often the transition between primary and secondary school was poorly handled. **“Too many secondary schools did not work effectively with partner primary schools to understand pupils’ prior learning and ensure that they built on this during Key Stage 3”**
- “In too many schools the **rate of pupils’ progress and achievement in KS3 was not good enough**”.
- “Slow progress in English and mathematics and **the lack of challenge for the most able pupils** was a common feature”.
- In MFL, history and geography **teaching failed to challenge and engage pupils**. Consequently, **low level disruption in some of these lessons had a detrimental impact on pupils’ learning**.
- Homework was not consistently providing the opportunities for pupils to consolidate or extend their learning in Key Stage 3.

In light of this report the Academy carried out a full review of our KS3 provision looking in detail at:

- The transition between KS2 and KS3 and how students’ academic and pastoral needs are identified and met during this process.
- The rate of progress and achievement in KS3

- Engagement and progress in MFL, history and geography
- How homework is used to support the learning of students.
- How to ensure a good level of progress in English and maths

The Senior Team were keen to establish whether the problems identified by Ofsted in their Wasted Years report were also true of Redhill.

Whilst this was not the case (across the curriculum, students at Redhill were making strong progress), the Academy decided to take a number of strategic decisions to improve further upon lower the learning experience for Year 7 and 8 students.

- We shortened our KS3 curriculum from 3 to 2 years. All faculties would still follow the full KS3 National Curriculum, but by making every lesson count with a healthy pace, we felt this was possible in a reduced amount of time. Consequently, Year 9 could be used as a transition year to effectively prepare students for full GCSEs.
- We allowed students to pick their GCSE options in Year 8, as a means of ensuring maximum engagement across the curriculum but particularly in MFL, geography and history (all very popular subjects at the Academy)
- We worked on the transition from primary to secondary school and made a number of changes to ensure that students' academic and pastoral needs could be met and that all students could 'hit the ground running' in Year 7. We hold a termly with colleagues from local primary schools to share ideas / knowledge on key issues e.g. marking, feedback and extended writing.
- We refined our approach to homework. All homework tasks were focused on delivering the clearly defined end points as set out in the Schemes of Work.

Our decision to run a 2 year KS3 sits squarely with our core purpose - **raising student achievement**. Our curriculum builds effectively on the work covered in primary school, comprehensively delivers the full National Curriculum, supports students with the transition to KS4 and delivers strong outcomes for all groups of students at GCSE. In addition, students are exposed to a skills focused curriculum (Redhill Learning Skills) which develops life long learning skills.

In Key Stage 3 we place a strong emphasis on creative subjects such as art, design and technology, music, dance and drama. All of these are delivered as 1 x 1 hour lessons each week and not as part of a carousel of lessons to ensure students have a broad, balanced curriculum and can make informed pathways choices in Year 8.

OUTCOMES

Examination results

In 2019 we achieved a Progress 8 Score of +0.32 and were well above National Data in almost every other accountability measure. The overwhelming majority of our students leave the academy with the academic currency they need to fulfil their dreams and ambitions.

In MFL, geography and history the school's outcomes are exceptionally strong with SPIs (SISRA Performance Measure) of +1.71 for German, +1.19 for history, +1.06 for French and +0.44 for geography.

OFSTED FRAMEWORK 2019

The Ofsted School Inspection Handbook 2019 states the following under the Quality of Education descriptor:

Pupils study the full curriculum; it is not narrowed... In secondary schools, the school teaches a broad range of subjects (exemplified by the national curriculum) throughout Years 7 to 9. [If this is not yet fully the case, it is clear from leaders' actions that they are in the process of bringing this about.] (2019:50)

On this topic Ofsted also states:

176 - In secondary education, inspectors will expect to see a broad, rich curriculum. Inspectors will be particularly alert to signs of narrowing in the key stage 2 and 3 curriculums. If a school has shortened key stage 3, inspectors will look to see that the school has made provision to ensure that pupils still have the opportunity to study a broad range of subjects, commensurate with the national curriculum, in Years 7 to 9. (2019:42)

We do offer a broad and balanced curriculum, commensurate with the national curriculum. All students are given the opportunity to study a wide range of academic and practical subjects, as well as take part in a vast array of extra – curricular activities (as advertised in Redhill Plus). We are able to do this in two years (rather than three) due to our effective Year 6 Transition, high quality teaching and learning, the effective use of homework and transition focus in Year 9.

STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS

In November 2019 we surveyed students (131), parents (105) and teachers (67) to ascertain their views on the current curriculum offer at Redhill. This was in light of changes to the Ofsted Framework (see above) emphasises the desirability of a 3 year KS3 model.

With regards to the Year 8 Options process, the overwhelming majority of students (92%) agreed with the statement 'when picking my options, the school was able to offer me a wide range of appropriate courses'. On the parent survey 90% agreed with a similar statement (26% stating that they strongly agreed). 90% of teaching staff shared this view.

2. When picking my options, the school was able to offer me a wide range of appropriate courses.

[More Details](#)

Strongly agree	33
Agree	87
Disagree	11
Strongly disagree	0



89% of students stated that they were glad to pick their options in Year 8 rather than in Year 9 (with 53% strongly agreeing with this statement). A similar response was evident on the parent survey, with 80% agreeing and 37% strongly agreeing.

3. I am glad I was able to choose my options in Year 8 rather than in Year 9.

[More Details](#)

Strongly agree	69
Agree	48
Disagree	12
Strongly disagree	2



Around 70% of students stated that they felt confident when picking their options in Year 8 and around 80% of parents were positive about the support their child had received from the school during the process. Both these responses are lower than the Academy would like and therefore warrant further exploration.

4. I felt confident when picking my GCSE options in Year 8.

[More Details](#)

Strongly agree	20
Agree	72
Disagree	35
Strongly disagree	4



74% of students indicated that they preferred their year 9 timetable to that of their year 8 timetable. 84% of parents agreed with a similar question on their survey.

5. I enjoy my weekly timetable of lessons more now than in Year 8.

[More Details](#)

Strongly agree	41
Agree	56
Disagree	29
Strongly disagree	5



All key stakeholders agreed that the work was harder in Year 9 than in Year 8. Students 95% and parents 92%.

6. I have noticed that the work is harder in Year 9 than it is in Year 8.

[More Details](#)

Strongly agree	57
Agree	67
Disagree	6
Strongly disagree	1



On the Parent Survey over 91% agreed with the statement “having three years to prepare for GCSEs in each subject will make our son/daughter better prepared for their exams in Year 11. Over 96% of teachers agreed with this sentiment.

4. We feel that having 3 years to prepare for GCSE's in each subject will make our son/daughter better prepared for their exams in Year 11.

[More Details](#)

Strongly agree	40
Agree	56
Disagree	8
Strongly disagree	1



In response to the question were there any subjects you would like to have continued to study in Year 9 but were unable to do so? Typical responses included:

“No there was nothing I wanted to continue other than the subjects that I chose”

“No, I got all the ones I wanted”

“There were no other subjects that I would have liked to have continued to study”

CONCLUSION

Over the last five years the curriculum at Redhill has been meticulously planned to deliver the best possible outcomes for our students. The vast majority make strong progress as a result of this model – as indicated by our Progress 8 Score of +0.32 in 2019. Over the last three years the Progress 8 score at the Academy has been consistently positive.

Despite operating a 2 year KS3, all subjects deliver the National Curriculum without compromising the quality or diluting the content. We do this via a smooth transition between KS2 and 3 (Start your Engines), high quality teaching and learning, effective intervention to support those students who are falling behind and a commitment to setting high quality homework.

The overwhelming majority of stakeholders are in favour of this model as indicated by the surveys undertaken in November 2019. It is therefore our intention to keep our current approach for at least the next academic year. This decision will be under constant review.

REFERENCES

Ofsted (2015) Key stage 3: the wasted years? -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-3-the-wasted-years>

Ofsted (2019) School Inspection Handbook -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>