

# THE FOUR STONES APPROACH



[www.the4stones.co.uk](http://www.the4stones.co.uk)

*One Vision.  
One set of Values.  
One Team.  
One Trust.*

## *Achieving Together*



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The Four Stones

# ACHIEVING TOGETHER



The Four Stones Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is a family of like-minded schools, that collaborate to provide mutual support, share their good practice, and learn from each other. Our students deserve the best and we do this most effectively by working together.

We are dedicated to improving standards and are driven to achieve excellence by living and breathing our core values of:

**AMBITION****COMMITMENT****CREATIVITY****INTEGRITY**

We are determined to make a positive difference to the future of our students and their families, the careers of our staff, as well as contributing to the wider community.

The core purpose of the MAT is to provide excellence and opportunity for all, enabling lives to be transformed. We want all our students to access university or a high-powered alternative.



## To achieve this, we:

- Invest in teachers and leaders to carry out their roles effectively in order to attain excellence in all our schools;
- Offer a broad, balanced, and academic curriculum at both GCSE and A level. At the same time, we emphasise the importance of educating the whole child with attention to their physical, emotional, and social development and so we are proud of our character development of teamwork, leadership, resilience, and challenge that comes from teaching an academic curriculum and holding students to our high expectations;
- Complement our academic curriculum with an extensive enrichment programme. From after school clubs to international trips, we give our students access to the cultural literacy to enable them to fully participate in adult educated life;
- Operate with a warm-strict approach to discipline ensuring our students can learn in calm and purposeful classrooms, free from distractions and develop the habits that will be necessary to be successful independent adults;





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- Provide engaging and effective teaching based on our core values and the best and most up-to-date educational practice;
- Are unapologetically ambitious for every student, no matter what their background, prior attainment or needs. We take great pride in developing relationships between students, staff, and families, in order that we can ensure that success is desirable, demanded and achievable; and
- Recognise and celebrate effort, achievement, and excellence.



### Our Mission/Core Purpose

**To provide excellence and opportunity for all, enabling lives to be transformed.**

- It is the responsibility of all those employed by and associated with the organisation to work towards fulfilling these objectives:
- Create a family of 8-10 like-minded schools, that collaborate to provide mutual support, share their good practice, and learn from each other;
- Provide the best learning opportunities for our students exemplified by exceptional teaching and support, a knowledge-based and academic shared curriculum, high quality resources and opportunities beyond the classroom;
- Ensure our students make outstanding progress, regardless of their starting points, and that they achieve more highly in the MAT than they would elsewhere;
- Nurture our students to be responsible, confident, and successful members of their community and wider society;
- Enable all staff to be part of and contribute towards an exciting and dynamic learning environment, working as high performing individuals and benefitting from quality professional development and supported career progression:
- Carefully maintain the fabric of the schools and develop our facilities to be safe and inspirational learning environments;
- Secure ambitious leadership and governance at all levels so that we deliver excellent outcomes and are financially secure; and
- Develop the work of the MAT so that it is of a quality which ensures the highest regard by others evidenced by schools which are full, oversubscribed and validated by external accreditation.





"To provide excellence and opportunity for all, enabling lives to be transformed."





## VALUES



We are dedicated to improving standards and driven to achieve excellence by living and breathing our core values of:

**Ambition**

- We are ambitious for ourselves and our students. We set high expectations and standards and strive to achieve excellence in all that we do.
- We are unashamedly ambitious for the students we serve. We want to provide access to opportunities within the classroom and beyond. We will continue to strive to be the best we can be.

**Commitment**

- We are committed to being the best we can be. We consistently deliver on expectations, go the extra mile to get the job done and give 100% in all that we do, approaching everything with a "can do attitude".
- We constantly look to improve ourselves and our service, cultivating our knowledge, skill, and attitudes to achieve excellence.

**Creativity**

- We always seek innovative solutions for our students and staff so that they achieve everything they are capable of.

- We believe that creativity is only possible when it is based on knowledge which in turn is based on literacy. Our schools, where students develop the literacy skills on which all further learning depends, cultivate creativity by providing a broad base of academic knowledge that students need to be properly creative.

The knowledge we deliver is powerful in that it changes students' perceptions, values and understanding. It encourages students to ask new questions and explore alternate explanations.

**Integrity**

- We always do the right thing. We treat others with respect and honesty, take care of our environment and utilise knowledge and understanding wisely.
- We nurture our students so that they become young adults of principle and character who support each other in their quest for excellence.





## Shared expectations for our schools

**We recognise that each school's communities are different and value their uniqueness and contribution towards our core purpose. We expect all our schools to:**

- Commit to very high expectations of our students: We believe in a broad, balanced, and academic curriculum. A curriculum is only a curriculum if it is learnt, and while we will not be led by outcomes, we know that a great curriculum will mean that outcomes are high;
- Demonstrate responsibility in leadership: our leaders do not pass the buck. Instead, they make sure that learning is desirable, demanded, and achievable in our schools. Behaviour in our schools is managed by systems that everyone follows and leaders prioritise. Leaders are highly visible and know their staff and students. Our leaders look after their staff and prioritise their wellbeing; and
- Employ people that do their job and do it well. We do not tolerate underperformance. We have professional candour, and we support our colleagues to get better. We value colleagues who can achieve a great deal in the time we work.



# CORE PRINCIPLES



To ensure that we achieve our vision in the right way, and with integrity, the Trustees established the following principles within which we operate:



## Inclusivity

- Ensuring our schools are open to and supportive of every student and their family.
- Supporting the social, emotional, and academic development of every student, so they are intrinsically motivated and free to learn.



## Supporting parental choice

- Ensuring families have the information needed to choose the right school for their child.
- Always acting to promote choice and competition within localities.



## Promoting a knowledge-based curriculum

Developing and implementing a knowledge-based curriculum across all schools as the best way to raise academic achievement and aspirations for all our students.



## Partnership

Accessing best practice and support for our staff, students, and their families both within our family of schools and through working with community, regional and national partners.



## Transparency

Recognising our responsibilities as a publicly funded organisation, adhering unwaveringly to the 'Nolan Principles' of Public Service, being open at all levels about how we work, and welcoming feedback as a way to continuously improve what we do.





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# CURRICULUM

**All our students require and deserve the same inspiration, motivation, and challenge in the classroom; they are all worthy of the best.**

Therefore, we believe in a collaboratively produced, single curriculum for our schools with shared content, resources, instructional methods, and assessment practices. This enhances equity and minimises the risk of variance and fundamentally reduces teacher workload.

**We believe in a curriculum that: supports students' academic success by promoting knowledge-based learning.**

We aspire to identify the powerful knowledge in each subject that meets this aim, whilst preparing our students successfully for external examinations. This content is the product of collaboration and dialogue between the subject specialists across our schools. Moreover, working together as specialists across our schools through larger subject communities allows this content to be continually discussed, reviewed, and enriched.

The knowledge we deliver is powerful in that it changes students' perceptions, values and understanding. It encourages students to ask new questions and explore alternate explanations. The focus on imparting knowledge does not mean we dismiss the value of students acquiring application skills however, without an understanding of subject content, students will never be able to successfully create, infer, analyse, evaluate, and synthesise.

By integrating factual knowledge with procedural knowledge, we encourage students to think with increasing sophistication about the subjects they study.







### **Academically challenging and rigorous**

We believe that studying the EBacc subjects at GCSE will considerably enhance students' life chances as they facilitate the greatest flexibility both into A-Level and University courses. We promote highly academic courses in all key stages.

The core curriculum (English, maths, science, history, geography and MFL) offers a good variety of knowledge, knowledge application and is rigorous and challenging. The core curriculum pathway challenges social inequality as we promote this pathway to all students, regardless of their ability or background.



### **Broad and balanced offering both breadth and depth**

Every subject offers depth. Subject leaders plan the curriculum to look at a wider domain than the expectations of the national curriculum and deliver the information that they believe is most meaningful to the students' futures.

At Key Stage 3 we do not narrow the curriculum. Our students all follow the full range of National Curriculum subjects. The range of subjects on offer at Key Stage 4 and 5 is varied ensuring that students can continue their studies in areas of interest to them. Study at Key Stage 4 is not constrained by the examination specification. Each subject's curriculum offers a deeper approach to the subject, offering a wide range of content that we deem is important for life-long learning.



### **Supports students to master language and numbers**

Strong literacy and numeracy skills have a positive impact on students' self-esteem, behaviour, motivation, and attainment as well as being fundamental to student development and the achievement of a rich and fulfilling life. Mastery of language and fluent mathematical skills are and always will be a top priority.

Reading underpins everything that our students do in school. We believe that our students are entitled to become competent, resilient, and fluent readers by equipping them with a range of skills and strategies, promoting reading of challenging texts and developing an appreciation of a wealth of literature to build upon their cultural capital. We recognise the importance of reading and expect that every student should be reading every day for a minimum of 30 minutes.





**We believe that high standards of behaviour lie at the heart of a successful school.**

Our students have the right to learn and our teachers have the right to teach in classrooms that are completely free of disruption. We have the highest expectations of conduct and manners in our schools, all of the time.

These high expectations transcend all aspects of school life – we expect our students to be punctual, to wear their uniform with perfection and pride, to be polite, to show kindness and understanding to others, and to come to school properly equipped ready to learn and work hard each day. This not only helps them to achieve well but also creates positive habits and routines that will stand them in good stead for a successful working life as adults.

Our teachers operate with high levels of consistency and insistency and with a warm-strict approach within the boundaries of clear systems that are well understood by all stakeholders. Our leaders are highly visible, supporting good order through their regular presence throughout the day. The result is calm and purposeful classrooms and corridors.

Behaviour expectations are communicated to students through assemblies and tutor periods on a regular basis as well as through posters which are displayed in each classroom. In addition, the message that bullying is unacceptable is made clear to students through the schools' PSHE programmes, through theme weeks, on the school websites and in tutor periods. Bullying is always taken seriously and is dealt with promptly.

Rewards are an integral means of achieving our aims. They have a motivational role in helping students to realise that desirable behaviour, self-awareness and responsibility to self and others is valued. We take great delight in celebrating good work and good behaviour by individuals and groups within school, with parents/carers, and within the wider community.





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# CHARACTER



**The Character Academy is an umbrella term for our enrichment offer to all students across the MAT. It is how students feel a sense of belonging and identification with the MAT.**

Our students have equal access, across all schools, to a wide variety of activities, including residential trips, cultural visits, as well as the opportunity to learn new skills and exposure to engaging and inspiring speakers. These are the kinds of experiences that students remember about their time at school; the memories of belonging to a team, trip abroad or being part of a successful school production, of seeing things through a new and fascinating lens, of having fun whilst developing their sense of place in the world with their friends.

The Character Academy is underpinned by the desire to foster students' personal development through **teamwork, resilience, leadership, and positive challenges**. We want all our students to be able to access the best of what is thought and said so that they can graduate from our schools as ethical, informed citizens ready to take on the challenges of the 21st century global workplace.


We offer our students a range of experiences throughout their time with us:

A programme of '**cornerstone experiences**' – where all students will be guaranteed to have an opportunity to participate in activities that will not only develop skills and qualities but create lifelong memories.

Each school has the best possible menu of **extra-curricular activities** to offer students and encourage and track student participation. We aim to have 'sticky' schools, where students choose to stay beyond the boundaries of the school day to be involved in high-quality extra-curricular clubs and activities (e.g. sports and performing arts).

Alongside this core offer we supplement students' experiences with further enrichment (e.g. visiting speakers, workshops, and visits) and leadership opportunities (e.g. peer mentoring, school council throughout each academic year).





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# TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT



Schools in the MAT share the same principles around teaching, learning and assessment. Our 'responsive' teaching model is simple and straight-forward, however we pride ourselves on our outward looking perspective and our use of the latest education and cognitive research to continually review our practice.

We believe lessons should include the following elements:



**Knowledge-based learning:** all lessons are based upon long term knowledge acquisition.



**Feedback:** feedback is a continuous thread that runs through every lesson. It takes many forms, such as verbal feedback and discussion, whole-class feedback, visualiser feedback, questioning, self and peer feedback and low stakes quizzing.



**Retrieval practice:** all lessons contain regular opportunities for retrieval practice enabling students to remember knowledge for longer.

A key feature is that all lessons start with a low stakes quiz focusing on strengthening previous learning and leading to fluent recall.



**Explicit direct instruction:** teacher led direct instruction is a feature of every lesson focusing on clear, concise, and structured explanation; modelling; identifying misconceptions; and construction and deconstruction of exemplars.

- **Explanations:** lessons are teacher led as opposed to activity or student led. Explanations are carefully planned during collaborative planning with core message, audience, and misconceptions in mind.
- **Modelling:** modelling is used to show the expert's thought process and is completed using an 'I do, we do, you do' approach. Numerous models, including worked examples and non-examples are provided. Modelling consists of the following four types and feature across a sequence of lessons: creation, co-creation, improvement, and deconstruction.

The aim is to guide student practice and allow students to rehearse new material and dispel misconceptions before deliberate practice.



**Questioning:** identified pre-planned and responsive questions are incorporated into all lessons to check for understanding through regular show me activities. Additionally, 'no hands up' questioning is used with the teacher in charge (cold call) asking a high number of closed questions linked to facts to promote lasting learning. A range of question types are asked throughout a lesson including: behaviour/instructional; checking for understanding; repetitive and deeper thinking questions. Teachers expect further explanation of answers and will not accept students opting out.



**Deliberate practice:** teachers provide opportunities for frequent practice/oral rehearsal (call and response) of key facts and concepts. Activities have a narrow focus to allow students to drill and perfect. Once complete, students are provided with the opportunity to practise application of the knowledge for example via extended writing pieces or drawing tasks.



**Testing:** formative assessment is used in every lesson using show me activities. Tools such as mini whiteboards, hand show and choral response are utilised. Responsive teaching takes place based on assessment findings. Students complete a plenary test at the end of each lesson in order to assess what they have learnt and their knowledge application. Completion of a plenary test holds students accountable for their learning during the lesson as well as providing teachers with key information that can be used to inform planning. Summative assessments contain questions based upon topics covered since the start of Year 7.



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