



DOWNSEND
SCHOOL

Curriculum Policy

Downsend School

September 2026

Registered in England & Wales - Cognita Schools Limited No. 02313425
Registered Office: Seebeck House, One Seebeck Place Knowlhill, Milton Keynes

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Curriculum Policy

1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that our curriculum supports our school ethos and fulfils our school aims, which are defined as:

- We inspire a global perspective, encouraging an awareness and an understanding of the world around us, and our responsibility to make change.
- We shape incredible people with the emotional intelligence to build relationships, lead teams and adapt to a changing world.
- We find the creativity within us all. We develop the curious, the critical thinkers, the artists and the innovators.
- We aspire to digital mastery by equipping ourselves with the ability and the mindset to tackle the technology of the future.

2 Our Values

2.1 Downsend is an innovative and forward-thinking school with a clear vision: to inspire a generation to embrace the future and to shape incredible people who go on to make change in the world. We think big, we celebrate innovation, and we never hold back. That ambition is built on three values which sit alongside our four aims and describe the character we want every pupil to develop:

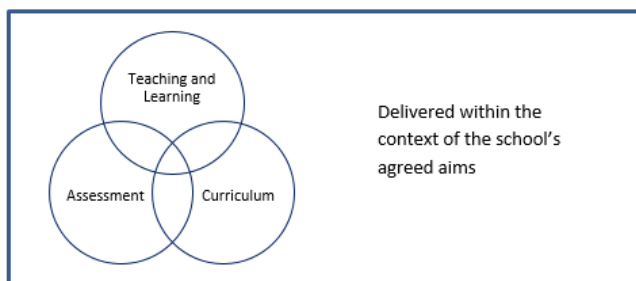
- **Thrive:** we create an inclusive, caring community in which every pupil feels known, valued and supported, so that they develop the emotional intelligence and resilience to flourish academically, emotionally and socially.
- **Innovate:** we embrace innovation and change, inspiring pupils to think creatively, lead with confidence and push boundaries, so that future-ready skills and a curious mindset equip them to shape the world around them.
- **Endeavour:** we celebrate effort, perseverance and courage, so that pupils learn that achievement comes from dedication and resilience, developing the strength of character and integrity to overcome challenges and reach their full potential.

2.2 This policy applies to all pupils, including those in the Early Years and Downsend Plus.

2.3 We see the curriculum as, 'The total learning experience for our pupils, which includes not only the taught lessons but also the routines, behaviours, events, activities and other opportunities that our pupils experience on a daily, weekly and yearly basis in order to ensure that all of them make the best progress possible and attain high standards'.

2.4 A well-structured and coherent curriculum is a fundamental element of the tripartite of education that underpins all successful schools and includes Teaching, Learning and Assessment as in the following model:

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- 2.5 We aim to provide a holistic curriculum which develops every pupil as a confident individual who loves learning. We understand that the curriculum, both within taught lessons and beyond them, and in everything we say and do, should create an environment where academic risk-taking, questioning and debating, challenging thinking and the freedom to learn from mistakes are all encouraged.
- 2.6 Our curriculum offers all pupils the opportunity to experience linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative aspects of education. We intend that our curriculum should imbue in our pupils:
- A passion for life-long learning;
 - A capacity for independent and critical thinking;
 - Self-awareness, self-regulation and resilience;
 - Self-confidence without arrogance; and
 - Genuine interests that extend beyond the confines of the classroom.
- 2.7 British values, which are; democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, are actively promoted in every aspect of school life.
- 2.8 Our curriculum is compliant with the following regulatory requirements as outlined in the Independent School Standards:

The written policy, plans and schemes of work:–

- (i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
- (ii) do not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

The school is committed to ensuring:

- (a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act (1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;

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- (b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills;
- (c) where the principal language of instruction is a language other than English, that lessons in written and spoken English, except that this matter does not apply in respect of a school which provides education for pupils who are all temporarily resident in England and which follows the curriculum of another country;
- (d) personal, social, health and economic education which:
 - (i) reflects the school's aim and ethos; and
 - (ii) encourages respect for other people, paying regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act(a);
- (e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that–
 - (i) is presented in an impartial manner;
 - (ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - (iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential. The school has a separate careers guidance policy.
- f) where the school has pupils below compulsory school age, a programme of activities which is appropriate to their educational needs in relation to personal, social, emotional and physical development and communication and language skills
- g) where the school has pupils above compulsory school age, a programme of activities which is appropriate to their needs;
- h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress and
- i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.

3 Taught Curriculum

- 3.1 Our taught curriculum broadly follows and, at times, goes beyond the National Curriculum at KS1,2,3,4 and is formally assessed at the end of KS2 by NFER, at KS4 by GCSEs and at the end of KS5 by A levels and BTECs. The details of which exam boards are used at GCSE and A level by our different subjects can be found in the individual subject information section on our website. Our pupils also take GL summative assessments at the end of years 1-6; 7-8 in English and Mathematics.
- 3.2 Pupils entering the school in years 7 and 9 take the CAT4 baseline test in September in their year of entry; all pupils take the CAT4 baseline test at the start of year 9. Pupils entering the Sixth Form will take the CAT4 baseline test. The outcomes of all tests are shared with pupils and parents as part of informed discussions about a pupil's potential. They are used to make sure that the curriculum offer is individualised to need.
- 3.3 Time awarded to each subject in each year group is visually explained in the curriculum model in appendix 1.
- 3.4 Details of how the taught curriculum is translated into subject Schemes of Work (SoW) and lesson plans can be found in the individual subject information section on our website.

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- 3.5 Taken together, the taught curriculum will ensure that by the time they have completed their time with us, all pupils are able to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding to enable them to move onto the next stage of their education at the highest level.

4 Our Future Skills Model

- 4.1 Our curriculum is built around a consistent Future Skills model that turns our four aims into everyday practice. The same four strands run through every phase of the school, Personal (shaping incredible people), Digital (digital mastery), Global (global perspective) and Creative (stimulating creativity), sitting alongside a broad, academic core curriculum designed to develop knowledge, skills and character together.

- 4.2 **Downsend Junior and Downsend Senior:** in the Junior and Senior Schools, the Future Skills model is delivered through the taught curriculum, enrichment and pastoral programme, and a wide range of unforgettable experiences. Our pupils speak to a significant range of speakers and guests, and experience the kind of moments designed to broaden horizons and inspire a lifelong love of learning.

- **Global:** pupils build a global perspective through the study of a wide range of cultures, debate on race and gender issues, community and charitable work, and exchange opportunities with our sister schools in Chile, Asia and Spain within the Cognita family.
- **Personal:** pupils are supported to become incredible people through leadership opportunities, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and wellbeing initiatives such as Global Be Well Day and the AS Steer programme, which helps us signpost potential mental health issues before they escalate.
- **Creative:** creativity is stimulated through our STRETCH programme - covering everything from Pfizer's Science in a Box to Young Engineers and rocket-making - Virtual Reality headsets that bring immersive, hands-on design to life, Downsend's Dragon's Den enterprise challenge in Year 8, and a thriving Creative Arts offer in music, drama and art.
- **Digital:** we roll out 1:1 devices from Year 3 (and from Reception in the Senior School), alongside platforms such as MS Teams, One Note, Atom Learning and the AI-based CENTURY platform, to personalise and stretch every pupil's learning. Digital citizenship is taught explicitly, and as part of the Cognita group our digital maturity rating is 'embedded', with 'leading' status our short-term ambition.

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- 4.3 **Downsend Sixth (D6):** at Downsend Sixth, the Future Skills model is expressed through two complementary strands - the D6 Core Programme and D6 Future Ready - which sit alongside the taught A-Level and BTEC curriculum (D6 Studies) to give every student a fully holistic Sixth Form experience across Years 12 and 13. Education at Downsend Sixth doesn't stop at the classroom door: our unique Global Impact Project, fully funded by the school for our founding cohort, combines a three-day team-building sailing expedition across the Solent with a summer expedition to Borneo, working with local communities and conservationists to protect endangered wildlife and restore damaged ecosystems - the kind of purposeful, globally connected education that builds the self-belief and perspective students carry into university, careers and life.



The Downsend Sixth (D6) model: D6 Core Programme and D6 Future Ready, built on Personal, Digital, Global and Creative Future Skills.

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- 4.4 The D6 Core Programme combines academic study with timetabled support, wellbeing, community and leadership, and includes:

- **D6 Tutor:** every student is assigned a tutor who knows and understands them, meeting regularly for group and 1:1 sessions, monitoring attendance and supporting elective choices and participation. The tutor also acts as an advocate, helps students access specialist support, and provides references for higher education and career next steps.
- **D6 Studies:** a broad range of A-Level and BTEC subjects, which can be combined so that every student builds a suite of subjects that suits their aspirations.
- **D6 Electives:** every student opts into a supplementary elective to broaden their experience and gain additional UCAS points - including the Extended Project Qualification (28 UCAS points), Critical Thinking AS-Level (up to 20 points), the International Certificate for Digital Literacy (up to 24 points), Sports Leadership (16 points) and the Level 3 Certificate in Sustainability, developed with input from the World Wide Fund for Nature (up to 20 points). Each year opens with Year 13 presenting their elective experience to the Senior School at the Downsend Sixth Incredible Expo.
- **D6 Community:** every student undertakes at least one hour of community activity each week in both Years 12 and 13, from supporting younger learners to charitable and

Commented [S12]: Should we add a table here for DJ, DS, D6? Similar to the behaviour policy?

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environmental projects, including re-wilding and clearing work with local councils and environmental associations.

- **D6 Wellness:** free gym membership at Leatherhead Leisure Centre for our first cohorts underpins a continued commitment to wellbeing through sport, fitness and movement, alongside a full fixture list of team and individual sports including football, hockey, netball, rugby sevens, cricket, tennis and swimming.
- **D6 Leadership:** every student applies for a leadership role - such as Student Voice representative, Digital Ambassador, House Captain, or a Drama, Music, Art or STEM Lead - receiving training and support from their D6 Tutor to consult, organise and deliver change.
- **D6 Futures:** timetabled sessions led by the leadership team, tutors and visiting experts, covering the English Speaking Board examination (worth up to 30 UCAS points), personal strengths analysis, personal finance, higher education and career guidance, study skills, time management, relationships, MOOCs and wellbeing and resilience.

4.5 D6 Future Ready is spearheaded by the Global Impact Project described above, and also includes:

- **D6 Entrepreneurs:** the Tycoon Challenge, a national enterprise competition in which student teams write a business plan, receive a risk-free goodwill loan and compete through a kick-starter style platform to build their own start-up.
- **D6 Sports Leadership:** a Level 3 qualification, worth 16 UCAS points, in which students can plan, build and lead sports programmes for younger pupils or the wider community.
- **D6 Stretch:** a thriving clubs programme shaped by student interest, including E-Sports, Film Media, Fashion Design, Journalism and Podcasting.
- **The Duke of Edinburgh's Award:** offered at Bronze, Silver and Gold, with practice expeditions on the North and South Downs progressing to the wild country of Exmoor and Dartmoor.

5 Special Educational Needs and Disability - SEND

5.1 Our curriculum is inclusive. For those pupils with special educational needs or specific learning difficulties, the school has a well-established Learning Support department, led by the Head of Learning Support or SENCO.

5.2 Further details of this provision can be found in our Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Policy.

6 Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

6.1 Our policy follows the advice given by the DfE in the non-statutory guidance of November 2014 and meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards/BSO Standards. Aspects of SMSC are infused within the day to day operation of our school; incorporated through the curriculum, both in content included in subject schemes of work and through other planned learning opportunities in the school. They are captured in our written aims and expressed in the ethos and behaviours of everyone.

- a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
- b) Ensures that principles are actively promoted which-

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- Enable pupils to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence;
- Enable pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England;
- Encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely;
- Enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
- Further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
- Encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act; and
- Encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic process, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England.

(c)precludes the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school; and

(d)takes such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils—

(i)while they are in attendance at the school,

(ii)while they are taking part in extra-curricular activities which are provided or organised by or on behalf of the school, or

(iii)in the promotion at the school, including through the distribution of promotional material, of extra-curricular activities taking place at the school or elsewhere,

they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.

6.2 Discriminatory or extremist opinions or behaviours are challenged as a matter of routine.

6.3 In addition, our approach to SMSC ensures that all pupils will gain an:

- Understanding of how citizens can influence decision-making through the democratic process;
- Appreciation that living under the rule of law protects individual citizens and is essential for their well-being and safety;
- Understanding that there is a separation of power between the executive and the judiciary, and that while some public bodies such as the police and the army can be held to account through Parliament, others, such as the courts, maintain independence;
- Understanding that the freedom to hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law;
- Acceptance that people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself (or having none) should be accepted and tolerated, and should not be the cause of prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour; and
- Understanding of the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination.

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7 Religious Education and PSHEE

- 7.1 Our school chooses to respond to the legal requirement in maintained schools to teach Religious Education and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), and to non-statutory guidelines to cover other aspects of Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHEE). Our programme encourages respect for other people, with particular regard to the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010
- 7.2 Our PSHEE course is delivered to all pupils through discrete PSHEE lessons taught by our teachers. There is one lesson of taught PSHEE a week. Elements of the programme may be supported through the bringing in of additional expertise, such as outside speakers, or the use of teachers with a particular interest or knowledge in a specific area. In addition to these discrete sessions, PSHEE is also dealt with across the curriculum (e.g. Social issues through the teaching of English Literature; Health through Biology and PE; Citizenship through History & RE). There are also centrally organised sessions which supplement the delivery in house, dealing with issues such as bullying, alcohol, sexual relationships and drugs, as well as supporting careers and economic education.

8 Co-curricular

- 8.1 A wide range of enrichment activities supplements the timetabled curriculum. Our pupils are encouraged to take part in an extensive range of art, drama, music, sport and other activities and clubs. Regular themed days and weeks are held. These may include Book Week, Maths Week, Science Week, Anti-Bullying Week or Art Week.
- 8.2 Pupils are taken to places of interest on a regular basis. Visits, including residential opportunities, are organised annually, which help to develop independence, teamwork and responsibility in a different environment to that in school.
- 8.3 Charity work and sustainability are a lived part of life at every stage of Downsend, not an add-on. Pupils in the Junior School elect global and local charities to support each year, and a peer-elected Eco-Committee has championed a range of sustainability initiatives that were recognised with the Eco-Schools Green Flag with Distinction Award in July 2025. This commitment continues into the Senior School and Downsend Sixth, where pupils dedicate time to local community work and, through D6 Community, contribute to environmental projects such as re-wilding and conservation work with local councils and environmental associations.

9 Scholarships and Bursaries

- 9.1 We actively seek out, nurture? and celebrate talent. Downsend offers Academic, Music, Drama, Sport and Art/Design Technology scholarships, awarded at 11+, 13+ and 16+ entry, including entry to Downsend Sixth, typically covering 5-15% of fees alongside expert mentorship and enriched, personalised programmes in the pupil's area of strength.
- **Academic scholarships:** awarded on the basis of CAT scores, references and, for current pupils, termly assessment results.
 - **Music, Drama, Art/DT, Futures and Sport scholarships:** awarded following a Scholarship Assessment Day, based on a written application, audition, portfolio or performance as appropriate to the discipline.

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- **Bursaries:** means-tested financial support is also available via Cognita, so that a Downsended education remains within reach for families who would otherwise be unable to afford it.

9.2 Prospective pupils wishing to be considered for a scholarship register for academic assessment and submit a written application by 1 November; exact assessment day timings are confirmed once applications have been processed. Further information can be found in the school scholarship brochure

10 Other Opportunities

10.1 Our school aims to provide an education for life. Other aspects of our curriculum which enable our pupils to gain the skills, knowledge and experience to be successful adults include:

- Careers and Higher Education;
- Leadership Training;
- Pupil Councils;
- Community Service;
- Duke of Edinburgh;
- Expeditions and trips;
- Fundraising Activities;
- Various Societies and Activities; and
- Sport.

11 Responsibility

11.1 Responsibility for the overview and yearly evaluation of this policy resides with Tim Pearne (Downsended Junior Leader of Learning and Innovation) and Martin Skitt (Downsended Senior Leader of Learning and Innovation). However, all staff are responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented and acted on.

11.2 When evaluating the use and impact of this policy, our school leaders will evaluate the extent to which there is evidence of a curriculum which:

- Fulfils the aims of the school;
- Embeds aspiration, attributes and the expectation to achieve high standards and high rates of progress; and
- Provides engagement and excitement for learning.

12 Monitoring and Evaluation

12.1 We monitor and evaluate the impact of our curriculum through a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures, reviewed at both whole-school and subject level, so that we can capture what is genuinely happening for pupils across Downsended Junior, Downsended Senior and Downsended Sixth, and respond quickly where change is needed.

- **Academic outcomes:** CAT4, Quest, GL and NFER assessment data, and GCSE, A Level and BTEC results, are analysed by subject and senior leaders to track progress and identify areas for development.
- **Quality assurance:** regular learning walks, lesson observations and work scrutiny by subject leaders and the Senior Leadership Team.
- **Pupil voice:** student councils, surveys and feedback gathered by Tutors are used to understand pupils' first-hand experience of the curriculum.

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- **Parent feedback:** gathered through surveys and ongoing communication with the school.
- **Future Skills and enrichment tracking:** participation and outcomes across enrichment, the Future Skills model, the Core Programme and Future Ready are monitored to ensure every pupil has access to a broad range of opportunities, not just the most confident or able.
- **Annual review:** findings are reported by the Leaders of Learning and Innovation to the Senior Leadership Team and used to inform curriculum development, staff training and the annual review of this policy.

12.2 Where monitoring identifies a need for change, adjustments are made to schemes of work, staff training or resourcing, and the impact of those changes is reviewed at the next evaluation cycle.

Ownership and consultation	
Document sponsor (role)	Group Director of Education
Document author (name)	Karen Nicholson, ADE
Consultation – May 2017	Consultation with the following schools: Long Close School, Charterhouse Square School, Quinton House School, El Limonar Murcia, Cumnor Boys' School, Downsend Leatherhead Pre-Prep School, Oakleigh House School and El Limonar Villamartin. Education Team representative: John Coleman, ADE.
Updated – April 2018	James Carroll, ADE
Review – May 2022	Nicola Lambros DE
Review – May 2025	Sarah Reynolds, Regional Director of Education
Review – August 2026	Charlie Gibbons, Head of Sixth Form

Audience	
Audience	All school staff

Document application and publication	
England	Yes
Wales	Yes
Spain	Yes
Italy	Yes
Switzerland	Yes
Greece	Yes

Version control	
Implementation date	September 2026
Review date	September 2028

Related documentation	
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Related documentation	Curriculum Policy Assessment Policy Teaching and Learning Policy SEND Policy EAL Policy Prevent Duty Early Years Policy, where relevant Independent School Standards Downsend Scholarship Programme (or whatever it's called)
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Appendix 1:

Downsend Junior:

(indicated in 60 minute periods **per week**)

Lesson Organisation

The school day is organised into structured teaching periods which allow for a balance of core academic subjects, creative learning, physical activity and personal development. Lessons are designed to provide pace, variety and opportunities for deep learning.

- Core subjects such as English and Mathematics are taught daily.
- Specialist teaching is provided in subjects including Music, Dance and Drama, Physical Education, Games and Modern Foreign Languages.
- Humanities and Science are taught through a combination of discrete lessons and thematic learning opportunities.
- Future Skills are developed across the curriculum through collaborative projects, digital learning and problem-solving tasks.
- Regular opportunities for reading, discussion and reflection support the development of literacy, critical thinking and communication.

	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
English	5	5	5	5
Library/ Reading	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Maths	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5
Science	1.5	1.5	2	2
Future Skills	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Art	1	1	1	1
DT	1	1	1	1
Drama/Dance	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Music	1	1	1	1
Humanities (Geog/Hist)	1	1	1	1
PRS	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
MFL	1	1	1.5	1.5
Computing	1	1	1	1
Swimming	1	1	1	1
PE	1	1	1	1
Games	4	4	4	4
PSHE	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5

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Downsend Senior:

(indicated in 60 minute periods **per fortnight**)

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	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
English	8	8	8	8	8
Maths	8	8	8	8	8
Science	9	9	12	12	12
Art	2	2			
DT	3	3			
Drama	2	2			
Music	2	2			
Geography	3	3			
History	3	3			
RS	2	2			
MFL1	3	3			
MFL2	-	-			
Computing	2	2			
PE/Games	7	7	5	5	5
PSHE	1	1	2	1	1
Option A			6	6	6
Option B			6	6	6
Option C			6	6	6
Option D			6	6	6
Future Skills	3	3	1	(2)	
Triple Science/ Support				2	2

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Sixth:

	Year 12	Year 13
Subject choice 1	10	10
Subject choice 2	10	10
Subject choice 3	10	10
Subject choice 4 (if applicable)	10	10
Future Skills	2	2
PSHE	2	2
Academic Elective	4	0
Games	4	4
Guided Independent Study	18	22

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