



St Columba's College

Stretch & Challenge Policy

This policy applies across the College at all age ranges including Early Years, Prep and Senior Schools.

St. Columba's College is conducted in the educational tradition of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. We respond with appropriate compassion and encouragement while maintaining high expectations. Compassion may call for challenging students to stretch beyond their comfort zones academically, socially, or spiritually.

Policy owner: NH

Date reviewed: November 2023

Date of next review: November 2026

Ratify by governors: No

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Section 1 Our Vision of Stretch & Challenge

“Being caring and compassionate is accomplished only by maintaining high standards and expectations . . . It is acting in a way that brings about the best possible development of others” Beyond Methodology page 94.

Stretch & Challenge (S&C) in the College is rooted in the tradition and charism of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. At the core of our vision each student is encouraged to grow and flourish in order to fulfil their potential. This flourishing can happen both within the set curriculum and in the various opportunities that extend beyond it. Hence the view that high quality teaching and learning and the SHAPE/Tutor programme (with pastoral support as its basis) are fundamental to the vision of S&C here.

This view of S&C is an integral part of the Brothers’ vision of educational opportunity for all students and we commit to providing an environment in which all are empowered to think deeply and engage with healthy struggle. The best provision for students and their peers is one that challenges them and extends their thinking, knowledge and skills. Students with particular abilities and talents must be recognised and supported to reach the highest possible standards intellectually, emotionally, aesthetically, socially, physically, creatively and spiritually. This takes place within a S&C programme that is fluid, inclusive and recognises that students develop at many different stages and paces. Our aim is to provide a challenging and stimulating learning environment for all, which offers opportunities for students to thrive and develop a lifelong love of learning.

A continuity of vision supports each S&C student as they progress through all the key stages of their education in the College. From the very youngest students arriving in the Lower Prep to Upper 6th Form students anticipating study at top universities, the College aims to stimulate a sense of responsibility for developing their own abilities, skills and interests. As a Catholic school, the College aims to foster in students, especially those of high ability or profound skill, a more selfless sense of responsibility toward the wider community and the world beyond.

It is the responsibility of the Prep to lay the foundations of a ‘Culture of Excellence’ spanning 4-18, supporting all students in achieving their potential without ceilings. As well as challenging the higher attaining pupils, this includes facilitating the discovery and development of talents and abilities at all levels and in all areas. By encouraging students to pursue different activities and master new skills, we hope they will make the transition to the Senior School with an enthusiasm for learning and the resilience to cope with the many challenges they will face and options available to them. This level of total inclusion in a safe environment for self-discovery allows our boys and girls to experience all that life at St. Columba’s has to offer and to reach new heights of personal growth and development, equipping them with the skills and determination to succeed.

Staff are required to actively promote fundamental British values of: democracy; the rule of law; individual liberty; mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs when planning and delivering the curriculum. Please refer to the Curriculum policy and the ‘Staff Safe Code of Conduct’ for further definition and clarification.

Section 2 Identification of S&C students

Inclusive Charism

In line with our vision, there is no exclusive body of S&C students. All are encouraged to pursue personal excellence in the many areas of school life and provided with healthy challenge in their learning as an essential part of their development.

List

In the Senior School, a S&C non-exclusive list for each year group is maintained and reviewed regularly. It is formed of students of exceptional ability in each year group (on average, 5-10%). All staff are involved in identifying S&C students in the key stages and subject areas in which they teach. Cognitive skills test results, lesson observations, teacher assessment, attainment and effort grades, and public exam results help identify high ability students. Beyond this, each subject area in the Senior School and 6th Form maintain its own subject specific S&C list.

In the Prep School, assessment data is used to ascertain who the highest attaining students are in the school and the progress of these students is closely monitored by the Lower Prep Lead and Deputy Head (Academic). Students with the highest 'developed ability' scores in their INCAS assessments are invited to join 'UnCommon Knowledge Club'. This is a lunchtime club run by the Deputy Head (Academic) which provides the opportunity to those children to extend and deepen their knowledge in particular areas of interest to them.

Scholar Badge

The top 10% in every Senior School year group are awarded a Scholar Badge. This entitles them to take advantage of specific programmes and measures put in place by the S&C co-ordinators for the purpose of challenging the most able. These pupils are identified by SLT in consultation with S&C coordinators, usually before the start of the academic year.

Added to the Scholar Badge list are students who do not necessarily meet the academic criteria for the Scholar Badge, but who nevertheless distinguish themselves by their outstandingly positive attitude towards learning.

Section 3 Provision

Within individual subject areas it is expected that the needs of the highest attaining pupils in the Prep and the scholars in the Senior School are fully met through high quality teaching and learning. Both in lessons and through the SHAPE/Tutor timetable, opportunities for S&C are available to a wide range of pupils at all times, maintaining the distinctive charism of the school. These experiences are offered to all in partnership with parents in the Senior School.

In delivering the curriculum, two strategies are used to meet the needs of S&C students, as well as other able students who may at times show a strength in one specific curriculum area:

- enrichment - broadening students' education by exposing them to aspects of a topic beyond the scheme of work;
- extension - encouraging higher order thinking and reasoning skills, and providing advanced activities for 'faster' workers until a new concept is introduced to the whole teaching group.

Setting is used in both the Prep and Senior School to focus provision for S&C. The subject areas of Maths and English (and Science and Modern Languages in the Senior School) have top sets of high ability learners concentrated in a narrow ability range. In all subject areas throughout the College differentiation expands learning opportunities for S&C. Phonics is also streamed in the Lower Prep.

A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities are made available to all students, and most S&C students participate in several of these. Competitive sport is played at a high standard and from a young age. Music lessons and participation in choirs, bands and orchestras are encouraged. Extended day activities include strategy games, art, computer clubs, drama, chess club and sporting activities. In the Prep, non-curricular subjects like Chinese are offered along with opportunities like the Year 6 Young Enterprise Club. Senior School students are encouraged to enter local and national competitions in many areas of interest, including Maths Challenge, Physics Olympiad, Chemistry Top of the Bench, Financial Services and Young Enterprise.

Key Stage 1 & 2

In the Lower Prep, the higher adult/student ratio helps us to tailor provision to meet the needs of S&C students.

Students in Prep 5 and 6 enter local, regional and national competitions in academic and sporting areas such as the National Quiz Clubs (General Knowledge, Maths & Science), Maths Challenges (Primary Maths Challenge, Aldwickbury) and competitive fixtures and festivals. Themed weeks, including Art/Music, Maths and Science, afford pupils the opportunity to explore areas of interest in more detail and to think about how to develop their skills. Links with the Old Columban Network and the Senior School give internal mentoring sessions. This allows younger students to obtain guidance on achieving their goals and ambitions whilst developing an understanding of the paths and choices available to them.

The PSPQ (Pre-Senior Project Qualification) A key part of the PSB (Prep school baccalaureate) is an independent project undertaken by pupils in Prep Six. Children are coached through the process during their weekly Future Prep lessons which are taken by the Head of Prep and the S&C Lead in the Senior School and their research can be presented in a variety of formats. This project is highly valued by senior schools as it develops independence, critical thinking and self-regulated learning. The S&C Lead in the Prep also worked very closely with the S&C Lead in the Senior School to ensure that

transition of the highest attaining students is smooth. It also allows us to provide the Prep and Senior students with a range of opportunities to work together.

Key Stage 3

All Scholars and other students interested in enriching their own learning are invited to attend the Key Stage 3 S&C Programme and the ‘In Search of . . .’ scheme, run on alternate years. The S&C Programme gives pupils the opportunity to broaden their academic horizons and develop their reasoning skills by being exposed to and investigating a range of resources on a number of topics, developing their independent learning, research, and debate skills. In particular this is carried out weekly in the form of The Junior Good Place which is developing very strong links with the Prep School. The ‘In Search of . . .’ project offers creative learning sessions from subject specialists around a particular theme, culminating in a trip or event, thus showing SHAPE in partnership with the wider curriculum. The S&C Department also offer a number of other trips following a similar pro forma e.g. Geneva and CERN visit

Key Stages 4 & 5

There are a range of enrichment activities open to all students, including The Good Place Philosophy Club, essay competitions, the ‘In Search of . . .’ scheme and other trips, as well as the Wider Reading programme for students considering applying to competitive universities.

In the summer term Form 4 Scholars are invited to attend lectures at Cambridge University in partnership with another school. Form 5 students are invited to attend an Oxbridge Conference at St Albans High School for Girls in the Spring term.

Critical Thinking and Oxbridge seminars run throughout the year for KS5 students who are invited to attend and to lead some of these sessions. Attendance is not compulsory but is driven by students. In the summer term there is a Lower Sixth trip to the Cambridge University Open Day. Furthermore, Oxbridge students are also supported with various mock interviews at local schools in preparation for interview, as well as extensive internal interview practice with subject specialists and Senior Leadership.

~~From the end of Form 4 until UCAS applications in Upper 6th, S&C students follow the PUP Prestigious Universities Programme: a modular tailored course in which they learn, amongst other things, spoken and written Mandarin & Chinese Economy and Culture, and spoken and written Arabic & Arab World Culture. The PU programme is crafted to maximise students' awareness of global issues and cultures, and to enhance their skills portfolio for their applications to the top universities.~~

The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) is an additional qualification timetabled for two periods a week. A level two EPQ is offered to 4th Form Students. Importantly, links with outside agencies, like Excellence East and Debate Chamber, allow students to attend conferences and activity days aimed at those S&C students aspiring to the top universities, including Oxford and Cambridge.

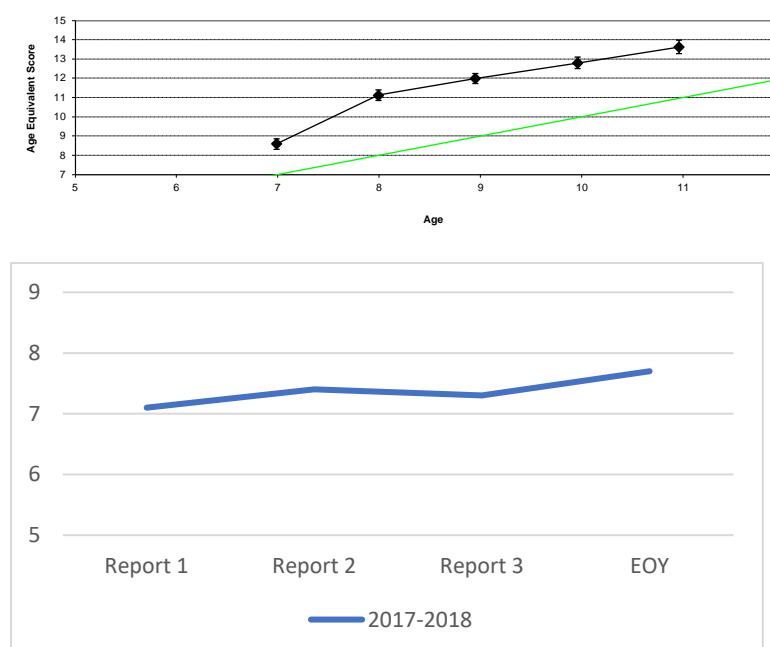
Section 4 Monitoring Scholars

All staff in all areas of the College are involved in the monitoring of S&C students: form tutors, subject teachers, subject leaders, S&C co-ordinators and leadership teams. At all key stages, student work books are regularly sampled by the leadership team and subject leaders to monitor progress, and exam and test results are analysed to determine student attainment and achievement. Subject leaders, in liaison with S&C co-ordinators, are responsible for monitoring the attainment and achievement of S&C students in their subject area and include evaluation of S&C provision in their annual reviews of development plans, schemes of work and lesson plans.

Regular communication between parents and the College is a recognised means of evaluation. Observations from parents support monitoring in the Senior School but not the Prep School.

Extracurricular provision for S&C students is regularly evaluated by the S&C coordinators through discussion and interviews with students, appropriate staff, and the Head. Students who participate in S&C extracurricular activities positively and effectively are encouraged to engage in future projects. Termly meetings are held to discuss the students' views on the projects and to establish progress. Attendance in all projects is noted.

Periodically the S&C co-ordinator for each age group KS3/4/5 creates a graphic representation of a Scholars' progress and invites the student in an interview to reflect on their progress and consider the extent to which they are exploring their full intellectual capacity. Longitudinal data of students who show particularly high developed ability is also tracked in the Prep. This is shared with teachers and also, at their individual request, parents. The data is presented in the following way:



The interview gives the Scholar the opportunity to appreciate an overview of their progress, and to give valuable feedback to the S&C co-ordinator about their academic experience as a student of higher ability. It also gives the co-ordinator an opportunity (at KS4/5) to ask the Scholar in a formal setting about their intentions for University applications.

Discussions are held termly between the three S&C coordinators to achieve continuity of support and provision for S&C students across the age range, in line with the whole College vision. Staff regularly review procedures and analyse cohort data year on year, looking to adjust and improve the S&C provision that is being offered. Close links between the three S&C co-ordinators provide continuity for S&C students as they move through the College. Students in the final years of Prep have regular contact with the key stage 3&4 S&C coordinator.

Section 5 Conclusion

The College S&C team seek to work collaboratively with parents, staff, students and the wider community in order to develop a life-long love of learning. At the heart of their work is the recognition that all students, including the more able, should fulfil their potential, thus echoing the words of The Brothers of the Sacred Heart:

For the charism is a tree whose branches have not yet all grown and that is perhaps holding more than one surprise for us. Maybe some branches, recently grown, will not last; it is because the sap of the charism is not flowing in them. But many buds have yet to appear; the springtime lies ahead of us!

The Foundation Charism of an Institute by Brother René Sanctorum, S.C.