

CONCORD COLLEGE

POLICY ON SUPPORT ENGLISH

Context

These lessons were instituted in 1997 for students in the Lower school in response to the growing demand from subject teachers that students should be given more help with their academic English. While the department was unwilling for academic English to replace general English for learners at these low levels, it willingly undertook to provide subject specific help for six periods a week – usually two periods of support for three subjects. At first, support was provided in Biology, Physics and Maths because at the time all students studied these subjects. Geography support was introduced when it became a compulsory subject and it replaced Maths as it is such a ‘language heavy’ subject. Subsequently, the demand of departments and students for help in specific subjects meant that support was offered for Biology and Physics (with some Chemistry Support also being provided to Form 3 students).

English teachers were provided with the appropriate schemes of work and textbooks and they liaised closely with the subject teacher to ensure that they were providing a language focus for the material students were currently studying. However, Support English placed considerable demands on English teachers in terms of research and materials preparation time since no subject specific EAP textbooks existed at this level, and even if they did, following them would take away the advantage of relevance and immediacy. Teachers were then asked to try and focus on the language used in the subjects, rather than merely providing remedial lessons for two periods a week. However, there is inevitably a degree of overlap between them, particularly where students are trying to conceptualise new language.

With a noticeable drop in the number of students requiring Support English and a desire for students to study a greater range of GCSE subjects, September 2008 saw the number of lessons allocated to Support English in Forms 4 & 5 reduced to 4 periods per week (Physics and Biology support), partly to allow a greater number of GCSEs to be offered. The number of periods for Form 3 continued at 6/week. The need to improve students’ spoken English and the success of ESB in improving students’ general English skills prompted a change in the nature of Support English. In September 2010 where 2 of the Form 4 & 5 periods were dedicated to ESB lessons.

September 2011 saw a major change in the use of Support English lessons to address the changing needs of Concord students. With all Form 4 students passing FCE in June 2011, we were faced with the issue that all Form 5 students would be studying English as a Second Language IGCSE. This placed a huge demand on their analytical, reading and creative writing skills and it was felt it would benefit these students to have these areas addressed in Support English. Form 4, similarly, worked on their creative writing and also The Big Read during their support lessons. Form 3 support lessons were taught by the groups’ main’ English teacher and were dedicated to The Big Read and developing general English skills.

Current Situation

In Lower School, Form 3 students with lower levels of English were previously given 8 extra periods of English when other students were studying Spanish, French and History. From September 2022, with a general rise in English language skills, the Form 3 students changed to just 6 periods of English Support in place of History and French, and with the possibility of joining these subjects later if their English level improved. In Form 4 and 5, depending on their language skills, some students are allocated Support English lessons in place of a GCSE subject, although some may have also elect to receive additional support lessons. These lessons are not taught by their main English teacher but taught by other EAL teachers and there is close liaison between the teachers involved. This results in greater variety for the students, more opportunities for discussion and support among the teachers and opportunities for additional reporting on the students’ English skills. During the English Support lessons, there is a focus on class readers, as part of a modified form of the Big Read, exam practice for the Cambridge First for Schools

and IGCSE English as a Second Language exam and an emphasis on improving the students' vocabulary skills and grammatical accuracy. This extra contact time has been an invaluable part of supporting our students as well as improving our exam passes over recent years (both in their English exams and their other GCSE subjects).