COSMOS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

OUR CURRICULUM

The Cambridge Pathway from Year 1 to Year 14

Why Cambridge

We chose Cambridge because of the kind of young people we want to send out into the world.

Our aim is to raise independent global citizens: students who are ready to take on the world when they finish their studies, ready to dream and equipped to achieve what they dream of. That is a large claim for a school to make, and it only means something if the curriculum behind it does the work.

Cambridge is not simply an international curriculum. It teaches students to be curious, to ask questions, to think critically, to solve problems and to think beyond the obvious answer. It asks them to apply what they know to situations they have never seen before, rather than to reproduce what they have been told. In our experience that is the difference between a student who can pass an examination and a student who can think.

It gives our students wings.

Our goals

Everything in this document is built around three outcomes.

Students who achieve at a high academic level

We want our students to reach the standard expected by the best universities in the world, and to hold qualifications those universities know and trust.

Students who are multilingual and confident speakers

Our students learn in English, study a second foreign language throughout their school years, and keep their own language and culture. We measure success not by how many languages appear on a certificate, but by whether a student is confident enough to speak in each of them.

Students who become valuable adults in their community

Academic results matter, but they are not the whole purpose. We want our graduates to be people their community is glad to have: thoughtful, responsible, able to work with others and willing to contribute.

The Cambridge Pathway at Cosmos

Our students follow the Cambridge Pathway from their first year of school through to A Level. Each stage builds on the one before it, and the two Checkpoint assessments give us an external check on progress before students move into the qualification years.

Years	Cambridge stage	Focus
Years 1-2	Cambridge Primary (early stages)	Literacy through phonics and English, number, first science, wellbeing as a taught lesson
Years 3-6	Cambridge Primary	Core academic subjects extended; composition introduced; Primary Checkpoint in Year 6
Years 7-9	Cambridge Lower Secondary	Separate sciences, computing, compulsory second foreign language; Lower Secondary Checkpoint in Year 9
Year 10	Pre-IGCSE	Students explore subjects and interests with their teachers and mentors before choosing their IGCSE subjects
Years 10-12	Cambridge Upper Secondary (IGCSE)	Core subjects plus chosen IGCSE subjects, leading to IGCSE examinations
Years 13-14	Cambridge Advanced (AS and A Level)	Specialisation in chosen subjects, leading to A Level examinations and university entry

Years 1 and 2: the foundations

The first two years are about making reading, writing and number secure, and about making school a place children want to be.

English is taught five times a week in total: three English lessons and two dedicated phonics lessons. We separate phonics deliberately. Systematic phonics teaching is what allows children to decode unfamiliar words independently, and it is the single strongest predictor of whether a child will read fluently later. Mathematics is taught three times a week, science once, and wellbeing has its own timetabled lesson.

Subject	Lessons/week	Notes
English	3	Reading, writing, speaking and listening
Phonics	2	Systematic synthetic phonics, taught separately
Mathematics	3	
Science	1	Enquiry-based, practical
Wellbeing	1	Taught as its own lesson at this stage

Years 3 to 6: building the core

From Year 3 the academic core broadens and deepens. English rises to five lessons a week, with a separate English Composition lesson added so that extended writing gets dedicated time rather than being squeezed into the end of a reading lesson. Mathematics moves to four lessons, and humanities enters the timetable.

Science remains at one lesson a week until Year 6, when it doubles to two in preparation for the separate sciences of lower secondary and for the Primary Checkpoint. Wellbeing is no longer a separate lesson but is integrated into the class hour, where the class teacher can address what the group actually needs rather than working through a fixed syllabus.

Subject	Lessons/week	Notes
English	5	English as a First Language
English Composition	1	Extended and creative writing
Mathematics	4	
Humanities	1	
Science	1 (2 in Year 6)	Increased in Year 6 ahead of Checkpoint and lower secondary
Wellbeing	Integrated	Delivered through the class hour

Years 7 to 9: specialising

Lower secondary is where students begin to work as subject specialists rather than as generalists. Science splits into two lessons a week in Years 7 and 8 and three in Year 9, reflecting the move towards separate biology, chemistry and physics. Computing enters the timetable as a subject in its own right.

A second foreign language, Spanish or German, becomes compulsory and is taught twice a week. It is not an enrichment activity. Students continue it through to the IGCSE years, and by the time they leave they have had six or more years of it.

Subject	Lessons/week	Notes
English	4	English as a First Language
English Composition	1	
Mathematics	4	
Science	2 (3 in Year 9)	Moving towards separate sciences
Humanities	1	
Computing	1	
Second foreign language	2	Spanish or German, compulsory
Wellbeing	Integrated	Delivered through the class hours

Years 10 to 12: the IGCSE years

Year 10: pre-IGCSE

Year 10 is deliberately not a year of examination preparation. It is the year in which students find out what they are actually interested in. Working with their teachers and their mentors, they sample subjects, test their own assumptions about what they are good at, and arrive at subject choices they have reasons for rather than choices made because a friend made them or because a parent suggested them.

This matters more than it might appear. A student who has chosen their IGCSE subjects thoughtfully works differently for two years than a student who has drifted into them.

The core and the chosen subjects

Throughout Years 10 to 12 all students continue with a common core: four English lessons, one English Composition lesson, three mathematics lessons and three science lessons a week, with the second foreign language increasing to three lessons a week.

Alongside this core, students take their chosen IGCSE subjects. Depending on the size of the teaching group, each subject is taught two or three times a week, which allows us to keep groups small enough for teachers to know exactly where each student stands.

Component	Lessons/week	Notes
English	4	English as a First Language
English Composition	1	
Mathematics	3	
Science	3	
Second foreign language	3	Spanish or German
Chosen IGCSE subjects	2-3 each	Depending on the number of teaching groups

IGCSE subjects offered

Business Studies, Economics, World Literature, History, Psychology, Geography, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Statistics, ICT, Computer Science, Art and Design.

Years 13 and 14: A Level

The final two years are years of specialisation. Students take their chosen subjects to A Level from the same list offered at IGCSE, which means they build on two years of work rather than starting a subject from nothing.

The core continues: four English lessons, one English Composition lesson, three mathematics lessons and two science lessons a week.

Component	Lessons/week	Notes
English	4	
English Composition	1	
Mathematics	3	
Science	2	
Chosen A Level subjects	2-3 each	From the same subject list as IGCSE

English at Cosmos

English as a First Language

Our students study English as a First Language, not English as a foreign language. The distinction is substantial. A foreign language course concentrates on the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and treats the language itself as the object of study. A first language course assumes those skills and goes further.

Our students read literature. They analyse how a text works and why a writer made the choices they made. They write in a range of forms and for a range of audiences, and they reflect on what they have read rather than only summarising it. By the upper years they are expected to sustain an argument about a text and support it with evidence, which is the same skill a university essay demands.

English Composition

From Year 3 onwards, composition has its own weekly lesson. Writing at length is a skill that improves through practice, feedback and redrafting, and it does not develop well when it is the last twenty minutes of a lesson about something else. The separate lesson protects that time.

Support for students whose English is developing

Students who join us with a lower level of English are supported through the Cambridge Global English curriculum, which is English as a Second Language. This is a parallel route into the same destination, not a lower expectation. It gives students the language foundation they need to access the rest of the curriculum, and the aim throughout is to bring them into the first language programme.

Second foreign language

Every student studies Spanish or German from Year 7. It is compulsory, twice a week in Years 7 to 9 and three times a week in Years 10 to 12. We treat it as a core subject because confidence in more than one foreign language is one of the outcomes we set for ourselves, and because a language studied for one or two years is a language that is forgotten.

Wellbeing

In Years 1 and 2 wellbeing is a timetabled lesson. From Year 3 onwards it is integrated into the class hour, delivered by the class teacher who knows the group.

The reason for the change is practical. Younger children benefit from explicit teaching of emotional vocabulary, friendship and self-regulation. Older students benefit more from a trusted adult who can respond to what is actually happening in the group that week. Integration is not a reduction in priority; it is a change in method.

Support for every learner

Students do not all move at the same pace, and a class of thirty timetabled lessons a week does not by itself meet every student where they are. We run individual and small group lessons in both directions.

When a student falls behind the material in a subject, they receive individual or small group teaching in that subject until they have caught up. The support is targeted at the specific gap rather than being general revision.

When a student is outstanding in a subject, they receive individual or small group teaching as well. A student who is ahead and left unchallenged learns to coast, which is a harder habit to undo than a knowledge gap. Extension work keeps able students working at the edge of what they can do.

Cambridge Checkpoint in Year 6 and Year 9

Our students sit Cambridge Checkpoint tests twice: Cambridge Primary Checkpoint at the end of Year 6 and Cambridge Lower Secondary Checkpoint at the end of Year 9. Both cover English, mathematics and science.

Why they matter

These tests are marked externally by Cambridge, not by the school. That independence is the point. A school marking its own work can always find reasons to be satisfied with it; an external mark tells us where our students genuinely stand against an international standard.

Cambridge describes the purpose of Checkpoint as providing feedback on learners' strengths and weaknesses in English, mathematics and science, and that is how we use it. The results are diagnostic rather than a pass or fail. Each student receives a Statement of Achievement, and the school receives detailed reports showing performance at subject, strand, sub-strand and question level, with scores reported on a 0 to 50 scale alongside performance bands.

What we do with the results

Checkpoint sits at exactly the two transition points where information is most useful: before a student moves from primary into lower secondary, and before they move from lower secondary into the IGCSE years. Where the reports show a weakness across a group, it goes into our planning for the following year. Where they show a weakness for an individual, it goes into the individual and small group support described above.

We share the reports with parents and explain what they show, because a diagnostic report is only useful if the people supporting the student understand it.

> *Cambridge is changing the Checkpoint test series from 2026: a new series in early March is being added to the existing May and October series, the May series moves to late May, and each series moves to a one-week timetable with dates set by Cambridge. We will confirm our chosen series each year.*

Cambridge IGCSE: what it is and what it is worth

Cambridge IGCSE is the world's most widely taken international qualification for students in this age group. Cambridge offers more than seventy subjects, including thirty languages, and schools may combine them freely, which is what allows us to offer the range listed in this document.

Cambridge describes the qualification as developing not only subject content but the ability to apply knowledge to unfamiliar as well as familiar situations, intellectual enquiry, flexibility and responsiveness to change, the ability to work and communicate in English, and cultural awareness. Cambridge also states that IGCSE improves performance by developing creative thinking, enquiry and problem solving, and describes it as a springboard to advanced study.

Two further points are worth making to parents. The syllabuses are written for an international student body and are designed to avoid cultural bias while retaining local relevance, which means our students are not disadvantaged by studying in Bulgaria. And IGCSE is designed with routes for learners of a wide range of abilities, including those whose first language is not English, which is what makes it workable for a school like ours where students arrive with different starting points.

Cambridge International AS and A Level

A Level is the qualification that carries students into university, and it is where the depth of the Cambridge approach becomes most visible. Students specialise, and they are expected to work independently in a way that resembles undergraduate study more than school study.

Cambridge International AS and A Levels are used by students to gain places at leading universities worldwide, including in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Singapore, Egypt, Jordan, South Africa, the Netherlands, Germany and Spain.

UK universities and many institutions elsewhere accept Cambridge International AS and A Levels as equivalent, grade for grade, with standard British GCE A Levels. In the United States and Canada, good grades in carefully chosen A Level subjects can earn up to a full year of university course credit, which has a direct financial value to families as well as an academic one.

Most universities that require A Levels ask for three, and some will accept a combination of IGCSEs and AS Levels alongside one or more A Levels. Requirements vary by country, by institution and by course, and we advise each student individually against the requirements of the universities they are actually applying to.

University recognition around the world

The practical question parents ask is simple: will these qualifications be accepted where my child wants to study. The short answer is that they are recognised across the major study destinations, and the longer answer is set out below.

Cambridge maintains a searchable recognition database of institutions that have given formal written acceptance of Cambridge qualifications, and publishes country-specific guidance for the main study destinations. Universities themselves report that they value the deep subject knowledge, the capacity for independent research and the critical thinking that Cambridge students bring.

Destination	Position
United Kingdom	Cambridge International A Levels are accepted as equivalent, grade for grade, with UK GCE A Levels. Typical offers are based on three A Levels.
United States and Canada	Widely accepted for admission. Good grades in carefully chosen A Level subjects can result in up to one year of university course credit.
Europe	Accepted across the major destinations, including the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Ireland. Cambridge publishes specific guidance for a number of European countries, and some institutions accept Cambridge qualifications as exemption from proof of English language ability.
Australia and New Zealand	All New Zealand universities recognise Cambridge qualifications, with entry calculated on a national tariff. Australian universities accept Cambridge qualifications for entry.
Asia and elsewhere	Recognised in India, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia and across the region, as well as in Egypt, Jordan and South Africa, with requirements varying by institution.

Cambridge also publishes profiles of individual universities that have chosen to explain why they value Cambridge students. These include the University of Cambridge, MIT, Rice University, Vanderbilt University, the University of Michigan, the University of California San Diego, the University of Florida, Bocconi University, the University of Melbourne, the Australian National University, the University of Sydney and the University of Queensland, among others.

> *Recognition policies change. Before any student applies, we check the current requirements of their specific universities and courses through the Cambridge recognition database at cambridgeinternational.org/recognition-search rather than relying on general statements.*

Our teachers

A curriculum document describes intentions. Teachers determine whether those intentions become real.

Our IGCSE and A Level teaching is delivered by experienced teachers who have worked well beyond the classroom, and who bring that experience into their subjects. A business studies lesson taught by someone who has run a business, or an economics lesson taught by someone who has watched an economy from inside it, is a different lesson. Students notice, and they ask better questions.

Teachers preparing students for Cambridge examinations work with the published syllabuses, mark schemes and examiner reports, and use them with students rather than only as marking tools. Students who understand how their work will be judged produce better work.

Assessment and reporting

We assess for three different reasons and we keep them separate.

- Day to day formative assessment tells the teacher what to do next. It is not reported as a grade.

- Internal summative assessment at the end of each term and year records what a student has achieved and is reported to parents.
- External assessment, through Cambridge Checkpoint in Years 6 and 9 and through IGCSE and A Level examinations, gives an independent measure against an international standard.

From the IGCSE years onward students sit mock examinations under full examination conditions, marked against Cambridge criteria, so that the real examination is not the first time they have worked to time and to standard.

Parents receive regular reports and are welcome to discuss them. We explain what Cambridge grades and Checkpoint scores mean rather than presenting numbers without context.

Appendix: weekly lesson allocation at a glance

Subject	Yr 1-2	Yr 3-5	Yr 6	Yr 7-8	Yr 9	Yr 10-12
English	3	5	5	4	4	4
Phonics	2	-	-	-	-	-
English Composition	-	1	1	1	1	1
Mathematics	3	4	4	4	4	3
Science	1	1	2	2	3	3
Humanities	-	1	1	1	1	-
Computing	-	-	-	1	1	-
Second language	-	-	-	2	2	3
Wellbeing	1	integrated	integrated	integrated	integrated	integrated

Years 13 and 14: English 4, English Composition 1, Mathematics 3, Science 2, plus chosen A Level subjects.

In Years 10 to 14, chosen IGCSE and A Level subjects are taught two or three times a week each, depending on the number of teaching groups.

Subjects offered at IGCSE and A Level

Sciences and mathematics	Humanities, social sciences and arts
Biology	Business Studies
Chemistry	Economics
Physics	World Literature
Statistics	History
ICT	Psychology
Computer Science	Geography
	Art and Design

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