

The Varndean Personal Development

Belonging, Equity and Human Flourishing: Every student. Every opportunity. Every day.

At Varndean School, we believe education is about far more than examination success.

Our purpose is to ensure every young person flourishes academically, socially, emotionally and culturally, regardless of their background, identity or starting point.

We want every student to leave Varndean with exceptional qualifications, strong relationships, a clear sense of self, confidence in their future and the belief that they can make a positive contribution to society.

This commitment is rooted in three interconnected principles:

Belonging

Every student deserves to feel known, valued, safe and understood.

Equity

Every student deserves access to the opportunities, support and experiences required to succeed.

Agency

Every student deserves the chance to lead, influence and shape both their own future and the communities around them.

These principles underpin every aspect of school life.

Personal development is not an additional programme delivered by a small number of staff. It is a whole-school commitment, embedded within our curriculum, our culture, our relationships and our daily practice.

Our ambition is simple:

No student leaves Varndean without having experienced success, leadership, enrichment, belonging and opportunity.

Why Does Personal Development Matter?

We recognise that young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world.

Alongside academic success, students must learn to navigate:

- Social media and digital technologies
- Mental health and wellbeing challenges
- Diversity and identity
- Relationships and citizenship
- Climate change and global issues
- Economic uncertainty
- Future employment pathways

The evidence is clear. Young people flourish when they experience:

- Strong relationships
- A sense of belonging
- Meaningful participation
- High expectations
- Purpose and contribution
- Opportunities beyond the classroom

This understanding has shaped every aspect of our Personal Development strategy.

Drawing on research from the Education Endowment Foundation, the Department for Education Enrichment Framework, Owen Eastwood's work on belonging, Brighton & Hove Citizens and our own school evidence, we have developed a model that deliberately creates the conditions for young people to thrive.

Starting Strong: Belonging as the Foundation

Everything begins with belonging.

Students learn best when they feel psychologically safe.

Students participate more when they feel valued.

Students achieve more when they feel recognised.

Students attend more when they feel they matter.

Our Belonging Framework is therefore the foundation of our entire Personal Development offer.

Through our ten Belonging Principles, every member of staff takes responsibility for creating an environment where students feel accepted, respected and empowered.

We deliberately create belonging through:

- Warm and consistent relationships
- High expectations and high support
- Positive recognition and celebration
- Student leadership opportunities
- Inclusive classroom practice
- Adaptive teaching
- Meaningful tutor time
- Strong family partnerships
- Visible equity and inclusion

Belonging is not left to chance.

It is deliberately planned, taught, modelled and renewed through every interaction.

This is reflected in our attendance, behaviour, student voice and wellbeing data, as well as the lived experiences of our students and families.

What Every Student Can Expect

Every student who attends Varndean is entitled to a rich and ambitious programme of personal development.

This entitlement is delivered through:

A High-Quality Tutor Programme

It provides opportunities for:

- Relationship building
- Personal reflection
- Current affairs
- Wellbeing support
- Careers education
- Leadership development
- Reading
- Character development

Our revised tutor programme has been designed to respond directly to student needs and is regularly reviewed through student voice and quality assurance processes.

Students increasingly report that tutor time supports their personal growth and sense of belonging.

An Outstanding PSHEE and Philosophy & Ethics Curriculum

Our curriculum equips students with the knowledge and understanding required to thrive in modern Britain.

Students explore:

- Healthy relationships
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Equality and diversity
- Online safety
- Financial literacy
- Citizenship
- Human rights
- Democracy
- Careers and future pathways
- Global issues and social responsibility

The curriculum is ambitious, responsive and relevant.

Recent adaptations have included work around:

- The manosphere
- Social media influence
- Global conflicts
- Identity and belonging
- Misinformation and online culture

Students are encouraged not simply to understand these issues but to think critically, discuss respectfully and develop informed opinions.

Leadership for All

We believe leadership should never be reserved for a small group of students, it starts in Year 7.

Every student should have opportunities to contribute, influence and lead.

Our Student Leadership Pathway provides a progressive framework through which students can develop confidence, responsibility and agency.

Students contribute through:

- Senior Student leadership
- Student voice initiatives
- Equality groups
- Peer support
- Transition programmes

- Community action projects
- School improvement work

Importantly, participation increasingly reflects the diversity of our school community.

We actively monitor representation and remove barriers to participation to ensure leadership opportunities are genuinely equitable.

A Culture of Enrichment

We believe enrichment is not a luxury.

It is an essential component of a great education.

Students benefit from a wide range of opportunities offering over 100 clubs each week including:

- Sport
- Performing arts
- Music
- Academic clubs
- Student societies
- Cultural activities
- Educational visits
- Residential experiences
- Community projects

Participation is carefully monitored.

Where barriers exist, we intervene.

Financial support is available to ensure opportunity is not determined by family circumstances.

The success of this approach is reflected in consistently high participation rates and growing engagement from disadvantaged students.

Exceptional Arts and Cultural Education

Our commitment to cultural education has been recognised nationally through the achievement of Artsmark Platinum status.

Students benefit from:

- Extensive performance opportunities
- High-quality arts provision
- Professional partnerships
- Creative leadership opportunities
- Inclusive access to cultural experiences

We actively remove financial barriers to participation through targeted funding and support. Creativity, expression and cultural engagement are viewed as essential components of human flourishing.

Preparing Students for Successful Futures

Every student is entitled to exceptional careers education.

Through our careers programme students receive:

- Independent careers guidance
- Work experience
- Employer encounters
- University engagement
- Apprenticeship information
- Alumni support
- Careers education within tutor time

Our student-designed Careers Day exemplifies our commitment to student agency and future readiness.

Students leave Varndean with ambitious aspirations and a clear understanding of the pathways available to them.

Human Flourishing in a Digital Age

Varndean is committed to preparing students for life in a rapidly changing world.

Our contribution to the Brighton & Hove Citizens report Human Flourishing and Social Media reflects our belief that schools must actively engage with the challenges and opportunities presented by technology.

Students are supported to:

- Navigate social media safely
- Understand algorithms and influence
- Develop healthy online habits
- Build resilience
- Maintain authentic relationships
- Critically evaluate information

We believe flourishing depends upon meaningful relationships, participation and connection.

Therefore, our approach prioritises opportunities for students to build community, develop friendships and contribute positively to society.

Equity in Action

Personal development is only exceptional if every student can access it.

Our Equity Framework ensures that opportunity reaches those who need it most.

We provide:

- Financial support
- Academic mentoring
- Adaptive teaching
- Mental health support
- Counselling
- Alternative provision pathways
- Targeted intervention
- Inclusive enrichment opportunities

Participation, attendance, achievement and leadership data are reviewed through an equity lens.

We actively identify and remove barriers to participation.

This reflects our belief that equality gives everyone the same opportunity.

Equity ensures everyone has a fair chance of success.

How We Hold Ourselves Accountable

We evaluate personal development through clear evidence and measurable impact.

We monitor:

Participation

- Enrichment
- Leadership
- Educational visits
- Careers engagement
- Student voice

Belonging

- Attendance
- Persistent absence
- Student surveys
- Safe and Well at School Survey
- Varndean Voice

Character

- A2L
- Leadership development
- Student portfolios
- Academic mentoring

Future Readiness

- Gatsby Benchmarks
- Work experience participation

- Destination data
- NEET figures

Equity

- Participation by key groups
- Attendance by key groups
- Leadership representation
- Enrichment access
- Behaviour outcomes

Success is not measured by how many opportunities exist.

Success is measured by who accesses them and how they benefit.

What Makes Varndean Unique?

Personal development at Varndean extends beyond the school gates.

Students have helped secure investment in counselling services across Brighton & Hove.

Students contribute to city-wide conversations around mental health, social media and community wellbeing.

Students lead change rather than simply learn about it.

Our students do not just participate in democracy, citizenship and leadership.

They experience them.

Through belonging, equity and opportunity, students develop into confident, compassionate and capable young adults who understand both their own value and their responsibility to others.

This is our commitment. This is our guarantee. Every student. Every opportunity. Every day.