



# Balcarras

From strength to strength

**YEAR 9**  
**SUBJECT INFORMATION**  
**FOR PARENTS**

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**2015- 2016**

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**Balcarras School**

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## **VLE: Virtual Learning Environment**

Pupils can access [www.balcarraslearning.com](http://www.balcarraslearning.com) - the school's **Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)** using their school login username and password. Subjects now have their supplementary work posted here and are also using the homework/events calendar to enable pupils and parents to track their homework, view merits and monitor attendance.

## **School Network**

Pupils can access the school network shared area (known as the **R: drive**) and download electronic resources provided by their teachers. They can also access their personal network area (known as the **H: drive**). This is available by clicking on the network link at the top of the [balcarraslearning.com](http://www.balcarraslearning.com) home page and using their school login username and password.



Dear Parents

This booklet is a guide to the courses your child is following in Year 9. I hope you will find it useful. If it does not answer all of your questions you will find the head of department concerned ready to provide any further information you need.

As in Year 8, most of our work in Year 9 is done in groups which have been set by ability, so that the pupils are able to advance at a similar pace. The exceptions are art, drama, music and ICT, where mixed ability groups continue to be used.

Later in Year 9 we shall be involving you in the process which leads to the choice of optional courses in Years 10 and 11. Please make a note of these two important dates:

- Thursday 4th February 2016 -  
Options Meeting for Year 9 Parents
- Thursday 25th February 2016 -  
Year 9 Parents' Evening

Yours sincerely

Headteacher  
September 2015

## Art

### Work in the studio

Year 9 marks the completion of the Key Stage 3 course. Pupils will have gained a broad knowledge and understanding of different art styles, movements and cultures. Although work will continue to be teacher led, pupils will be increasingly encouraged to develop more individual approaches to their assignments. Pupils will be asked to draw on previous skills acquired throughout this valuable key stage. A typical project would be one where pupils research into how different artists and cultures have used the figure in their differing art works. From this research pupils will be encouraged to discuss their findings, and working in groups of three will produce their own re-interpretation of their discoveries.

### Resources used

These are wide-ranging and can include drawing, painting, collage, print-making and clay work. Stimuli for lessons include objects, books, reproductions and demonstrations. ICT and internet research will also be widely used.

### How parents are able to help

It is important that pupils choosing art as a GCSE option have developed effective habits of homework. Parents can play a valuable part by encouraging observational studies based on objects inside and outside the home. Any stimuli that enhances an awareness of art history is to be encouraged, such as books, visits to museums, galleries and ICT research.

**Head of Department : Mr D Hazael**

## Science

### Work in the classroom

**An important difference between science and other subjects is that all students start their GCSE science course at the beginning of the year.**

The majority will go on to complete 3 separate science GCSEs in biology, chemistry and physics examined in the summer of Year 11. It is therefore important that work covered over the course of this year is retained. For some students who find science more difficult it may be more appropriate to complete a combined science GCSE (worth 2 GCSE grades) and the students for this route will be selected in the autumn term of Year 11. The material we cover in Year 9 is examined in both the separate and combined science routes and so is appropriate for all.

Over the course of Year 9 students will complete 6 topics, 2 each in biology, chemistry and physics. Each topic will contain 2 graded homeworks and an end of topic test. There will also be a GCSE style mock examination in May. The results of these assessments will be used in the setting process for Year 10.

As students will be sitting the new style of GCSE examination when they reach Year 11 their work will be graded to reflect this. They will be graded form 1-9. 9 will be the equivalent of a high A\* and students gaining a 9 will have gained 90% or above in assessments. A grade 5 will be the equivalent of a current high C or low B grade and students gaining a 5 will have gained 50% or above in assessments that include higher material.

### Resources

Most of our resources can be found on the school VLE including our e-book. This is a textbook that pupils can access via the internet and is designed to support our GCSE courses. Additional worksheets and ICT resources are also available on the VLE and on the R:drive on the Balcarras School website.

### How parents are able to help

We issue front sheets for each topic. These show what a pupil will be learning in each unit and parents can use them to help their children revise for end of unit tests and for the mock examination in May. The e-book also contains key words, learning objectives and exam tips on each page and a revision checklist and graded questions at the end of each section. Revision materials are also available on the VLE as well as links to the exam board (AQA) who also produce revision materials and past papers that can be accessed from home. Additional information is available on the science website that parents can use to keep up to date with what their children are learning in science and all science homework is posted on the VLE.

**Head of Department : Mr G Towers**

## Religious Education

The Religious Education Department at Balcarras aims to produce religiously educated and aware pupils who also value truth, seek justice and honour, respect themselves and others and who care about the environment. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and recognise where others may be trying to influence them.

Moral and spiritual growth is at the heart of our teaching and pupils are encouraged to show that they are learning from world religions not just learning about world religions.

Parents are able to withdraw their sons and daughters from this personal development if they have strong religious or conscience grounds. These must, however, be discussed in detail with the Headteacher.

### Work in the classroom

Pupils in Year 9 study the world religions of Islam and Judaism until Easter and then will work towards the 'Comparative Religions' and 'Introduction to Philosophy and Ethics' topics. This allows them to consider the religious beliefs behind these religions and how they compare to their own. This year involves much cross-curricular work with pupils comparing these religions to work they are completing in other subjects, such as History and Science well as media portrayals. Year 9 requires pupils to work in GCSE mode, where they will be asked to consider their opinions on issues and ask fundamental questions. Pupils have found this aspect of the course to be stimulating and throughout the course their confidence at expressing themselves in both discussion and written work is noticeable.

During Year 9 pupils can opt to study GCSE - Philosophy and Ethics in Year 10 and 11. Students study both courses alongside each other which has the effect of considerably deepening the pupils' approach to the full GCSE. This course is ideal for pupils who might be thinking of going on to do Philosophy and Ethics at A level or want a means of challenging themselves and others about current moral issues.

### Resources used

We have been fortunate in building a wide ranging collection of newly written textbooks and are quickly developing a shared library of PowerPoint presentations to support the work in class. These, together with ICT techniques and internet access, mean that pupil research can be fully utilised. External visitors to the department are frequent and these add breadth to our studies.

### How parents are able to help

Homework takes the form of selected tasks which are designed to complement the work done in class. Some of these will be in the form of literacy tasks while others will be more to do with developing pupils' skills. It is important that parents help their sons and daughters appreciate that studying the beliefs and religions of others is a crucial act of learning in a modern, multi-cultural world.

**Head of Department : Miss H Ebanja**

## Computing

Computing in Year 9 is where students begin to develop strengths in either computing or ICT. The curriculum is designed so that students work on both computing and digital graphics units so they are then informed about what each involves and are then able to select which option choice to make for GCSE.

There are two choices, a GCSE in Computing or a GCSE in ICT. Both of these courses lead into the relevant key stage 5 qualification. We offer an A level in computer science and a BTEC in Games Design.

The focus in Year 9 is developing skills and knowledge to support GCSE work and as such, students are required to submit all work electronically via the VLE.

### Work in lessons

The Year 9 course pupils follow is designed to cover two main areas. There is a distinct computer science area which covers computing, the internet, information technology, laws and legislations and basic programming. There is then a digital graphics area which covers the creative and artistic use of IT and includes 3D modelling, digital publishing and information media. As pupils move towards the end of Year 9 they should begin to think about which option to take in Year 10. We encourage students to think about taking the option choice of units they have enjoyed and achieved highly in.

### How parents can help

The homework book given at the start of the year is the main method of feeding back to pupils that parents can also access. This book contains the compulsory homework for the year and additional homework may be given which will often be for pupils to further develop their classwork to a specific stage ready for next lesson. To achieve this pupils have access to all the software they need before or after school or lunchtimes where teacher support is available in the computing rooms.

**Head of Department : Mr R Cook**

## Design and Technology

### Work in the classroom

In Year 9, pupils are expected to become increasingly autonomous in their work as they progress through the key stage.

Pupils will continue to develop the skills, knowledge and techniques explored in Years 7 and 8.

### Resources used

Pupils will be required to wear a protective apron during practical lessons to comply with health and safety regulations. These will be provided by the department.

Pupils will be expected to undertake written work using a variety of media, including A4 and A3 paper and e-workbooks. There is a growing emphasis on the use of ICT for design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). The department uses a wide range of text books and online resources to support learning, both in and out of the classroom.

### How parents are able to help

Parents can support learning by showing an interest in the work their children undertake in the classroom, and by discussing homework tasks which are used to reinforce and develop this learning. It is recommended that the homework board is monitored on a regular basis.

In food and nutrition, it would be helpful for parents to carefully check ingredient lists to ensure the correct resources are available for practical activities. Parents are expected to provide ingredients for practical work.

In product design and textiles, pupils should be encouraged to consider the familiar products we use everyday in a more critical way. It can be useful to explore how these products are made, where the raw materials came from to make them and how well they do the job they were designed for.

There is some technical vocabulary in this subject, and pupils need to practise so that they can use it correctly and with confidence.

**Head of Department : Mr J Draisey**

## Physical Education

### Programme of work

Pupils should become more expert in their skills and techniques and learn how to apply them in different activities. They start to understand what makes an effective performance and how to apply these principles to their own and others' work. They learn to take the initiative and make decisions for themselves about what to do to improve performance. They start to identify the types of activities they prefer and take a variety of roles, such as leader or official.

The major games are:

<b>Girls:</b>	<b>Boys:</b>
Hockey	Football
Netball	Basketball
Basketball	Rugby
Athletics	Athletics
Rounders	Cricket
Tennis	Tennis

Pupils in Years 8 and 9 have an additional lesson which is used to teach elements of health, fitness and communication skills. Each pupil will study health and fitness, outdoor adventurous activities and athletics activities as part of a healthy living programme.

### How parents are able to help

Pupils should be encouraged to apply the lessons of this course in their everyday lives throughout the year. They should also be reminded of the importance of the extra-curricular programme and encouraged to attend the activities run by the department and the school sports development officer.

For pupils wishing to play sport at the highest level, the school has excellent links with outside clubs.

**Head of Department : Mr M Harvey**

## Personal, Social and Health Education

Whilst academic progress is monitored carefully at Balcarras, so too is the personal development of each pupil. Social and health issues are, of course, tackled on a day-to-day basis in lessons, but in addition to this the timetable is collapsed each term for each tutor group to explore aspects of social and health education.

During these sessions we often invite visitors in to discuss issues with students so that they have a fresh perspective on some of the topics being studied.

This year students will study the following topics:

- *Making decisions*
- *Careers and how do I decide my Options?*
- *Issues with binge drinking*
- *Relationships*
- *Sex education and contraception*
- *Nutrition*
- *Positive self esteem*

## Citizenship

Although not studied as a curriculum subject, themes of citizenship form an important backbone in many subject areas, including history, geography, languages and science. Developing an awareness of the world outside their locality and comfort zone is important and students are given access to a wealth of opportunities (including foreign trips) to expand their social understanding.

PowerPoint presentations are also used each week during tutor time to provoke group discussion about current news issues.

**Head of PSHE and Citizenship : Miss H Davies**

## Drama

Year 9 develops earlier work in Years 7 and 8 continuing to build confidence, team work and presentational skills for life. We also explore wider dimensions building a basic understanding of more technical dimensions of theatre, film and television - how drama effects can influence how we represent and perceive life on stage and through the media.

However, there is now a very important bonus as the Year 9 course focuses on the demands of our pre-GCSE school drama certificate – enabling every student to gain an actual preliminary award in this subject. The syllabus will involve extended practical project work culminating in a major realisation test in the summer term. This exam takes place across approximately five hours of lesson time. Activities include improvisation and script work. Individuals are assessed in a group context with credit given for commitment and generosity of spirit as well as technical proficiency.

In addition to giving some end of key stage recognition for the achievements of pupils, this experience also prepares people for the demands of drama GCSE should they decide to opt for it.

(Please note that some work may involve video recording – as do the GCSE and A level courses in this subject. If this is not acceptable then parents should contact the drama department to ‘opt out’ of this element.)

### How parents are able to help

The Year 9 drama course does not normally involve homework. However, there can be great benefit if parents show an interest in activities and encourage discussion at home. Indeed, students may decide to do some extra work beyond school - learning lines, rehearsing or researching topics – this will be voluntary but should be encouraged so long as it doesn’t interfere with other compulsory study.

### Head of Subject : Mr A Bennett

*NB: There is also the Balcarras Youth Theatre (BYT) available to Year 8 and 9 students if they wish to extend their drama studies. This is voluntary and runs after school on Tuesdays from October.*

## English

### Work in the classroom

Pupils in Year 9 continue to develop the skills inherent in reading, writing, speaking and listening. They will work individually, as one of a pair, and as part of a group, with work taking place in the library and the computer room, where possible, as well as in the classroom.

### Resources

Pupils' work is based on novels, poems, plays and non-fiction texts, with the assignments and activities being developed within the department. As in Years 7 & 8, every pupil has an English book in which she/he will complete work in lessons, homework and end of unit assessments. Students are expected to maintain this to a high standard.

### Curriculum

Students in Y9 will study the following units of work:-

- Teenagers Past and Present (Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening)
- World War Poetry (Reading)
- Romeo & Juliet (Shakespeare)
- Of Mice and Men (Novel + creative writing competition)

### Assessment

Students' work will be marked using the WWW (What Went Well) and EBI (Even Better If) acronyms. English teachers will highlight strengths and suggest targets and students will be guided and encouraged to review their own work so that they have a very clear idea of how to improve. Each of the above units will culminate in a formal assessment which will be marked against English skills and levels.

### How parents are able to help

Parents are asked to continue to show an interest in their child's homework and to discuss the work while it is in progress. This extends the audience beyond the teacher and fellow pupils and helps to give the work a genuine sense of value. Parents can help their children to learn corrected spellings and punctuation and to review any individual targets that have been set.

**Head of Department : Mr D Sharkey**

## Music

### Work in the classroom

In Year 9 pupils continue to explore music through performing, listening and composing. Students develop musical skills through a wide variety of topics, exploring topics such as film music as well as Romantic period and popular music. Students are expected to use the skills and knowledge they have acquired throughout Key Stage 3 to complete tasks in a responsible and independent way. The department's two classrooms, along with practise rooms, allow student to develop individual strengths and interests in preparation for their final Key Stage 3 assessment and equip them with the skills and knowledge to move onto GCSE music.

With the help of teacher comments, pupils assess their own work and that of their peers to set themselves half termly targets. Pupils are awarded National Curriculum levels for each of their major assessment pieces and can work towards star challenges and special certificates in bronze, silver, gold and platinum which correspond to skills and knowledge from KS3 right through to A-level standard work. These are awarded at the end of each academic year.

### Resources used

Students use an exercise book to record key words and facts as well as completing written evaluations about their work. Visual and aural stimuli such as videos, posters, recordings and live performances are used to develop appreciation and understanding of the work covered. Specific music software, Cubase and Sibelius are used as a composition and performance tool, along with tuned and untuned percussion, electronic keyboards and voices. Pupils who learn instruments are encouraged to use them in class when this is appropriate.

### How parents are able to help

Listening to, and encouraging discussion about music will help pupils develop awareness of the use of the basic elements. To assist with this process music is available on the school R: drive in music and then the listening resources folder. Students will benefit from an interest in what they are doing in the classroom and should be encouraged to participate in one of the extra-curricular activities.

**Head of Department : Miss E Hayes**



## Modern Foreign Languages

In Year 9 the vast majority of pupils continue learning both of their foreign languages.

### Work in the classroom

We aim to teach languages in a way which is thoroughly practical. The courses emphasise situations which pupils could meet in their normal lives and set out to equip them with the words and phrases which they need.

The teacher will often speak to the pupils in French, Russian or Spanish and they are encouraged to use the foreign language as the normal language of the classroom.

### Resources used

Each course is based on a textbook which is accompanied by listening resources. These provide an outline of the course which individual teachers will supplement with exercises and activities of their own. These include resources created for the interactive whiteboard as well as a range of language learning websites.

### How parents are able to help

Progress depends upon a good stock of relevant words and phrases and homework tasks often involve learning new vocabulary or practising it in a dialogue. Parents can play a valuable part by checking that a list of words or a dialogue has been thoroughly learned. Written homework is also set and it is helpful if parents can check that this has been completed. We expect all pupils to have access to a bilingual pocket dictionary at home.

Holidays and school trips to the countries where these languages are spoken are also highly motivating!

We also run a **Mandarin Chinese Club** at lunchtimes and after school, as well as a **Latin Club** and a **German club**. It is a lot of fun and presents a marvellous opportunity for our pupils to diversify in their language learning experience.

**Head of Department : Mrs J Hockenhill**

## Geography

### Work in and outside the classroom

Students will study a range of topics designed to enable them to meet the criteria of the new National Curriculum programme of study for KS3. The topics studied will give students a more detailed insight into physical processes and human activity, the interaction between them and the environmental impacts of them both. Topics to be studied include: Ecosystems, Glaciation, Population Pressure and Perishing Places.

Assessment in geography takes many forms with students being supported in learning how to use self-reflection, 'critical friend' peer assessment, group analysis, and target setting. These methods are used in addition to teacher assessment and students are encouraged to celebrate their success and set targets for improvement. Independent learning is a key priority and all students will be encouraged to develop these key skills through geography.

This year there will be an optional trip which will complement the ecosystems topic.

### Resources used

The geog. series of textbooks are combined with various DVDs, photographs, board and sorting games, visual stimuli, GIS and other ICT resources giving a variety of delivery. Geographers use these resources to learn through a wide range of methods including pair and group work, role-play, DVD, internet research and interactive games.

### How parents can help

Homework is set regularly in order to consolidate learning and extend work done in the classroom. Students should be encouraged to use reference materials such as an atlas, the internet, a globe, a world map and a dictionary when doing their homework to raise general awareness of continents, countries and cities, and improve general literacy skills. Parents could encourage students to watch television programmes such as *Newsround* and *Countryfile* to improve their knowledge of current affairs and events such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes as they happen. Going for walks using an OS map also consolidates students' map skills.

Sharing holiday experiences and asking questions about places parents and friends have visited would broaden horizons and help students to grasp more difficult concepts such as different levels of development and the implications these have on everyday life in other countries.

**Head of Department : Mrs N Lambert-Masters**

## History

### Learning in the classroom

The entire year is taken up with study of the 20<sup>th</sup> century world. This is international history, though it often connects closely with pupils' own lives and the experiences of their families. For example, pupils may frequently incorporate family anecdotes and recollections of the two World Wars into their work.

This unit provides an understanding of the modern world, including politics, civil rights issues and war, which helps them to grow into well-informed citizens and also builds a solid knowledge of 20<sup>th</sup> century history in preparation for GCSE.

As in Year 8, some important individual events are studied in depth through a varied programme of teaching and learning. We focus on key questions from the period which are investigated through individual assignments or whole class enquiries.

### Resources used

A wide range of class textbooks and library books are used, supplemented with film, audio sources and clips. As well as this primary sources assume a growing importance during this final stage of Key Stage 3 and much of this is accessed via online archives. Students are encouraged to be much more independent and adventurous in their methods of research in order to actively prepare them for the challenges of GCSE history. Students have the opportunity to go on a trip to the WWI battlefields in Northern Europe and to visit the Imperial War Museum.

### How parents are able to help

It is very beneficial if pupils of this age are encouraged to become interested in news and documentary programmes on radio and television, as is having the opportunity to read a daily newspaper. There are also now a huge variety of podcasts, YouTube films and apps for students to use to engage in history outside of the classroom. Parents can also help by encouraging students to read as it develops their literacy skills and enables them to access more challenging material.

**Head of Department : Mr P Sexton**

## Mathematics

### Work in the classroom

Much of the work in Year 9 is focused upon preparing pupils for the end of key stage assessments which they sit in the summer term. Topics covered in Years 7 and 8 such as 'number', 'algebra', 'ratio, proportion and rates of change', 'geometry and measures', 'probability' and 'statistics', are developed and longer, more complex assignments and investigations are carried out. Skills involving mental arithmetic will be regularly practised.

### Resources used

The main course material is from the Collins Frameworking series and this offers a range of approaches designed to meet the needs of pupils at all levels of ability. A selection of other resources, including CGP texts, is also used, particularly when pupils are carrying out investigations.

The assessments that we currently use target different ability levels within the National Curriculum. Students develop an increased awareness of the level at which they are working.

### How parents are able to help

It is valuable for pupils to be able to talk over their work and share the challenge of new topics and the search for appropriate solutions. There will be some homework assignments which explicitly ask pupils *not* to use a calculator. When this is the case parents should encourage pupils to estimate their answers before trying to find the solution. Pupils will need particular help and encouragement when they are revising for the examinations in May. The week by week framework for mathematics can be viewed on the school's VLE (accessed via the school website).

Additional help on any mathematics topic can be found by going to [www.mathswatchvle.com](http://www.mathswatchvle.com). Log in with **balcarras** and then use your 'mymaths' login and password. Here, you access video clips and other resources to support you from level 3 to A\* at GCSE.

**Head of Department : Mr R Larcombe**