



Balcarra

From strength to strength

YEAR 7
SUBJECT INFORMATION
FOR PARENTS

2015 - 2016



Dear Parents

I hope that your child is beginning to settle into life at Balcarras and has started to enjoy it.

This booklet has been written so that you are well informed about all the courses your child is following. I hope that you will find it helpful. It is intended to be no more than an introduction: where you need further information the head of department concerned will be pleased to provide it.

In almost every case the work in Year 7 is done in groups of mixed ability. Your child is therefore being taught in their tutor group, which is made up of a cross-section of all the pupils in the year. The one exception is mathematics, where the pupils have been grouped into sets of similar ability.

I hope that Year 7 will prove to be the start of a bright career for your child here at Balcarras.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher
October 2015

Art

Work in the studio

The art department has four specialist studios. The rooms are light and airy and provide a stimulating environment for all the different key stages. All the rooms are equipped with data projectors and computers.

Students will be introduced to a range of different materials and working practices. The department works hard to instil a confidence in the students and encourages them to develop a curiosity into why artists make their work. Pupils are introduced to art history as the starting point for practical work of their own.

A typical unit of work would therefore look at the expressive nature of the drawings of Van Gogh and translate his mark-making into paintings of the surrounding countryside. A characteristic three-dimensional assignment would begin with the observation of a landscape through a window and go on to break that down into sections which can be represented in clay. Mixed media work would result in a combination of materials being used on a single piece of work.

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 using ICT.

How parents are able to help

For most work in the studio, pupils will need an apron. As homework often involves drawing, a 2B pencil is recommended. Sketchbooks are provided in Year 7. A glue stick and scissors will prove invaluable. Pupils are encouraged to use word processing for written projects and internet research. An apron or an old shirt will protect their uniforms from any damage.

Head of Department : Mr D Hazael

Computing

The first year of computing is dedicated to establishing the core concepts and theories of computer science and ICT to enable students to develop a strong platform on which to build layers of further skills and understanding later in the key stage. The learning that takes place in Year 7 enables students to become informed, discerning and efficient users and creators of digital content! There is a focus on theory in Year 7.

The core of our curriculum is based around three strands; computer science, information technology and digital literacy. Computer science is learning how digital systems work and how to use this knowledge via programming. Information technology is becoming equipped to create programs and a range of content. Digital literacy is being able to express ideas through ICT. These three strands are delivered via a multimedia course.

Work in the classroom

Year 7 pupils have one computing lesson every two weeks. The multimedia course that pupils follow is designed to interest, engage and challenge pupils' understanding and knowledge of modern information technology, the internet and computing. We expect pupils in Year 7 to develop a broad foundation of skill and understanding and greater independence using IT.

Access to resources

Pupils can access computers throughout the school and have access to a wide range of IT resources. The school's VLE and network can also be accessed from home. Computer rooms are available before school, at break-time and lunchtime.

How parents can help

All pupils have access to their personal workspace on the school network from home. This means pupils' work can be opened with parents and worked on from home. Parents can help by checking work and giving guidance and solving small technical issues. There is a homework book which contains homework related to each topic being worked on in class.

Head of Department : Mr R Cook

Design and Technology

Work in the classroom

There are three aspects to design and technology: food and nutrition, product design and textiles.

In food and nutrition pupils will follow a programme where they will learn basic food preparation skills. In addition, they will carry out a series of written tutorials and assessments.

Work in product design and textiles focuses on teaching pupils the skills needed to solve problems by following the 'design process'. Much of the work is organised around projects which may teach specific skills or allow pupils to develop an imaginative response. There will be opportunities to work with a wide range of materials, including modern and smart materials.

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 word processing. 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 every day 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

Drama

Year 7 and 8 drama focuses on encouraging pupils to work constructively in groups whilst acquiring a basic working knowledge of the subject as an art form in its own right.

In Year 7 pupils learn to work with every member of their class in a co-operative manner. This is done through team building exercises and teaching pupils to respond quickly and creatively to instructions. Improvisation and 'thinking on your feet' are actively encouraged. All activities explore the need to balance imaginative energy with good concentration and disciplined attention to detail. This should deepen levels of response and develop students' technical skills.

Work will naturally include physical movement projects to develop spatial awareness and trust – some actions will require mutual support and contact between partners.

Pupils spend the first part of the course learning about key safety issues related to such active pursuits. We then move on to developing still pictures (tableaux) in order to create an awareness of simple narrative structuring. Concentration and control is required in freezes and pupils learn to use their whole body to convey meaning. Later, pupils may be asked to explore and present more abstract concepts such as emotion tableaux.

Extension work will use speech and text to develop a full range of expression and control, thereby combining the movement skills learnt earlier with vocal techniques applied to the demands of specific texts and other stimuli.

How parents are able to help

As this course does not normally involve homework there can be great benefit if parents show an interest in the work and encourage discussion of it at home.

Head of Subject : Mr A Bennett

English

Work in the classroom

Pupils are encouraged to develop the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. They will do this through the reading and writing of poems, plays and stories, as well as through role-play and dramatic activities. They will work on their own, in pairs and in groups, in the library, the computer room and in the classroom. In the course of the year pupils will learn how to write accurately and speak expressively for a variety of purposes.

Resources

Every pupil has an English book in which she/he will complete work in lessons, homework and end of unit assessments. The exercise book is a record of all their work and students are expected to maintain it to a high standard.

Curriculum

Students in Y7 will study the following units of work:-

- Holidays and Theme Parks (Writing)
- Ghost Tours (Speaking & Listening)
- Wonder (Novel)
- The Tempest (Shakespeare)
- Public Speaking (Debating 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

Homework usually includes some reading, writing or researching. Parents can often help by showing a genuine interest in the assignment and discussing it with their child. It would also help to reinforce their children's learning if parents discussed any corrections that teachers have made and any individual targets that have been set.

Head of Department : Mr D Sharkey

French

Work in the classroom

We aim to introduce French in a practical way. The focus is on how languages work and aims to equip pupils with the skills they need to become successful language learners both in French and in their second language, which they will begin in Year 8. This includes encouraging pupils to become independent in their language learning and fostering an interest in foreign cultures. The skills are taught within a context of topics which are relevant to the pupils and which will help them to communicate information about themselves.

The teacher will often speak to the pupils in French and they are encouraged to use it whenever possible as the language of the classroom.

Resources

One of our main resources is the text book '*Studio*'. We also deliver activities on the interactive whiteboard and use a range of language learning websites.

How parents are able to help

Progress depends on a good stock of relevant French words and homework tasks often involve learning a list of new vocabulary or verbs, or practising it in a dialogue. Parents can assist by taking part in a French dialogue or by checking that revision has been carried out thoroughly. We will sometimes ask pupils to get a parent's signature as 'proof' that they have done this. We expect all pupils to have access to a bilingual pocket dictionary at home. Holidays in France and participation in school trips can also be highly motivating!

We also run a **Mandarin Chinese Club** on lunchtimes and after school, as well as a **Latin Club** and a **German club**. Both of these clubs are open to pupils in Key Stage 3. They are a lot of fun and present 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

During Year 7 pupils will be taught a range of physical and human geography topics. These have been designed to meet the demands of the new National Curriculum programme of study for KS3. Through these topics pupils will also improve their knowledge of places as well as basic map and graphical skills. Topics to be studied include: oceans and coasts, urbanisation and adventure landscapes.

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.

Within the first term pupils will be investigating the local area and its sustainability. This will involve a lesson being spent around Charlton Kings. In the summer term there will be an optional field day to Cheddar Gorge which will complement the adventure landscapes topic.

Resources used

The geog. series of textbooks are combined with various dvds, photographs, board and sorting games, visual stimulus, 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 in order to raise general awareness of continents, countries and cities, and improve overall literacy skills. Parents could encourage students to watch television programmes such as *Newsround* to improve their knowledge of current affairs and events. 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 Lambert-Masters

History

Learning in the classroom

We begin our study of history by looking at the Anglo Saxons and Vikings. This unit introduces our students to history and it allows them to study Britain before the Norman Conquest. In the second term we continue our study of Britain from 1066 through to the end of the middle ages. This involves considering the great themes of the period such as war and conflict, the role of religion, the power of the monarchy and the development of parliament. We finish Year 7 with an international depth study on the native peoples of North America which provides an interesting comparison with British history.

In all three units a mixture of important events and changes in everyday life are studied. Key skills for the future are focused on throughout such as chronology, causation, significance, source analysis and interpretations.

Resources used

Several recently published, colourful class texts are used as well as books from the library. Students are also encouraged to bring their own research materials and books into lessons as well. Television and radio programmes add variety and stimulus to the learning process and a visit is made to Chepstow Castle as a case study. We use the VLE, online articles and archives on the internet for research and we have an ICT suite which students have access to throughout the year.

How parents are able to help

Homework is set once a fortnight and often involves students researching and preparing for lesson based enquiries. Occasionally the research tasks set require visits to the school's library resource centre or local libraries. The VLE also contains wider reading suggestions for students who want to develop their literacy skills further. Encouraging students to read is really helpful 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

The approaches used this year are intended to develop pupils' skills in the subject and make sure that they enjoy and gain confidence in their mathematics. The main subject areas of 'number', 'algebra', 'ratio, proportion and rates of change', 'geometry and measures', 'probability' and 'statistics' are all covered, with skills in mental arithmetic being regularly practised.

All students take end of term tests. Setting is reviewed after these.

Setting

After one week pupils are placed into a set based on the ranked order of their Key Stage 2 score within their half year group. These are reviewed at the end of each term. We typically have pupils with level 5 scores in both Set 1 and Set 2 in each half of the year group.

Resources used

Lessons will be planned in line with the National Curriculum and will incorporate work from the core text book, worksheets and a variety of other sources. Throughout the year lessons will be booked in the computer room working on a variety of mathematical activities, particularly those related to number.

Investigations

Students undertake a variety of functional skills activities which encourages them to apply mathematical techniques to real world situations and develop the skills required for GCSE.

How parents are able to help

At this stage it is vital that every pupil learns his or her tables and parents can be very helpful in ensuring that this building block is laid in place. It is also valuable for pupils to be able to talk over their work and share the challenge of new topics and the search for appropriate solutions. The scheme of work for mathematics and homework set 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. 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

Music

Work in the classroom

In Year 7 we explore music through performing, listening and composing. Students develop musical skills through a broad exploration of the subject. A wide variety of topics are covered including aspects of music history and theory, and styles/topics from classical music to music and media and Indonesian Gamelan.

The department has two main classrooms where, depending on the topic, the focus changes from using keyboards and ICT to group work. Pupils are encouraged to develop musical skills in all areas whatever their ability level.

With the help of teachers' 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 of 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

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 an hour each fortnight is set aside for each tutor group to explore aspects of social and health education.

In addition the timetable is suspended for two hours each term for PSHE. 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:

- *The change from junior to secondary school*
- *Relationships with peers*
- *Personal organisation*
- *Bullying*
- *Personal safety*
- *Personal hygiene*
- *Thinking about others (charity event)*
- *Fire safety*

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

Physical Education

Programme of work

Physical education is important in the life of every pupil. It not only encourages the development of athletic and sporting talent, but provides the basis for a healthy style of life at school and during the years beyond. Pupils are therefore introduced to dance, gymnastics and the study of topics related to health, as well as learning skills in the major traditional games.

The major games are:

Girls:

Netball
Hockey
Athletics
Rounders
Tennis

Boys:

Rugby
Athletics
Cricket
Tennis
Football

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

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

Year 7 Religious Education focuses predominantly on Christianity, however, this is done through reference to the beliefs of the six major world religions as well as pupils own ideas.. The approach is first made through an investigation into the Philosophy behind religious belief itself. Pupils will be asked to question what God is, as well as consider their own beliefs on a number of subjects, for example miracles and life after death. Students then investigate the Bible as a source of guidance and authority for Christians and will become familiar with the life and teachings of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels. Then pupils focus on the teachings and methods of worship in the Christian Church and the role of local faith communities.

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 part of learning in a modern, multi-cultural world.

Head of Department : Miss H Ebanja

Science

Work in the Classroom

In Year 7 pupils cover six units of work: 2 each in biology, chemistry and physics. One of the biology topics includes sexual reproduction, pregnancy and birth.

Over the course of the 6 topics students also gain an understanding of how to carry out practical work.

At the end of each unit pupils sit a test for which they receive a level. They will also complete 12 levelled homework tasks throughout the year and sit a Year 7 exam. This gives us a clear picture of their progress and helps us set targets for Year 8.

Resources

Each pupil is issued with a revision guide in addition to their exercise books which must be brought to each lesson. Additional worksheets and ICT resources are used, most of which can be accessed at home via the Balcarras School website.

How parents are able to help

We issue front sheets for each topic which show parents what their children will be learning and target sheets that show pupils' assessment levels. The revision guides can be used by parents to help with homework. These can all be used to help pupils revise for the end of unit tests. Parents can also use the information on the science website to see what their children will be studying and keep track of the work set on the VLE.

Head of Department : Mr G Towers

Literacy in the Curriculum

Balcarras has long believed that literacy has a key role to play in a child's progress. We are currently reviewing the provision we make in order to improve our already strong focus on literacy in the curriculum.

Literacy is important in all areas of learning. Being able to read and write accurately, to listen carefully and to talk clearly about ideas will increase the opportunities for young people in all aspects of life and will allow them to participate fully in learning and later in a work environment.

Literacy is more wide ranging than just being able to read and write, it involves listening and talking, reading and writing and is the responsibility of all subject teachers. Literacy may involve critical and creative thinking, competence in listening and talking, reading and writing skills in using language and personal, interpersonal and team-working skills.

At primary level pupils will learn the basic tools of communication. In their reading, they will learn how to explore sounds, letters and words, and how to contribute ideas and take turns when talking with others. In their writing, they will learn how to use correct spelling, punctuation and grammar and how to ensure their writing makes sense. We will continue to build on these areas and as young people become more skilled, they will learn how to find, comprehend and use information, and communicate more effectively.

There is more to good literacy than purely the understanding of printed texts. In the 21st century young people experience a wide range of information, so they need the skills to work with written or printed texts as well as other forms of text, such as web pages, social networking sites, films, graphs, and the spoken word.

Parents

Parents play a crucial role in helping children to develop literacy skills from an early age. You may be used to listening to your child read every day. Whilst we realise the time implications this may have, we would encourage you to continue with this, as it is sometimes lost in the early years of secondary school. Please encourage your child to read at home regularly and to continue questioning them what they are reading. Parents can contribute further by encouraging children to talk about their thoughts and ideas. Parents can encourage children to explore literacy outside the classroom.

Young people will enjoy reading different types of texts and all reading helps them to develop their skills. So whether they are reading a book, a blog, a magazine or a sports report, it will help if parents are encouraging and supportive.

Study Skills

During their time in Year 7, pupils will be introduced to the main ideas and principles of Independent Learning. They will be introduced to **The 5 Rs**. Most children will have already had some experience of being encouraged to be independent in their learning at primary level and this is something we wish to build on further.

In your child's planner you will find an explanation of what skills we think an independent learner should have. The 5 R's will be integrated into lessons. Pupils will be taught the skills they need in order to develop their learning, and will be given lots of opportunities to review their learning.

The 5 Rs are - Resourceful, Resilient, Reflective, Reciprocal, Responsible. A more detailed explanation of each of these can be found in your child's planner.

What you can do to help

- ✓ Look at your child's planner
- ✓ Ask them about what they have learnt
- ✓ Encourage them to be more independent when completing homework
- ✓ Look at the school website, which has a Homework Board link on the home page

VLE: Virtual Learning Environment

Pupils can access **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** home page and using their school login username and password.

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