



Balcarras

From strength to strength

YEAR 8
SUBJECT INFORMATION
FOR PARENTS

2015 - 2016

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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](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 8. 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.

Most of our work in Year 8 is done in groups which have been setted by ability, so that the pupils are able to advance at a similar pace. The exceptions are art, drama, music, physical education and ICT, where the mixed ability schemes employed last year continue to be used.

This is another vital year in your child's education and their growing up. I hope that we will continue to work closely together to ensure that he or she is as successful as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ains Healy'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Headteacher
September 2015

Art

Work in the studio

Students will be working in one of the four purpose built art rooms, engaged in a variety of activities. They will continue to extend their ability to observe carefully and accurately and build on their knowledge and understanding of art. They will observe, discuss and record a variety of differing approaches highlighted by different cultures from around the world and re-interpret these results into their own work. A typical example of this is when pupils research into how different cultures use pattern in both their design work and decoration.

Resources used

These are wide-ranging and can include drawing, painting, collage, print-making and clay work. Stimuli for lessons include objects, books, reproductions, demonstrations and ICT work.

How parents are able to help

For most work in the studio an apron will be required. As drawing often forms part of the homework, a 2B pencil is recommended. Sketchbooks have been supplied in Year 7. A glue stick and scissors would prove invaluable. By Year 8 pupils should be familiar with the routine of regular homework and parents can help by regularly checking that time is given to all assignments.

Head of Department : Mr D Hazael

Science

Work in the classroom

Pupils study six units in Year 8 covering Biology, Physics and Chemistry. They also carry out an extended project at the end of the year. At the end of each unit pupils complete a test for which they receive a level. They also complete a set of level led homeworks and sit a Year 8 exam. This gives us a clear picture of their progress throughout Year 8.

Setting varies each year depending upon the cohort, but all pupils are taught higher tier materials and have access to higher tier assessments. Pupils all do a lot of practical investigations in lessons to build up their laboratory skills and aid learning.

Resources

Each pupil is issued with a revision guide as well as an exercise book. Both these books should be brought to all lessons. Additional worksheets and ICT resources are also available and most of these can also be accessed via the R: drive on the Balcarras School website.

How parents are able to help

We issue a front sheet for each topic which shows what pupils will be learning and a progress sheet showing pupil achievement. Parents can use these to help their children revise for end of unit tests. The revision guides can be used to help pupils with homeworks and parents can direct their children to this. There is additional information on the science website that parents can use to keep up to date with what their children are learning in their science lessons 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

Year 8 pupils will be introduced to the world religions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. In addition, there will be an investigation into 'Religion and Music' and 'Religion and Art'. This year enables pupils to consider religion on a worldwide basis and the differences that may arise between cultures. Pupils will be asked to question what they can learn from different religious attitudes and how this compares to their beliefs and spirituality. The world faiths will be considered using the framework of the new Gloucestershire Agreed Syllabus where the Key Beliefs, the Main Teachings, Sources of Religious Guidance and Individual Values are among the themes explored for each religion.

Resources used

We have been fortunate in building a wide ranging collection of newly written textbooks and continue to develop 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. In the summer term the department holds an Eastern Religions event where visitors from other faiths help broaden understanding by working with groups of pupils.

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

We have a whole school approach to computing which means that pupils experience it across the school and via a specialist computing curriculum focused around multimedia and computer science.

In Year 8 students begin to work on longer projects and the expectation is that they become able to develop techniques to solve problems themselves. This might involve rigorous research on the internet using tutorials or expert forums or through persistence and determination! The focus in Year 8 is on skills building.

Work in the classroom

Year 8 lessons are designed to further develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of multimedia technology and computer science. The course pupils follow is both practical and theoretical mixing both the creative, artistic and problem solving and logical thinking approaches.

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 can connect to their personal workspace ('H' Drive) on the school network from home. This means pupils' work can be accessed from home. There is a comprehensive VLE area with teacher resources for the lesson (which help to aid learning at home) plus links to software and other resources. A homework book is given out which contains the compulsory homework for the year and links to the topics covered in Year 8.

Head of Department : Mr R Cook

Design and Technology

Work in the classroom

The three aspects of design and technology introduced in Year 7 (food and nutrition, product design and textiles) are further explored and developed during Year 8.

In food and nutrition pupils will continue to 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 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

The development of a healthy style of life continues to be the theme of the work in Year 8. The major traditional games are developed further and the range of knowledge is extended. There is a continuation of gym and health related fitness.

The major games are:

Girls:	Boys:
Hockey	Football
Netball	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:

- *Personal organisation*
- *Crime and personal responsibility*
- *Drugs and alcohol*
- *Relationships*
- *Community cohesion*
- *Healthy choices*

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 8 drama builds upon the experiences in Year 7 such as group co-operation, movement skills and the use of controlled speech. Pupils are encouraged to become increasingly aware of the process by which the art form achieves its end products. They are required to analyse how things work through active discussion and personal reflection. However, beyond these technical aspects the subject is also used as a means to continue building the personal development, self-confidence and social awareness of the student.

Previous learning is reinforced through further practice and more sophisticated application, whilst a range of 'new' dramatic techniques are introduced to add fresh interest and scope.

For example, 'thought-tracking' can be introduced during Year 8 as freeze frame work becomes more developed and detailed: this requires the actor to talk through and share the feelings of any given character. Such activities help make the pupil think more deeply about the feelings of a character and address the impact on others of any chosen interpretation. The uses of speech and sound effects are also further developed, looking at intonation and the use of appropriate language (register) for a range of situations, eg the use of persuasive language, sound bites, slogans and jingles in advertising and news reporting.

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

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

In Year 8 we continue to develop and foster the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Pupils are introduced to progressively more complex works of fiction and non-fiction as they continue to develop their interpretive and critical skills.

Resources

Pupils' work is based on novels, poems and non-fiction with the assignments and activities being developed within the department. As in Year 7, 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 Y8 will study the following units of work:-

- The Sandman (Creative Writing)
- The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (Novel)
- Non-Fiction (Reading & Writing)
- Poetry (Reading & Writing)
- Criminal Minds (Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening)

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 8 pupils develop their understanding of music through performing, listening and composing. Students build on the musical skills acquired in Year 7 through a variety of topics from aspects of music history from the Blues to world music. The department's two main classrooms are used to provide a range of activities incorporating individual, paired and 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 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 8 all pupils continue learning French and the vast majority begin a second language – either Spanish or Russian.

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**. Both of these clubs are open to pupils in Key Stage 3. 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 and the interaction between them. Throughout the topics pupils will also be building up their knowledge of places and where they are located in the world. Topics to be studied include: climatic hazards, deforestation, and global trade and fashion.

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.

In Year 8 pupils will have the opportunity to take part in a field trip linking to the tectonics violent earth 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 general 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 N Lambert-Masters

History

Learning in the classroom

Two major British themes are studied during this year: The Making of The United Kingdom 1500-1750 and Britain 1750-1900. In the first theme students study the development of the UK from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. This is a rich history full of amazing stories and interesting characters. In the second theme students study the Industrial Revolution and its great impact on Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. In this unit students cover a lot of social history. During Year 8 the students also look at international history. In particular they study a unit on the French Revolution. Finally there is a local case study on the development of Cheltenham as a Spa town. These units are sometimes studied through individual assignments and whole-class enquiries.

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 from the internet are also used to add variety and stimulus to lessons. We take students on a Civil War trip to the Commandery Museum in Worcester where they have the chance to experience history in a practical way. 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

Parents can add to their children's understanding of these more modern periods of history by discussing the broader issues, for example the idea of a social, technological or political revolution. 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

In Year 8 pupils continue to work on the six areas of mathematics introduced in Year 7. These are: 'number', 'algebra', 'ratio, proportion and rates of change', 'geometry and measures', 'probability' and 'statistics' with skills in mental arithmetic being regularly practised.

There will be lessons spent in a computer room exploring ways in which technology can be used to assist with mathematical calculations.

Setting

Setting follows on from Year 7 and is reviewed at the end of every term after tests.

Resources used

The main course book is 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.

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. 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. 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