



Balcarra

From strength to strength

YEAR 7

SUBJECT INFORMATION
FOR PARENTS

2025 - 2026



Dear Parents

I hope that your child is beginning to settle into life at Balcarras and has enjoyed the start to the year.

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 or, take a look on the school website for more details via the Curriculum Maps. Please visit: www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk > Learning at Balcarras > Subject Areas.

Your child is 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

Mrs Elizabeth Cullis
Assistant Headteacher

October 2025

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.

Pupils will be introduced to a range of different materials and working practices. The department works hard to instil a confidence in the pupils 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 could 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 cityscape 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 or an old shirt to protect their uniforms from any damage. 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.

Head of Department: Mr D Hazael

Computing

Work in the classroom

Our curriculum is built around two core strands: Computer Science and Creative Media. Through these, we aim to equip pupils with a modern and highly relevant skill set that supports a wide range of future careers.

Year 7 begins with a short introduction to the school's computer systems. During this time, pupils develop essential digital literacy and ICT skills that they will use not only in Computing lessons but across the wider curriculum as well.

After this, we begin the core curriculum. Pupils complete three major units focused on understanding computer systems, learning the basics of graphic design, and writing simple programs.

Curriculum

- Getting Starting on the Network
- Computer Systems
- Graphic Design Fundamentals
- Introduction to Programming

Assessment

Pupils are assessed in each unit using a 9–1 grading system. Each grade is accompanied by individual feedback, outlining how the pupil can improve. Grades are based on the quality of classwork and, where appropriate, homework performance.

Access to resources

Pupils have access to computers across the school and a wide range of IT resources. The school's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and network can also be accessed from home. A dedicated Computing homework room is available for pupils who need a space to complete tasks.

How parents can help

Computing is a subject with a wealth of opportunities for pupils to explore beyond the classroom. If your child is interested in extending their learning, they can visit the Next Steps section on the Computing department page of the VLE for ideas and guidance.

Head of Department: Mr S Cooper

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, with the emphasis on healthy eating guidelines.

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 electronics and 3D printed components.

Resources used

Pupils will be expected to undertake written work using a variety of media, including project booklets and ICT applications. There is a growing emphasis on the use of ICT for design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). 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. 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 VLE is monitored on a regular basis.

In **food and nutrition**, it would be helpful for parents to carefully check ingredient lists, recipe sheets and keep up to date with the VLE to ensure the correct resources are available for practical activities. Parents are expected to provide ingredients for practical work. If there is a financial problem with this, then please contact us to see if we can help.

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: Mrs J Swanepoel

Drama

Year 7 drama focuses on encouraging pupils to work constructively in groups whilst acquiring a basic working knowledge of the subject as an art form. 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 pupils' 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 core skills including (but not limited to) freeze frame, thought tracking and slow motion. Pupils will develop an awareness of simple narrative structuring using fairy tales. After Christmas pupils will then move on to a unit focused on mime followed by an introduction to script work in the summer term.

How parents are able to help

There is no homework in Year 7 but there can be great benefit if parents show an interest in the work and encourage discussion of it at home.

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 they will complete work in lessons, homework and end of unit assessments. The exercise book is a record of all their work and pupils are expected to maintain it to a high standard.

Curriculum

Pupils in Y7 will study the following units of work:

- Ghost Stories (Creative Writing)
- Treasure Island (Novel/Reading)
- The Tempest (Reading)
- The World Today (Speaking & Listening)
- Public Speaking (Debating Competition)

Assessment

English teachers will assess pupils in a variety of ways including the highlighting of achievements and also areas to develop, focused and summative written comments, specific targets, verbal feedback and progress set against assessment criteria. Pupils will be guided and encouraged to review their own work so that they have a clear idea of how to improve.

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 targets that teachers have 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 textbook '*Studio*'. You can also find additional activities and useful links on our VLE page.

How parents are able to help

Homework tasks often involve learning new vocabulary and parents can assist by checking that revision has been carried out thoroughly. We expect all pupils to have access to either a bilingual pocket dictionary or a reliable online dictionary such as www.wordreference.com at home.

Finding opportunities to practise their French in France or any other French-speaking country and participation in school trips can also be highly motivating! We run a trip to Normandie during activities week in the summer term.

We run a ***French Club*** at lunchtimes for Year 7 and it is very popular. It is a lot of fun and presents a marvellous opportunity for our pupils to consolidate their language learning experience.

Geography

Learning in and outside the classroom

During Year 7 pupils will be taught a range of physical and human geography topics including oceans, sustainability, urbanisation and physical landscapes. These have been designed to meet and exceed 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 map skills, graphical skills and independent learning skills.

In addition to in-class learning, pupils will also take part in some local fieldwork around Charlton Kings village. In the summer term there will also be an optional fieldtrip to Cheddar Gorge which will complement the Adventure Landscapes topic. Pupils will be taught how to identify their successes and next steps through the use of self-reflection, peer assessment, group analysis, and target setting to support assessment in Geography, in addition to teacher assessment.

Resources used

A combination of text and ICT resources are integrated into each scheme of work to ensure pupils are exposed to a wide range of academic materials. Pupils will learn through independent work, pair and group work, role play, internet research and interactive games/activities.

How parents can help

Homework is set regularly to consolidate learning compliment and extend work completed in the classroom. Pupils should be encouraged to use reference materials such as an atlas, the internet, textbooks, magazines and newspapers alongside a dictionary when doing their homework. Parents could encourage pupils to watch television programmes such as the news, Countryfile and other relevant documentaries to improve their knowledge of current affairs and events. Going for walks using an OS map also consolidates pupils' map skills. Wider reading of both non-fiction and fiction books that link to relevant topics is also encouraged.

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

For more specific topic support please see our curriculum maps on the school website. These include places to explore, conversation starters and a range of fiction and non-fiction reading linked to each topic.

Head of Department: Miss A Searle

History

Learning in the classroom

We begin our study of History by exploring the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. This unit introduces pupils to the discipline of History and allows them to investigate Britain before the Norman Conquest. In the second term, we continue our chronological study of Britain from 1066 through to the end of the Middle Ages. Pupils consider key historical themes such as migration, empire, 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 focusing on how China was changed by its absorption into the Mongol Empire. Across all three units, we study both significant events and everyday life, with a strong emphasis on key historical skills: chronology, causation, significance, source analysis and interpretations. The department prides itself on encouraging creativity, independence and resilience in our learners.

Resources used

Pupils use a range of recently published, visually engaging textbooks alongside library books and curated digital resources. We encourage students to conduct their own research and make use of our VLE, digital archives, online articles, historical podcasts and documentaries. Pupils also have access to our ICT suite, supporting the development of research and literacy skills. A comparative site visit to Chepstow and Berkeley Castles enhances their understanding of medieval Britain.

How parents are able to help

Homework is set regularly to complement and extend classroom learning. Parents can support their child's historical development by encouraging the use of accessible, age-appropriate resources, such as historical podcasts (e.g. You're Dead To Me or History Extra), short YouTube history explainers, reference books, and educational documentaries on streaming platforms. Family conversations and stories about historical events are also a valuable way of helping children develop a love for history. We regularly update suggested resources on display boards and the VLE.

Head of Department: Mr M Stoker

Mathematics

Children's chances of success are maximised if they develop deep and lasting understanding of mathematical procedures and concepts. During the first two months, we use TEACHING FOR MASTERY to strengthen the numeracy skills of all Year 7. They are introduced to new concepts such as indices and arithmetic sequences, whilst working on a deeper understanding of the numeracy skills from KS2.

From the start of Year 7 pupils are placed into a set based on the ranked order of their Key Stage 2 national curriculum test score. Before the October half term students are tested on the content of the first half term and the sets are adjusted where required.

Year 7 sit in class tests in maths in October, February and June. Before every set of test students are given revision resources. Following assessments sets are always adjusted accordingly.

Resources

Lessons are planned in line with the National Curriculum and the Scheme of Work is based on the Kangaroo Maths Scheme, which is used in many of our feeder schools too.

Pupils will be asked to copy notes in lessons and keep these notes up to standard as these will be an excellent resource for revision later on.

Each student will receive a B.A.M. homework booklet (Building A Mathematician). These follow the "Do it", "Secure it" and "Deepen it" structure that some pupils might already know from Primary school.

The school will provide each student with a MathsWatch login. This platform might be used in lessons and for homework, but also provides excellent resources for revision. There are videos, worksheets and interactive questions.

How parents are able to help

It is vital that every pupil learns and maintains their times tables and parents can be very helpful in ensuring that this building block is laid in place.

The VLE provides a huge amount of information: The SoW, guidelines on how to revise, assessment dates, homework tasks, feedback, etc. Being aware of what is happening each term, is a great support for your child.

It is also valuable for pupils to be able to talk over their work at home and share the challenge of new topics and the search for appropriate solutions. "What did you see in Maths today?" "How did you get on with the homework?"

Head of Department: Mr S Critchley

Music

Work in the classroom

In Year 7 we explore music through performing, listening and composing. Pupils develop musical skills through a broad exploration of the subject. Wide varieties of topics are covered including: Musical Elements and Notation, Vocal Skills, Indonesian Gamelan, Film Music Motifs, Jazz and Improvisation, and Composition Skills.

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.

Due to the practical nature of the subject, pupils are constantly receiving verbal feedback. Opportunities are also created for peer, self and teacher evaluation. Work is formally assessed at the end of each topic, often through performing work that has been composed.

Resources used

Pupils 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, Mixcraft and Sibelius, are used as composition and performance tools, 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 music and encouraging discussion will help pupils develop awareness of the basic elements. On occasions, pupils are directed to extra resources on the school's R:drive or VLE to extend their in-class learning. Pupils are encouraged to participate in any of the extra-curricular activities.

Please ensure your child has a pair of **headphones** with a mini jack to use in every music lesson.

Head of Department: Mr D Armstrong

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE)

How we deliver PSHE at Balcarras

Pupils in Year 7 are timetabled for 2-hour half termly Personal Development lessons. PSHE is taught within these lessons. Having a 2-hour lesson enables us to bring in visitors to speak with groups, and to make Personal Development and PSHE more of an 'event' in school. In addition to our 2-hour Personal Development events, tutors deliver PSHE sessions every Monday during a Personal Development lesson. Year 7 pupils are given one hour a fortnight called 'Tutor Period' where PSHE topics are also covered.

This year, pupils will study the following topics during their Monday Personal Development lessons:

Autumn Term – Relationship Education

- Forming positive relationships
- Understanding identity
- Healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Managing conflict
- Introducing consent
- Different families
- Puberty and relationships

Spring Term – Health Education

- Attitudes to mental health
- Promoting emotional wellbeing and resilience
- Caffeine consumption and energy drinks
- The worry tree
- The sleep factor
- Dental health
- Personal hygiene

Summer Term – Living in the wider world

- Decision making
- Discrimination and The Equality Act 2010
- Careers (organised by Mrs Lewis)
- Coercive friendships (preventing involvement in crime)
- British values
- Visible differences
- Barclays life skills (organised by Mrs Lewis)

Pupils will study the following topics during their 2-hour 'event' sessions:

- Year 7 induction
- Bullying (including a bullying speaker session)
- Online safety (including a police speaker session)
- First aid
- Thinking about others (charity event)
- Mental health (including a mental health speaker session)

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:	Boys:
Netball	Rugby
Hockey	Athletics
Athletics	Cricket
Rounders	Tennis
Tennis	Football
Handball	Handball
Football	Gymnastics
Tag Rugby	
Gymnastics	

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 British values and the world they live in. Our aim is to educate pupils so that they are interested in and can understand the religious beliefs, values and traditions of others whilst also being willing to assess their own beliefs against conflicting opinion. As a result of this, religious education helps our pupils build their sense of identity and belonging and allows them to explore world issues in a secure background. 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.

Although religious education at Balcarras School explores aspects of belief and non belief including Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and Sikhi, atheism and humanism, we do not presuppose individual commitment. Indeed, we seek to make the content accessible to all pupils whether they belong to a religious tradition or not. In addition, while we are fully conscious of an increasingly diverse and changing society, we are keen to highlight the important role of family and community in religious belief and activity. The work of the department is underpinned by the Gloucestershire agreed syllabus for key stage three and key stage four follow AQA and key stage five follow the EDUQAS religious education examinations.

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. Pupils 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 in our multifaith country.

Head of Department: Mrs H Ebanja

Science

Work in the classroom

In Year 7 pupils cover six units of work: two each in biology, chemistry and physics. Unit titles include; basics of life, the particle model and forces.

Initially pupils complete a unit of work that focuses on working scientifically, skills, such as identifying experimental variables and drawing graphs. The pupils then get an opportunity to practice these skills throughout the six units taught in the year.

At the end of each topic pupils sit a test for which they receive a grade (1 to 9). They will also complete 12 graded homework tasks throughout the year and sit a Year 7 exam. Pupils achieving a grade 9 will typically have achieved 90% or above in an assessment, grade 8: 80% etc. 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. Additional worksheets and resources used in lessons can be accessed at home via the Balcarras School VLE and are also available on the R: drive. The topic front sheets and homeworks for each topic are also available on the VLE, along with a multiple choice revision test for each topic. The BBC bitesize KS3 website is also a useful resource:

<https://www.bbc.com/education/subjects/zng4d2p>

How parents are able to help

We issue front sheets for each topic which show parents what their children will be learning. Vocabulary sheets are also issued or available to assist your child in learning and using scientific key words correctly. The revision guides can be used by parents to help support homework. These can also be used to help pupils revise for the end of unit tests. Parents can use the information on the science area of the VLE to see what their children will be studying and keep track of the homework set on the VLE.

Head of Department: Mr A Spring Wallis

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.

If your child is struggling to find something to read, please encourage them to visit the Literacy Page on the VLE where they will find lots of age appropriate recommendations.

Personal Development

Students in Key Stage 3 and 4 are timetabled for a 30-minute Personal Development lesson every Monday with their tutor. PSHE/RSHE, Careers and Citizenship are all taught within these lessons as well as some extra RE. For more information on PSHE/RSHE see page 14. In addition to the 30-minute lessons, students are timetabled for 2-hour half termly Personal Development lessons, commonly known as 'Extended Personal Development'. Having 2-hour lessons enables us to bring in visitors to speak with groups, and to make Personal Development more of an 'event' in school.

Each Personal Development lesson is planned and tailored to the needs of our children at Balcarras. Lessons are created and delivered by the Head of Personal Development and a committed team of existing teachers. All lessons are sequenced in a scheme of work and underpinned by the British Values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and for those without faith.

To facilitate children's learning in Personal Development lessons:

- Rules are established at the beginning to create an environment of safety, maturity and security; one in which children are encouraged to talk hypothetically as opposed to each other's personal experiences.
- The purpose of each lesson is made clear.
- Appropriate learning experiences are planned in line with our long-term scheme of work to meet the needs of all the children in the class. Where necessary, the school's SENCO is consulted on best practice for delivery.
- Scenario based learning experiences draw on children's own knowledge and understanding to provide them with a range of opportunities to learn, practise and demonstrate skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding.
- Time is given for children to reflect, consolidate and apply their learning of skills to relevant scenarios.

- Staff training needs are met, to include safeguarding children, handling sensitive and controversial issues and confidentiality to ensure that teachers do not let their personal beliefs and attitudes influence their teaching of Personal Development.
- Staff are encouraged to speak with House Heads and the Head of Personal Development should anyone be concerned about their ability to teach certain areas of the curriculum.
- Balcarras leads the programme, but carefully selected and, where necessary, screened outside visitors may play a role in delivering content.
- All children will be included in these lessons, regardless of ability or special educational needs and/or disability.

VLE: Virtual Learning Environment

The VLE is an online extension of the classroom, which can be accessed by pupils, parents and staff, and aims to share information and resources in a simple, clear and intuitive way. Any device which has internet access can view the site at the following address: balcarras.fireflycloud.net

The system, called Firefly, allows the opportunity for personalised learning for pupils and the ability for them to become increasingly independent and responsible for their learning and self-organisation. It also enables parents and guardians to support them at home, by viewing their homework, resources and potentially see their progression through the school.

To log on, new parents should visit the site address, and activate their account, using the email address the school holds on record as part of your contact information. Current parents should have their children added to their account already.

In September, every new student will be allocated a username and password to access not only the VLE, but the school network as well. When logging into Firefly, pupils must pick the log in with **Office 365** option on the right-hand side of the login page. They will then be prompted to enter their school email address, e.g. ####@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk, where the #### are the pupils 4-digit username.

The password they then use to login is the same one they will have chosen when first logging onto the computers at school.

There are also mobile apps available for both parents and pupils, which can be

downloaded from the appropriate app store. These are called Firefly for Parents and Firefly for Students, and are free. When logging in for the first time, the same username and password must be used along with the school code: **balcarras**, to link successfully with our system.

School Network

Pupils can access their school files from home, including both their personal Home Drive and the shared Pupil Resources folder, through OneDrive.

To access these files:

- Use the **OneDrive link** at the top of the school website, or
- Go to the school's **Virtual Learning Environment (Firefly)** and follow the links provided.

Because these files are stored in the cloud, **any changes made at home will automatically update**—there's no need to email files back and forth or worry about different versions.

If your son or daughter needs help logging in, they should use their school email address (e.g. **1234@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk**) and the password they use to login the school computers.

Online Safety

The school has a well-established ICT Code of Conduct. All pupils will be allowed access to the internet for school related activity. Anything not directly linked to schoolwork, such as playing or downloading games and accessing social media services is prohibited. Pupils who break the code of conduct, which is monitored by our network manager, will be sanctioned. This often includes having their network access revoked.

When outside of school, pupils should continue to use technology in a responsible manner. In particular, pupils should be mindful of how you use social media services, such as Instagram and TikTok. It is strongly recommended that pupils make their profiles private. Pupils should also carefully consider how they communicate with each other on these platforms as this is often the cause of friendship issues within groups..

We recommend that parents monitor computer, smart phone and tablet use at

home. Support in this can often help prevent or mitigate problems caused by the use of social media. Parents of younger pupils should also be aware of the age restrictions many social media services have, the majority requiring users to be at least 13 years old.

We recommend all parents read the school's advice on social media safeguarding which can be found on the school website: www.balcarras.co.uk / Our school / Safeguarding and Wellbeing / Social Media.

How will your child be assessed at KS3?

- We will have TARGET GRADES of 1-9 (1 being the lowest, 9 the highest) instead of levels. We will use the pupil's KS2 entry 'score'. We will also consider any department 'baseline tests' and set them a target at Christmas of Year 7.
- The target grade (e.g. grade 6) remains the same grade for all three years (7, 8 and 9) but the work and assessment criteria to meet that grade gets progressively tougher year on year.
- We will report progress on whether the pupil is successfully below/working towards/on/above that target using 'interim' and full written reports throughout the three years.
- Targets may be raised over the years if pupils achieve them too easily. But they will rarely be lowered as we think every pupil should strive to reach their potential with our help.
- Many styles of work – not just official assessments will be marked using the numbers 1-9. All class and homework will be continually assessed through a variety of feedback mechanisms to ensure that pupils know how to make progress.
- There will be no assumption that a Grade 7 at KS3 should mean a grade 7 at GCSE (however, it will give us an indication of their ability).
- Heads of Department have all designed their own sets of assessment criteria for the grades which have been passed through the Senior Management Team to ensure consistency, fairness and rigour.

Year 8 and 9 subject information booklets

Over the next two years a subject information guide, like this one, will be available as your child joins Year 8 and then Year 9. In our efforts to be more environmentally friendly, instead of sending you a paper version, the booklets will be available on our website for you to view, download (and also print if you wish).

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Fax: 01242 250620

Email: admin@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk

Website: www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk

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