



**Balcarras**  
From strength to strength

YEAR 8  
SUBJECT INFORMATION  
FOR PARENTS  

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2020 - 2021



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 setted by ability, this means the pupils are able to advance at a similar pace. The exceptions are art, drama, music, physical education and computing, where the mixed ability schemes employed last year continue to be used. This setting in most subjects will happen after Christmas this year so that we have a little more time to gather data due to Year 7 having been curtailed. There will be assessments this term that will help the setting process happen.

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 they are as successful as possible.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Elizabeth Cullis  
Assistant Headteacher  
October 2020

## 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 following a trip to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.

### 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**

## Computing

### Work in the Classroom

In Year 8, pupils build on their knowledge and skills from Year 7. They will learn principles of programming which will help them create their own coded game, they will understand the components of computers and how data is represented in binary. They will also develop their graphic skills using Adobe software to create a visual for the department. The curriculum builds the foundation for their year 9 topics in order to both prepare them for their GCSE choices as well as give them the skills relevant to today's technological world.

### Curriculum

- Algorithms and programming
- Coding project using Python
- Graphic design principles
- Graphics project using Photoshop
- Understanding computers
- App development project

### Resources

All resources for lessons are available on the VLE and are accessible to both pupils and parents. These include lesson worksheets, homework activities and skills videos. For theory topics, each pupil will have an online booklet to complete which they will also use for homework tasks. Projects will be worked on in class, pupils are not expected to buy the software used. They can however, request to use the computer rooms during lunch if required.

### Assessment

Throughout the year there will be a number of VLE assessments and each unit will have a final assessment which will be graded on a 9-1 scale.

### How parents are able to help

Showing an interest in the topic is always a big help, as well as ensuring their homework is being completed to the highest effort standard. If lessons are missed, the VLE can be used to catch up with content.

*Head of Department : Miss A Hinton*

## 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 further food preparation skills. In Year 8, lessons will focus on more detailed aspects of nutrition and product analysis and evaluation.

Work in product design and textiles looks to build on the projects completed in Year 7. Pupils will be able to develop their practical skills further and start to use workshop machinery with confidence. There will be opportunities to work with a wide range of materials and processes.

### 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 project booklets and ICT applications. 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 VLE 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. 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. Pupils could start to develop design skills by using ICT programs such as Sketch Up or Tinkercad. These are both free computer aided design programs that pupils can use at home to develop their design skill.

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 C Swanepoel*

## **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.

## **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:-

- Animal Farm (Novel)
- Fairy Tales v Horror (Creative Writing)
- Greek Mythology with a focus on non-fiction (Reading & Writing)
- War Poetry (Reading & Writing)
- Criminal Minds (Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening)

### **Assessment**

Students' work will be marked in a variety of ways including the highlighting of both achievements and errors, focused and summative written comments, specific targets, verbal feedback and progress set against assessment criteria. Students 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**

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.

## 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, 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 an optional field trip linking to one of the topics covered within Year 8.

### Resources used

A variety of resources are used to compliment the delivery of lessons throughout the topics. A combination of text and ICT resources are well integrated in to the schemes of work to ensure pupils are exposed to a wide range of academic materials. Pupils will use these resources to learn through a wide range of methods including pair and group work, role play, internet research and interactive games/activities.

### How parents can help

Homework is set regularly in order to consolidate learning compliment and extend work completed in the classroom. Students should be encouraged to use reference materials such as an atlas, the internet, textbooks, magazines and newspapers alongside 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 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 students' 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 students to grasp more difficult concepts such as different levels of development and the implications these have on everyday life in other countries.

**Acting Head of Department : Mrs E Cullis**

## 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 exploring how we gained an empire and how industrialisation changed the face of Britain for all. During Year 8 the students also look at international history. In particular they will again focus on China in the same time period with particular focus on the Opium Wars.

### 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. A plethora of learning resources adds variety and stimulus to the learning process. 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. Students also have the opportunity to go on the Battlefields trip in July. This readies them for their studies of History in Year 9.

### 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. The new VLE will also have relevant podcasts and documentaries uploaded frequently. 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 M Stoker**

## 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 *CGP texts* 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 worksheets are 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.vle.mathswatch.com](http://www.vle.mathswatch.com). Individual logins and passwords are given out at the start of the year. Here, you access video clips and other resources to support you from the lowest levels at KS3 up to the top grade at GCSE.

**Head of Department: Mr S Critchley**

## 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 either a bilingual pocket dictionary or the website [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com) at home. Holidays and school trips to the countries where these languages are spoken are also highly motivating!

We run a **Mandarin Chinese Club** at lunchtimes, and a **Latin Club** as well. Sometimes we also run a **Japanese Club**, depending on staff availability. All of these clubs are open to pupils in Year 8 and they are very popular. 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 Hockenull**

## Music

### Work in the classroom

In Year 8 students 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 including Rhythmic Notation, Samba, Blues, Indian Music, Keyboard Skills and World Music.

The department's two main classrooms are used to provide a range of activities incorporating individual, paired and group work. Students are encouraged to develop musical skills in all areas whatever their ability level.

Due to the practical nature of the subject, students 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

Students 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, Mixcraft and Sibelius, are used as composition and performance tools, along with tuned and untuned percussion, electronic keyboards and voices. Students 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 students develop awareness of the basic elements. On occasions, students are directed to extra resources on the school's R:drive or VLE to extend their in class learning. Students are encouraged to participate in any of the extra-curricular activities.

*Head of Department: Mrs H Chong*

## Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE)

PSHE education is the school subject through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives, now and in the future. PSHE education develops the qualities and attributes pupils need to thrive as individuals, family members and members of society. **The Department for Education (DFE)** research report states that: 'A high quality PSHE provision has a significant effect on pupils' academic success, makes them more engaged in school and has an overall effect on their well-being'.

### How we deliver PSHE at Balcarras?

Every week, a tutor session is set aside for each tutor group to explore aspects of PSHE education. In addition, the timetable is suspended for two hours each half term. 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*
- *Self-esteem and stress management*
- *Healthy choices*
- *Racism*
- *Diversity*
- *Mindfulness*
- *Mental Health*
- *Dealing with change*
- *Discrimination*
- *The Sleep Factor*
- *First Aid*

*Head of PSHE and Citizenship: Miss H Davies*

## 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:

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

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*

## 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 Christianity and other core world religions including Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and Sikhism, 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 recently updated Gloucestershire agreed syllabus for key stage three and key stage four and five follow the OCR 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 8 pupils will be introduced to the world religions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. 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.

*Head of Department: Mrs H Ebanja*



## Science

### Work in the classroom

Pupils study six units in Year 8 covering biology, physics and chemistry. They also complete a unit of work that focuses on “working-scientifically skills” to help prepare them for the start of GCSE science in Year 9.

At the end of each unit pupils complete a test for which they receive a grade (1-9). They will also complete 12 graded homework tasks throughout the year and sit a Year 8 exam. Students 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 throughout Year 8.

Pupils carry out a lot of practical investigations in lessons to build up their laboratory skills and enhance learning.

### 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 a front sheet for each topic which shows what pupils will be learning. 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 area of the VLE 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: Dr S Jones**

## VLE: Virtual Learning Environment

The VLE is an online extension of the classroom, which can be accessed by students, 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 students 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, attendance and potentially see their progression through the school. This has been redesigned over the last year to be simple and easy to navigate. 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 this site and this is their normal student network login. When logging in from outside of school, students must include the last part of their email address that follows their username (#####@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk).

There are also mobile apps available for both parents and students, 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 and the school code: **balcarras**, to link successfully with our system.

## School Network

Students 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 either clicking on the Network link at the top of the school website homepage (**www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk**) or by selecting the Network option located on the dashboard of the VLE (**balcarras.fireflycloud.net**). Users will be directed to the FoldR website and students need to use their school username and password to log in. FoldR (By Minnow IT) is also available as an app for Android and iOS devices. FoldR can also be used to change pupil passwords when away from school.

## Notes

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