



# Balcarras

From strength to strength

YEAR 8

SUBJECT INFORMATION  
FOR PARENTS

---

2023 - 2024



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.

In Year 8 some groups are sorted by prior attainment, others are not. Any setting took place before the summer break. It will be reviewed later in the year once some assessments have taken place.

This is another vital year in your child's education, I hope that we will continue to work closely together to ensure that they are as successful as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Elizabeth Cullis', is written over a horizontal line.

Mrs Elizabeth Cullis  
Assistant Headteacher

October 2023

# 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

During Year 8, pupils take the next steps in both Computer Science and Creative Media. This ranges from improving their technical understanding of programming, to applying composition techniques, to using CSS to help style webpages. By revisiting similar topics, we aim to not only re-embed what was learned in Year 7, but also explore topics in far greater depth.

## Curriculum

- Programming Principles
- Graphic Design Techniques
- HTML and CSS
- Oxford University Bebras challenge

## Assessment

There will be four main assessments throughout the year, one for each of the four units listed above. With the exception of the Bebras challenge, pupils will be awarded a mark and a 9-1 grade. This will be paired with feedback on how they might go about improving further. In the case of the Bebras challenge, this is marked by Oxford University and as such pupils will receive the score they achieved along with a Participation, Merit, Distinction or Gold level certificate.

## 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. The school offers a homework computing room which can be used if required.

## How parents can help

There is a range of further guidance on an array of topics available through the Next Steps section inside Computing on Firefly. This contains project ideas and good resources to help students develop their skills beyond what we do within the classroom.

*Head of Department: Mr S Cooper*

---

# 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 speech. Pupils are encouraged to become increasingly aware of the process by which the art form achieves its end product. They are required to analyse how things work through active discussion and personal reflection. However, beyond these technical aspects the subject is also used to continue building the personal development, self-confidence and social awareness of the student.

Year 8 begins with a unit focused on improvisation. Students will build on the skills taught in Year 7 and will be encouraged to think imaginatively and creatively. They will become confident with the core skills of improvisation including creativity, confidence, accepting and saying 'yes!'

In the spring term students will study Musical Theatre as a genre. Lessons will begin by focusing on developing the freeze frame work from Year 7 and then building towards effective transitions and movement to music. Students will also have the opportunity to explore, and experiment with, the effect of music on performance.

The year ends with an exploration of Melodrama as a genre. Students will continue to build on the practical skills taught in Year 7 whilst exploring the conventions of Melodrama. Students will consider how to portray stock characters through their physical and vocal skills. Short scripts will also be used, building on the introduction to script work in Year 7.

# 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 they 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:

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

## Assessment

English teachers will assess students 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. 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.

*Head of Department: Mr D Sharkey*

---

# Geography

## Learning in and outside the classroom

During Year 8 pupils will be taught a range of physical and human geography topics including deforestation, weather, tectonic hazards and fairtrade. 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 an optional fieldtrip to complement the tectonic hazards 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. 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. 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 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

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 'number', 'ratio', 'geometry' and 'statistics' and get introduced to 'probability'. Throughout the year they learn lots of new skills within the area of 'algebra'. Number and algebra skills are now both at the top of essential skills to maintain!

Setting follows on from Year 7. Students are still in two separate bands with in each band up to 4 sets. Setting is reviewed after each assessment. The whole-year assessments happen in December, March and June.

## 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.

Students 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.

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

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, offers 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?"

If your child needs help with the actual understanding of a topic, the "go to" platform is MathsWatch!

---

*Head of Department: Mr S Critchley*

## Modern Foreign Languages

In Year 8 most 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. 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 play a valuable part by checking that vocabulary has been learnt to the best of their child's ability. 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 a reliable online dictionary such as [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com) at home.

Finding opportunities to use their languages outside of the classroom can also be highly motivating and we organise trips for Years 8 and 9.

We run a *French Club*, *Mandarin Chinese Club* and a *Latin Club* at lunchtimes. 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: Mr F Seguin*

---

# 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, Vocalise, 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.

**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)

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

Pupils in Year 8 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 and to make Personal Development and PSHE more of an 'event' in school. In addition, tutors deliver PSHE every Monday during a Personal Development lesson.

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

#### Autumn Term – Relationship Education

- Bullying and cyberbullying
- Disability discrimination
- Sexual orientation and gender identity
- Relationship values
- Consent – avoiding assumptions
- Parenting
- Commitment

#### Spring Term – Health Education

- Digital resilience
- Building connections
- Drugs – tobacco
- Drugs - alcohol
- First aid
- Emotional effects of puberty

#### Summer Term – Living in the wider world

- Decision making
- Internet citizens
- Stranger danger
- Careers (organised by Mrs Bull)
- Money (organised by Mrs Bull)

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

- Self esteem
- Knife crime
- Personal hygiene and healthy lifestyles
- Racism
- Citizenship
- Relationships and mindfulness
- Drugs (including a speaker session)

***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 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 Sikhi. 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. 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 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.

## 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](http://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 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, students 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](mailto:#####@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk), where the ##### are the students 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 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 along with 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 can be accessed at home by either clicking on the Network link at the top of the school website homepage ([www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk](http://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk)) or by selecting the Network option located on the dashboard of the VLE (**[balcarras.fireflycloud.net](http://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.

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

We also 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.

## 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.
- 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. However, other marking techniques can also be incorporated to assess progress as subject teachers see fit.
- 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.

Tel: 01242 515881

Fax: 01242 250620

Email: [admin@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:admin@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk)

Website: [www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk](http://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk)

**Balcarras School**

East End Road

Charlton Kings

Cheltenham

Gloucestershire

GL53 8QF