



Birkdale  
School

# Lower School Handbook

for entry September 2023

**STRONGER  
TOGETHER**

[birkdaleschool.org.uk](http://birkdaleschool.org.uk)



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## Welcome to Birkdale Senior School

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Dear Parent/Guardian

Entry to a new secondary school is an exciting but challenging time for a child of eleven or twelve. At Birkdale we try to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible, and the purpose of this handbook is to give you information which will help the children to settle down rapidly and securely.

Whilst they are in the Lower School, during the first two years of their career in the Senior School, your child will be under the care of the Head of Lower School, Mr Howard Parker and his Assistants, Mr Dominic Parsons and Mrs Annie Hinchliffe. The Lower School is based in the Johnson building, and the pastoral structures are designed to help them settle down quickly and to feel confident at school and at home. Please contact your child's Form Tutor or the Head of Lower School in the first instance if you have any questions about academic or pastoral matters.

Much of this handbook is concerned with the academic curriculum, which is related to, but not dictated by, the National Curriculum. Our policy is to prepare each child in the best possible way so that they realise their full potential, not least when they come to external examinations and university entrance.

For school rules and many other points, please refer to the "General Information for Parents" booklet, a copy of which you should already have. In order that your child benefits fully from Birkdale, they should take a full and active part in school activities. The school week runs from Monday to Friday, but a considerable number of activities are arranged on Saturdays and after school each day. We look to parents to support us in ensuring that pupils attend at these times when selected to play in matches, practices and other activities. So much of what makes Birkdale distinctive is dependent on the support of parents for what we do - not least in extra-curricular activities, including drama and music.

We look forward to working in partnership with you as we welcome your child to the Lower School. I am sure they will find the Birkdale atmosphere to be a happy one in which they will enjoy great success.

Kind regards

**Peter Harris**  
Head



## The Structure of the Senior School

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The Senior School is divided into three sections, each of which has its own individual character. We aim to provide different environments to enable pupils to develop as individuals and gain in confidence.

### THE LOWER SCHOOL

Forms S1 and S2, the equivalent in the state sector of years 7 and 8, are housed in the Johnson Building under the pastoral care of the Head of Lower School, Mr Howard Parker and Assistant Heads of Lower School Mr Dominic Parsons and Mrs Annie Hinchliffe.

### THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Forms S3, S4 and S5 are under the pastoral and disciplinary care of the Head of Middle School, Mr Matthew Morton and Assistant Heads of Middle School Mrs Emma Magenty and Mr Stefan Bridle.

### THE SIXTH FORM

Mrs Helen Parsons is the Director of Sixth Form, which is based in the Grayson building. She is supported by our two Heads of Year Mrs Polly Pickford and Mr Matthew Jones.

Each form has a Form Tutor who is pastorally responsible for the pupils in his/her form and this, together with the structure outlined above, ensures that personal contact between pupils and staff - always given a high priority at Birkdale - is preserved and enhanced.

The School is also organised on a House system, which provides a vertical structure within which pupils can relate together across the age boundaries. The House system gives pupils opportunities to develop leadership potential. The four Houses are Asterley (Green), Griffiths (Blue), Hall (Yellow) and Heeley (Red).

# The Lower School

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By creating a Lower School, with its own base and Head of Lower School, Birkdale has recognised the importance of the first two years in the Senior School as a foundation period, during which academic and social skills (required later for more advanced work) and mature and responsible conduct will be established. Children of this age are particularly responsive and enthusiastic, so these years are an important, exciting and interesting period in their development. Our aim is to ensure that when they enter the Middle School they have acquired broad interests and enquiring minds, that they have learned to work effectively on their own, that they have started GCSE preparation in a self-disciplined and mature way and that they feel secure and happy within the Birkdale School community.

The Head of Lower School, Mr Howard Parker, and Mr Dominic Parsons and Mrs Annie Hinchliffe, Assistant Heads of Lower School, are responsible for the pastoral and academic development of the pupils. They aim to ensure a smooth transition for pupils from Primary Education to the Secondary School environment by providing a caring and welcoming community in which pupils can gain confidence and acquire a sense of belonging. The tutor groups within this section of the school are all based in the Johnson building but pupils take lessons in subject areas which are based throughout the school, bringing them into contact with more senior students. We try to arrange that each Form Tutor teaches his or her form in S1 and then continues as the tutor in S2. A similar system exists in the Middle School (S3, S4 and S5).

The Johnson Building and grounds (*pictured right*) are for the sole use of Lower School pupils outside lesson times, and this provision of an area separate from older pupils helps the younger ones, especially those new to the school, to enjoy a smaller, secure environment.

Lower School have their own Common Room and table tennis area, cloakrooms, toilets and lockers, large tarmac playing area and lawns of around two acres.



Each year group (S1 and S2) is divided into tutor groups. All forms in a year group follow the same curriculum. Mathematics and French are initially taught in mixed groups but pupils are then placed into sets for the remainder of the year. There is considerable flexibility for movement between the sets for anyone who is struggling or finding insufficient challenge, if we feel that such a move is in their best interests.

## SCHOOL WORK

Pupils are encouraged to develop sound work habits in Lower School which will form the basis of their academic progress through the Senior School. Books should be labelled clearly with name, class, subject and a note of the days upon which lessons take place. Each piece of work should have a title, which is underlined, and be dated. Homework is noted in the homework diary and must be completed on time. Pupils will also have access to Google Classroom for each subject. They are encouraged to take a pride in

their work, and parents are asked review their child's homework diary weekly. To encourage participation and effort there is a system of house points and certificates are awarded on a regular basis for achievement, effort, demonstrating good citizenship and having an excellent attendance record.

## LOWER SCHOOL - PREFECTS AND MONITORS

One aim of the Lower School is to aid the "growing up" of children in a secure, well-defined environment which allows them to develop their skills as individuals in a community. In the separate environment of the Lower School pupils are encouraged to develop as leaders, and to take responsibilities in a wide range of activities.

A number of pupils at the top of the Lower School are selected for duties as Prefects and Monitors. There is a Head and Deputy Head pupil of the Lower School. A small number of pupils are selected each September and additional appointments may be made throughout the year.

## PROPERTY

Lower School pupils have individual lockers. Keys are issued at the beginning of every year and spares are kept in school. If your child should lose their key they will be supplied with a spare, which will be charged for at the end of the academic year if the original key remains lost. Books may be kept in lockers, or at home and brought in daily as required. On arrival at school, bags should be placed in the cloakrooms and left there for the duration of the day. There should normally be no need to carry bags round school. Small document cases to carry books between lessons are acceptable.

Sports bags should be brought to school on a Monday only, when there is a timetabled games session. On other PE days a small bag to hold the necessary equipment is sufficient. All property should be named or marked so that it can be returned, if mislaid. All clothing should be named.

Lower School pupils are allowed to have mobile phones in school, but phones must be kept switched off in lockers throughout the school day. The phone may only be used for emergency calls during the day, with the permission of the Head of Lower School. Mobile phones are not to be used during break times and lunch times, but we do acknowledge their value when pupils come to be picked up in the evenings.

## CLUBS AND SOCIETIES

A large variety of clubs and societies are available in the Lower School. A full list is provided in the parent portal. Many Lower School pupils become involved in Choir, Sport, Drama and other musical activities which require a degree of commitment, including after school and occasional Saturdays, if they are to get the greatest pleasure and benefit from participation. All take place during the lunch break or after school and pupils in the Lower School are expected to participate in at least two activities per term. They can, of course, change and preferably show a mix of interests. The Form Tutor discusses with each child the activities they will pursue each term and encourages them to follow a balanced programme. The choice is wide and varied and pupils are encouraged to become involved.

## The Curriculum

The curriculum which we have developed at Birkdale takes account of the National Curriculum and the requirements of Key Stage 3. We have taken advantage of our independent status to make two further modern languages available in S2 and to retain Latin as a core subject for the first two years.

S1	Periods per week
English	5
Mathematics	5
Science	6
French	4
Latin	2
Geography	2
History	2
Religious Education	2
Art	2
Design & Technology	2
Computer Science	2
Music	2
Physical Education	1
Games	3

S2	Periods per week
English	5
Mathematics	5
Science	6
French	3
German/Spanish	2
Latin	2
Geography	2
History	2
Religious Education	2
Art	2
Design & Technology	2
Computer Science	1
Music	2
Physical Education	1
Games	3

At this level particular importance is attached to English across the curriculum, and in every subject staff are asked to insist on effective communication and correct use of language. Considerable time is also spent in drama and debating to help pupils become fluent and to think rapidly "on their feet". It is also felt that if a child finds pleasure in reading they gain a permanent interest that is a vital part of education for leisure.

At Birkdale, we feel it important to produce the right blend of the theoretical and the practical. We recognise the increasing role of technology in society and, therefore, the growing need to develop technological awareness and skills through the school curriculum. Thus education in Art, Design and Technology and Information Technology forms an integral part of the school curriculum from the first year in the Senior School.

Birkdale is a community which, although it has no denominational links, nevertheless makes no secret of its claim to be a Christian School. This is reflected not only in the timetabled day but, more significantly, in the "hidden curriculum" in which every pupil is assured of their worth as an individual.

By the time they enter the Middle School all pupils should know how to listen and respond effectively, how to express themselves accurately, and have developed some understanding of the society in which they are to play a part. They should also have learned how to relate effectively to others, with consideration of needs other than their own, and how to behave in a mature, courteous and responsible manner.

# Outdoor Education

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Birkdale has always included within its educational philosophy the education of the whole pupil and, in addition to the priority we give to academic development, we seek to provide opportunities for character development and leadership training outside the classroom. Outdoor education (non-games physical activity in an outdoor environment) aims to introduce pupils to a variety of situations in which they can develop qualities of self-reliance, initiative and leadership, in addition to providing a basis for the pursuit of interests throughout their lives.

The programme followed by all pupils will centre on two camps, for which there will be training sessions which take place beforehand. The camps will involve activities which are designed (within carefully planned safety considerations) to be physically and mentally testing: the emphasis is on self-reliance and leadership. The programme will culminate in a two day small group expedition during the 4th form camp.

## Third Form Camp

The aim is to develop group skills and to give experience of small group leadership.

The activities will probably include:

- a. Training in navigation and camp craft
- b. Small group walk into a tented base camp
- c. Local orienteering exercise
- d. Small group command tasks
- e. Cooking own food
- f. Small group walk, out to designated rendezvous
- g. Adventure activity at rendezvous (eg canoeing and rock-climbing)

Timing:

- a. After school sessions in the latter weeks of the Easter Term and the first weeks of the Summer Term
- b. One Games afternoon
- c. Camp on a Friday/Saturday, probably the weekend before half term

Location:

Peak District

## Fourth Form Camp

The aim is to develop leadership skills to a level at which pupils can help lead a small group on a two day expedition.

The activity will include:

- a. Pre-camp briefing
- b. Safety/briefing exercise on site
- c. Local navigation exercise
- d. One night camping expedition
- e. Adventure activity training days

Timing: Five days, during the Summer Term

In recent years the *Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme* has become a significant part of the pupils' wider education, with a majority of Third Formers taking the Bronze award and an increasing number going on to take the Silver and Gold awards. The work in S3 will provide a good basis for the expedition section of the Bronze award but pupils will need to show the development of skills and interests, together with their willingness to be of service to the community, to fulfil other requirements of the scheme.



## Academic Work

School work, homework and coursework are all essential elements of the education programme at Birkdale. We monitor progress by assessing homework and class-work and report to parents and pupils on grade cards, at Parents' Evenings and in end-of-term Reports. In the first term of S1 pupils are tested in class or as a year group as appropriate. Formal testing usually takes place in English (for diagnostic purposes), French (for setting purposes) Science and Mathematics (diagnostic and setting). There are examinations in all subjects at the end of each school year.

### GRADE CARDS

Grade Cards are issued once or twice per term on the dates indicated in the school calendar. Grades are given for attainment and effort. High effort grades can be achieved by any pupil; attainment grades relate to achievement.

A summary of the grade criteria is given below:

ATTAINMENT		EFFORT		
Grade	Comment	Grade	Comment	
A	Excellent	O	Outstanding	They give of their best all the time
B	Very good	V	Very Good	Does all they should and more.
C	Good	G	Good	Concentrates and works well most of the time.
D	Weak	S	Satisfactory	Applies sufficient effort to complete work
		U	Unsatisfactory	They are seriously underachieving.

Pupils are interviewed by Form Tutors and/or Senior Staff after each set of grades and targets are set for improvement where necessary. U grades for effort are treated seriously and a range of sanctions, which includes a daily report card, are used to focus attention on a pupil's problems.

### HOMEWORK

Homework is set as indicated in the homework timetable issued at the start of the school year. Some teachers may set a piece of work to be completed over a period of time. Homework may be written, research or to learn for a test.

All homework will be set on Google Classroom.

**If homework is incomplete, late or unsatisfactory then the following sanctions may be employed:**

1. Repetition of unsatisfactory work.
2. Detention after school on a Tuesday evening.

Staff can also choose to give an academic detention at lunchtime on Thursday.

The importance of homework cannot be exaggerated; pupils are learning the patterns of self-discipline which will serve them well in GCSEs, A levels, at university and employment. Parents can help by:

1. Checking the Google Classroom. In S1 and S2 pupils will have regular check-ins with their form tutor. This measure is relaxed in later years but parents are encouraged to maintain an interest in the work set; those who find organisation difficult may be asked to adopt a procedure whereby parents check set work and assignments on Google Classroom with their child.
2. Supporting the disciplinary procedures applied to pupils who fall below the standards expected.

### REPORTS & PARENTS EVENINGS

There is a written report at the end of each term, unless there has been a Parents Evening during the course of the term. The current programme of reports and Parents Evenings is:

	Christmas	Easter	Summer
<b>S1</b>	Parents Evening	Report	Grades
<b>S2</b>	Parents Evening	Grades	Report
<b>S3</b>	Grades	Parents Evening	Report
<b>S4</b>	Parents Evening	Report	Parents Evening
<b>S5</b>	Report	Parents Evening	-
<b>L6</b>	Parents Evening	Report	Parents Evening
<b>U6</b>	Report	Parents Evening	-

Parents worried about the progress of their child may contact the Head of Lower School at any stage. This especially applies after a report from the School.





# The Lower School Curriculum



## ART & DESIGN

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Pupils in the first and second year work as forms on a variety of projects that follow the National Curriculum. Time is spent developing skills for analysing and recording from direct observation and collecting various source material. This research can then be developed in the various media that are available in the art room. These range from pencil and pastel through to paints, collage and 3D materials, printing, and multi-media.

The pupils are encouraged to discuss their work at all stages and make critical judgments. They learn to modify or develop their approaches in response to their own and others' evaluations. In addition to this, they develop a specialist vocabulary, and explore and experiment with materials and images, whilst working towards producing a final piece.

Throughout the first two years pupils should be able to demonstrate and show evidence of the ability to evaluate work of other artists, and understand the principal features of our artistic heritage. Methods and approaches of other artists can be used imaginatively in the presentation of their own ideas and feelings.

One of the things we pride ourselves on in the Art department at Birkdale is the use of good, almost professional, quality equipment as well as taking very seriously the meaning and formal qualities that constitute all great Art.

Even at this early stage we introduce the pupils to some of the quite difficult concepts and philosophies which underlie Art and find that they rise to the challenge. In the same way, when they are shown something of the professional's way of working they respond, and some quite exciting and sophisticated work can result.

## CLASSICS

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In the first and second years at Birkdale, all pupils study Latin for two periods a week. We use the Cambridge Latin Course. In the early stages we concentrate on the learning of basic Latin grammar and the differences in word order between English and Latin. Also of prime importance in the first two years is the learning of vocabulary. This is mostly done through reading and translating but we also have learning homework fairly frequently. Learning grammar and vocabulary takes place in the context of reading stories in Latin from the course book. Standard activities in class and for homework include reading Latin aloud, oral and written comprehension and translation, discussion of character and analysis of noun and verb endings. Latin classes are held in the IT suite on a regular basis in S1 and S2, using the on-line resources linked to the Cambridge Latin Course.

The historical context of Latin is very important. In the first part of the course the story is set in Pompeii. There are sections to be studied on topics as varied as education, gladiators and beliefs about life after death, but much of the historical material arises out of the reading passages themselves. The second and third parts of the course are set in Roman Britain and Roman Egypt. They offer scope for a fairly close examination of how Roman culture affected two very different regions, and how it has directly influenced their culture and society nowadays.

These foundations lead on to GCSE Latin and Classical Civilisation in the Middle School. The course changes its location, moving to Britain - focusing on Bath and Chester, and the City of Rome, but the methodology stays the same. GCSE Latin is based on set books, unseen translation and comprehension, and questions on Roman life and society.

Classical Civilisation GCSE, which is taught in the fourth and fifth years, offers the chance to study the Greek and Roman worlds, without Latin or Greek. The topics covered are Myth and Religion and War and Warfare.

Ancient Greek is offered as an extra-curricular club in S3.

## COMPUTER SCIENCE

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### Definition

Computer Science encompasses the disciplines of Computing and Information and Communications Technology. Computing involves problem solving and writing computer programs. ICT is more concerned with content creation and learning how best to access communications technologies.

### Rationale

The first year course aims to develop competent ICT users who are confident in their ability to produce relevant documents (eg desktop-published, slideshows, etc) for use in other subjects. Students will be introduced to the use of collaborative platforms (eg Google Classroom) to develop effective remote learning skills. In addition, we are building the foundation problem-solving skills required for Computer Science for GCSE and A Level. We hope that students will finish the course enthusiastic about their ability to build with PCs rather than being passive receivers of content generated by others. The second year course has a focus on Physical Computing with the aim of developing an understanding of how other computer forms work (robots, smartphones, etc) and how they can interact with their environment.

All first year students have a double lesson each week. In the first term there is an emphasis on eSafety issues and developing cross-curricular presentation skills. Students make use of the Internet as a research tool and also to submit work via a virtual learning environment or email. They have their own network storage space and this can be accessed from home using the remote access links on the school website. We use Windows PCs in lessons, and try where possible to teach students how to use a mixture of software relevant to current industry standards, but also packages that are free to download and install at home. Lessons in first year are focused on practical application of skills and knowledge. We make use of opportunities to discuss and embed relevant theory, including extended learning tasks set for homework. Homework tasks are generally set through Google Classroom or other relevant online tools. We encourage students to make use of their Chromebooks to support the tasks carried out on PCs and to develop their skills further. Students can make use of the library or IT labs in school at break or lunchtimes if access at home presents problems.

### Programmes of Study

#### S1 Students

The Christmas term introduces students to network resources and eSafety topics. Students develop IT skills relevant to cross-curricular work and how to submit evidence through online channels. They are introduced to the concept of Object Oriented Programming using Microsoft's Kodu game-making environment. They design and create their own 3D games using a visual 'blocky' language to program object behaviours and world-building tools to create game levels.

In the Easter term students are introduced to cryptography through code-breaking challenges and the use of the Python text-based language. This is followed by an extended project to create their own eCommerce website. The website incorporates the writing of HTML webpages with CSS to control their appearance and JavaScript to make the site interactive. They publish their site online for testing and peer evaluation.

In the Summer term students experience a variety of more hands-on, hardware-focused tasks, including working with robots, micro-computers and mobile technologies. Students also embark on the acquisition of an Inspiring Digital Enterprise Award badge at bronze or silver level. This is an industry-recognised certificate scheme that delivers employability and personal development skills.

#### S2 Students

The S2course starts with a review of Python skills - this time applied to the control of robotic turtles to draw shapes on paper or on screen. They will use this as an opportunity to develop their cryptography skills as they draw encoded symbols to write secret messages. Students are encouraged to develop their cryptography skills to coincide with the Cipher Challenge competition in November/December. They round off the term with some hands-on experience of modular robots and the exploration of ethical issues in robotics as a theme.

In the second term, students will acquire some digital media creations skills using Photoshop and other graphics software packages to learn some of the colour-correction and photo-manipulation skills used in modern cinema. Students will also explore the impact of reality-manipulation software on society from an ethical viewpoint. They will then be introduced to a model mechanical computer - the Turing Tumble - to learn how processors work at a fundamental level. These marble-powered devices are used to teach concepts such as logic gates, registers, binary numbers and more.

In the Summer term, students will develop some simple games using object oriented and event-driven techniques. They will have the chance to use their photo-manipulation skills to develop and enhance graphics assets for use in their games.

#### Assessment

Students' performance and progress are assessed throughout a unit of work and at the end of each topic by submitting evidence of practical tasks. Work is graded from O to U for effort and 10 to 1 or a percentage for attainment in line with the school's assessment and marking policy. Progress throughout the term is summed to give a final grade for reports. Students also take part in the Oxford University Bebras competition to assess computational thinking skills.

#### Extra-Curricular Activities

A lunchtime 'Code Club' is open to those who wish to develop their programming skills. This platform is used by students to extend their classroom work or to investigate new programming challenges. It is also a springboard for participation in a number of programming and code-cracking competitions run by external bodies and our teams have managed many strong performances in recent years. Cryptography Club also runs after school during the delivery of the National Cipher Challenge (October - December) and the Alan Turing Cryptography Competition (Jan - Mar).

## DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY

*“Design is not just about how something looks – it is about how something works. It is vital that we work towards developing projects that work better and last longer. Young people should be encouraged to be creative and make things.” James Dyson*

Design and Technology at Birkdale School embraces this philosophy throughout each year and cites ‘Turning ideas into reality’ as its motto, encouraging pupils to apply knowledge and skills to solve practical ‘real world’ problems in a safe and disciplined environment. An emphasis is placed on independent creative thought, both individually and whilst working as a team, in the Design and Technology workshop. Health and Safety is reinforced in all projects and pupils are encouraged to integrate IT into all of their work. Every pupil in S1 and S2 is trained to use ‘Solid Works’, an industry standard 3D modelling software package, and is able to take this software home to further develop their skills.

### S1

The S1 Scheme of Work is designed to build on pupils’ design and make experiences in primary education with three projects, each allowing pupils to experience many different disciplines within the subject area.

- Pupils will design, make and test a survival stove and will compare the performance of their outcome against a commercially produced stove. The project finishes with them using their stove to make a hot drink for themselves in the workshops whilst evaluating their work.
- The CNC Puzzle Project introduces pupils to designing an artefact on a PC and then transferring that design to a CNC laser machine which cuts it out for them. They then finish and assemble their product.
- Finally, the Go-Kart project is an exercise where pupils work in pairs, following a technical working drawing to construct a go-kart which they ultimately sit on and race downhill. They learn to measure and mark out accurately and to cut and form softwood using a range of hand tools and machines.

### S2

Design and Technology in S2 takes on a more sophisticated approach, with greater attention to detail in the presentation of project work. Again they cycle through three projects experiencing different disciplines within the subject area.

- Pupils will learn to communicate their ideas neatly and more effectively in a DVD/games rack project that examines and applies ergonomics and anthropometrics in design.
- A more in depth study of electronics is introduced in S2 as pupils design and manufacture an innovative steady hand game. Within this they experience printed circuit board production, amplification and utilise an integrated circuit.
- Finally, pupils learn the fundamentals to designing techniques in a graphics based project with the final outcome being a design presentation of their own displaying their newfound skills. This is followed by computer aided design training utilising ‘Solid works’ software.

## ENGLISH

In English, pupils will:

- Enjoy reading a wide variety of texts, both literary and non-fiction, including novels, plays, poetry from 1600s to the present day
- Learn to write for a wide variety of purposes
- Learn to write accurately and with increasing confidence and sophistication
- Engage successfully in group discussions, debates and give presentations
- Build 'cultural capital' as well as enthusiasm for the subject, unhindered by rigid and reductive dependence on GCSE preparation

### STAFFING AND TIMETABLING

English in S1 and S2 is taught, for timetabling purposes, in science sets. Pupils are not, however, setted according to ability in English. There are usually four groups of about 12-20 pupils.

### CONTENT AND SKILLS

#### ATTAINMENT TARGET 1: SPEAKING AND LISTENING

The flexibility of English as a subject means that drama and small group discussion fits easily into the pattern of work. Pupils are able to give talks and participate in interviews and group exercises.

#### ATTAINMENT TARGET 2: READING

Much material is covered in class – extracts, articles, short stories, novels, plays and poems are all read and discussed, both for their own sake and as a stimulus to written work. The department has a number of class sets of novels and plays that can be read and studied by the whole group together. All pupils are required to do some reading in their own time (a minimum of one book per half term) and to take part in at least two 'Reading Reviews' each year. In these informal class sessions, each pupil brings the books they have read and talk about them, sharing ideas and recommendations with others so that overall progress can be monitored. **We expect pupils to read a novel of their own choice for thirty minutes a week at home.**

#### ATTAINMENT TARGET 3: WRITING

Pupils write regularly and have their work read, corrected and commented on by their teacher. The types of writing attempted will reflect the range of what is read, both fiction and non-fiction: stories, poems, play scripts, discussions, statements of individual viewpoints and attempts to persuade the reader; factual accounts; basic journalism; autobiographical accounts; letters both formal and informal. There is one 30 minute homework per week for writing; this may take the form of essays, or research/note-making.

### ASSESSMENT

#### ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN WORK

Each pupil has a folder, kept in school, in which final drafts of work as well as assessments are stored.

**COURSEWORK** – These pieces will be started in class and completed at home to a specified deadline or else completed in the IT suite with help from the teacher. These tasks are set and marked by the class teacher. Each piece may be word processed and should be the equivalent of two or more standard homeworks.

**ASSESSMENTS** – During the course of the year pupils are assessed by their teacher on a range of different tasks related to the text or module they have studied.

#### ATTAINMENT TARGET 4: SPELLING, PUNCTUATION and GRAMMAR

Teaching of SPaG skills is built in to the course as a whole. Pupils are expected to continue to develop the skills they learned in Y6 and P4.

#### SUMMER EXAM

This assesses the reading and writing skills that have been developed over the course of the year.

### SKILLS

Pupils will:

- gain in confidence as fluent speakers of English
- use spoken language appropriate to audience, task and situation
- demonstrate empathy, both as a listener and speaker, in a variety of social contexts – working in groups to share ideas, for example
- Enjoy reading a wide variety of texts, both literary and non-fiction, including novels, plays, Shakespeare, poetry from 1600s to the present day
- Study 17<sup>th</sup> (S1) and 18<sup>th</sup> (S2) century history, culture, ideas, writers and texts in a 'building cultural capital' module
- Learn to write for a wide variety of purposes
- Complete a short module on a key aspect of English language (e.g. language and gender; language and power)
- Learn to write accurately and with increasing confidence and sophistication
- Engage successfully in group discussions, debates and give presentations

### EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Drama, creative writing and debating are the department's main extra-curricular activities. We also encourage pupils to join school theatre trips in Sheffield and further afield when relevant. Opportunities exist for them to take part in national and local competitions for essay and letter writing, poetry and journalism. They can be on the editorial team of the department's in-house magazine (*In Between the Lines*) or contribute as many articles as they wish.

## GEOGRAPHY

The first two years of Senior School Geography are part of the wider course of the National Curriculum. The course spans the wide spectrum from the Pre Prep to GCSE and has been specifically designed to provide a continuum for pupils moving from one school department to another and for those pupils who come to the Senior School from other schools.

The first two years of the Key Stage 3 course at Birkdale are structured to satisfy the following aims:

- to continue to build upon the firm base of geographical knowledge, skills and ideas gained in Key Stage 2.
- to provide a sound platform from which more advanced studies (ie to GCSE) may be launched.

### S1 (Y7) Geography Curriculum

#### *Christmas Term*

- Passport to Geography – Our Planet
- Passport to Geography – Maps & Mapping
- Passport to Geography – The UK

#### *Easter Term*

- Fantastic Features 1 – Rocks
- Fantastic Features 1 – Glaciation
- Fantastic Features 1 – Rivers
- Fantastic Features 1 – Flooding

#### *Summer Term*

- Fieldwork – Burbage Brook Rivers study
- Into Africa – The Horn of Africa
- Into Africa – Country investigation

### S2 (Y8) Geography Curriculum

#### *Christmas Term*

- Into the City – *Urbanisation*
- Fieldwork – *Sheffield City study*
- How many people live on planet Earth? – *Population*

#### *Easter Term*

- Fantastic Features 2 – *Coasts*
- Weather and Climate
- Is our planet getting warmer? – *Global Warming*

#### *Summer Term*

- Superpower Geography 1 – *China & India*

### FIELDWORK

This is an integral and important part of Geography. In order to enhance their study of the local area and incorporate their knowledge and to observe processes at work, S1 will have a day visit to Burbage Brook, South West of Sheffield, when they will be introduced to river fieldwork techniques. Both year groups will also participate in small scale fieldwork during lesson time around the school grounds identifying microclimate and environmental quality.

The Department is well equipped with up-to-date resources and these are used selectively throughout, so that up-to-date case studies may be used and the relevance of the work studied may be clearly appreciated.

### SKILLS

An enquiring, questioning approach to geographical studies is adopted so that both study and social skills are developed. Pupils are encouraged to form their own opinions and develop values and attitudes towards issues and the people involved in them. The use of ICT in Geography is introduced at many points throughout both years so that pupils are actively engaged in ICT exercises, problem solving, numerical skills, data analysis, PowerPoint presentations and even the use of some Geographical Information Systems (GIS).

## HISTORY

"What is History?" is a question that has been asked many times. The answers have been equally varied: "a list of dates", "Henry VIII"; "the Battle of Waterloo"; "Robin Hood". Whilst monarchs, wars and legends are all important parts of History they need to be linked together to form a coherent body of knowledge so that questions can be answered, such as:

*"Why did Henry VIII have six wives?"*

*"What were the consequences of the Battle of Waterloo?"*

*"Who was Robin Hood?"*

Understanding the facts is far more important than the facts themselves, so that the emphasis in our History teaching is no longer on simply learning strings of dates.

From a sound chronological base, the History Department aims to explore the past to uncover what really happened. Pupils will investigate historical evidence, discover the opinions of others, develop their own views about events and learn to support them from the facts. Through their evaluation of evidence they will learn to detect bias and see through propaganda. These skills provide the foundation for the study of the subject throughout the school to GCSE level and reflect the requirements of the National Curriculum.

The course content for S1 covers British History from 1066 to 1485 exploring such themes as:

*"What were the effects of the Norman Conquest?"*

*"Was King John really a bad king?"*

*"What was at stake in the Wars of the Roses?"*

An exciting contrast is provided in the Summer Term with a study of the Plains Indians of North America. This section of the course examines the culture of a non-European society and the clashes which occurred when the "white man" moved into the Indians' homeland in the form of cowboy, mining prospector and homesteader.

In the Summer Term there is also a visit to Warwick Castle and Bosworth Battlefield.

In S2 pupils pick up the chronology of British History with the advent of the Tudors in 1485 and follow events through the English Civil War to 1745. The causes of the Civil War are investigated in some depth culminating in the question of:

"Why did parliament execute the king in 1649?" An interesting parallel is provided with a study of the French Revolution and pupils are encouraged to compare and contrast the consequences of such significant events which undoubtedly shaped the political future of Britain and France.

We finish S2 by studying the creation of the United Kingdom and how its Jacobite opponents – like Bonnie Prince Charlie – were defeated.

In their investigations pupils will experience a variety of teaching methods. Learning to analyse and evaluate evidence will increase their ability to process information, skills which form a part of many types of employment. In addition, class discussion, small group work, formal debates and historical role-play will encourage pupils to develop the confidence required to speak in public and present their own arguments, as well as learning to listen to the views of others and balance these against their own; skills which will be of great value throughout their school career and in later life.

Fieldwork visits to historical sites form an important part of the course. In S1 pupils study Norman defence systems at Warwick Castle and question whether the Battle of Bosworth was really fought where the historians say it was. At the end of S2 a visit to Quarry Bank Mill helps to prepare them for studying the Industrial Revolution in S3.

In both S1 and S2 there is a coursework element based on personal research which constitutes 20% of the Summer exam. The use of IT in History is explored through a simulation programme on "The French Revolution" where pupils are encouraged to solve the problems of 18th century France more effectively than Louis XVI. To conclude, our overall aim is that History should "come alive" in the classroom so that pupils can enjoy gaining a sense of the past and its relevance for them today.

## MATHEMATICS

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For the first half term in S1, there will be some mixed ability teaching. There will then be an assessment before the October half term break. Thereafter pupils will be placed into one of four ability sets based on their performance in the assessment, baseline tests and teacher judgement. All pupils follow the same core material in S1, the main resource being Essential Mathematics book 7H.

Our aim is to make mathematics challenging and exciting for all our pupils. There are many opportunities for group/pair work and the resources are colourful and well presented. Our schemes of work are arranged to avoid repetition. However, we aim to bring everyone up to the same standard in S1 so there will inevitably be a few topics which some pupils may have met in their previous schools.

By assessing all the pupils each half term we are able to accurately monitor their progress against the rest of the year group. This allows movement between sets where necessary.

Developing pupils' ability at mental and written arithmetic is something we consider to be very important, so much of the work covered in S1 will not require the use of a calculator. Sometimes, however it is desirable to speed up repetitive calculations and to this end we buy in a supply of calculators which are then sold on to the pupils.

The work covered in S1 is formally assessed at the end of the year by two examinations. The result of these, together with half termly test results and teacher judgement, determines into which sets the pupils are placed in S2.

In S2 we use the Essential Mathematics series of text books. Pupils in sets 1 & 2 follow book 8H and those in sets 3 & 4 follow book 8C. The core is common to both although there are more extension topics in book 8H to stretch the more able pupils. Progress is again monitored every half term by way of common tests.

It is still very much our aim to give pupils an enjoyable experience of mathematics by using a variety of teaching methods and a combination of investigative and more traditional learning strategies for them. To this end we subscribe to the web based resource HegartyMaths which allows the pupils to access high quality videos and attempt quizzes which then give instant feedback.

In addition we run a twice weekly lunchtime clinic where pupils are encouraged to come and clarify any areas of misunderstanding they have.

## MODERN LANGUAGES

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Speaking another language as fluently as possible and communicating with people in other countries is an increasingly important skill. This could be for work or holidays and travel. French, German and Spanish are all major European languages and are widely spoken all over the world. All pupils will take French in S1 and also in S2 where they will additionally study half a year each of German and Spanish. Pupils may choose to study one or two languages to GCSE. If they choose to study two languages, one must be French.

### FRENCH

Pupils will learn how to understand, speak and write in French. This will mean having conversations with each other, acting out role plays, playing language games, listening to people speaking, watching short video clips and listening and responding to poems and songs as well as short translation and written tasks.

Topics include: talking about themselves and their families, their hobbies and pets, their school and daily routine, the weather and learning to tell the time. They will also learn about life in France and other French-speaking countries. In addition, they will learn some grammar, so that they can make sense of the language and start to speak spontaneously. That's when it gets really useful and fun!

In S1 and S2 pupils are taught in sets with provision for complete beginners in French. By organising them like this it is hoped that each pupil will be able to work at the pace which suits them best and will be encouraged to produce their personal best.

### GERMAN and SPANISH

All pupils will be introduced to German and Spanish in the second form and be taught for half a year in forms. Pupils will gain a good initial understanding of the two languages to form the basis upon which they can build their knowledge for the purposes of GCSE.

The four skills of listening, writing, reading and speaking are developed in a number of topic areas. By the end of these initial courses, pupils should be able to talk and write about simple personal topics as well as cope with transactional language, such as in shopping. All activities will provide a useful basis for understanding. Information technology forms part of the courses.

At the same time as being presented with new language in lively and fun contexts, pupils will gain valuable insights into the German and Spanish speaking worlds.

### EXTRA-CURRICULAR

The department offers taster visits to either France, Germany or Spain to give the pupils a chance to try out one (or even two) of their languages in the country.



## MUSIC

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The Lower School course focuses primarily on creative practical keyboard skills and pupils will also learn how to use a sophisticated computer programme, Cubase, to record their work. We aim to enable all pupils to play a keyboard competently and confidently within two years, as well as developing the ability to be confident with their voices whilst singing in class.

Keyboard playing and composition go hand in hand. In S1 pupils will learn how chords and melody link together, and how to use them within a structure. In S2, a wide variety of different musical styles will be covered, with a focus on the compositional techniques that go with these styles.

Topics covered include Ternary Form (a simple musical structure), Blues Music, Indian Raga, Ragtime and Reggae. As an aid to composition, we also listen to a range of pieces of music which fit into these categories.

There are many extra-curricular activities aimed primarily at Lower School, including Ensemble 123, Lower School Choir and Music Technology Club. Lower School pupils are encouraged to participate fully in joint drama and music productions.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION & GAMES

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Physical Education and Games in the Lower School provides a firm grounding in all major concepts of Physical Education and a natural course of progression in later years. We seek to establish the necessary skills, allied with self-expression and enthusiasm, irrespective of ability, to enhance future development.

Pupils will be given the opportunity to participate in a variety of team games including Rugby, Football, Cricket, Hockey and Basketball. There is also a full programme of Badminton, Table Tennis, Swimming and Tennis available throughout the first and second years. All pupils study Health Related Exercise (HRE) in PE lessons, in which they are introduced to the principles of training, the components of fitness, the value of exercise and how to incorporate this in their everyday lives. The pupils will also be taught Volleyball and Softball as part of the curriculum.

Physical Education is taught in forms in Years 1 and 2, whereas Games is taught appropriate to the pupils' level of development in Rugby, Football and Cricket. Flexibility therefore exists within the groups to allow for development between different sports. All pupils are encouraged to take a full and active part in the various Inter-House competitions that take place throughout the year. House teams are presently selected for Rugby, Basketball, Football, Badminton, Cricket, Table Tennis, Hockey and Cross-Country. Pupils will also get the chance to represent their house in the school's annual Swimming Gala and Sports Day.

In addition to timetabled lessons, there is a comprehensive programme of extra-curricular activities, which are viewed as an important extension of the department's curricular programme. School teams compete against both independent and state schools in regular fixtures and competitions on both Saturday mornings and midweek at Rugby, Rugby 7s, Football, Cricket, Cross-Country, Basketball and Hockey. Teams are also entered into local and national competitions in Badminton, Golf, Tennis and Athletics.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The aim of RE in S1 and S2 is to introduce pupils to some fundamental questions about God and about morality and to help pupils formulate their own responses to these questions. In this, concepts of Christian theology will be the main focus, but pupils will also study both Judaism (S1) and Islam (S2). A significant objective in RE will be the personal development of pupils. It's hoped that pupils will **learn from** the study of religion by exploring and developing their own belief commitments and values.

### Content and Skills

S1: [Term 1](#)

#### AN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

This introduction enables pupils to understand the power of religious faith and thus its importance for individuals. They explore and evaluate a biblical view of the human condition.

[Term 2](#)

#### AN INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS ETHICS

This section helps pupils understand how religion is linked to morality. We explore the basis of Christian ethics: if God is Love and loves all people unconditionally, so Christians, who try to be 'like God' morally, should be loving.

[Term 3](#)

#### JUDAISM

Pupils are introduced to the key concepts which form the characteristics of Jewish identity.

S2: [Term 1](#)

#### FIGHTING PREJUDICE: A KEY THEME IN CHRISTIAN MORALITY

This course aims to show pupils the importance of moral parameters in society by looking at the suffering caused by prejudice. It also explores the theological rationale Christians would use to support a fight against different types of prejudice.

[Term 2](#)

#### JESUS AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF

This section helps pupils understand the significance of Jesus for Christian theology. Pupils are asked to assess Christian beliefs about Jesus from their own belief perspective.

[Term 3](#)

#### ISLAM – FIVE PILLARS OF BELIEF AND ACTION

The aim here is to understand the main concepts of Muslim identity and begin to understand an Islamic world-view. We also aim to question the negative perceptions of Islam in the Western world.

### Assessment

Pupils will be assessed on their responses to a variety of creative tasks set for homework. Their contribution to class discussion will also be important. The creative skill of empathising with others will often be a key focus of this. In June, pupils will sit a one hour exam designed to test their understanding of the key content covered during the year.

## SCIENCE

In the Lower School, the science course consists of six lessons delivered across the week in both S1 and S2, so the pupils follow a two-year KS3. These usually take the form of two double lessons to facilitate practical work and two single lessons for consolidation. Each group can be taught by one member of staff for all the lessons or sometimes the group may be shared and taught by two members of science staff. The S1 science course is delivered to mixed ability groups. At the end of the S1 year, pupils will be redirected into ability groupings based on their S1 assessment data and are therefore taught in ability groups in S2.

We use the Oxford Sciences Activate scheme across S1 and S2 which delivers a mix of biology, chemistry and physics units across both years. The pupils are provided with a textbook alongside access to a digital suite of resources. These are used on Chromebooks within the classroom but also used for homework tasks and assessment. The course provides inquisitive and engaging science which is fully differentiated allowing all pupils to progress through the KS3 course. In addition, there is much emphasis on developing literacy, mathematical and working scientifically skills. The course fully supports the pupils in the development of these key skills as they prepare for the transition to KS4 science.

The course is heavily focused on investigative skill and process with the clear aim to improve the ability of the pupils to think about problems in a scientific way. Many of the lessons are practically based, during which the pupils will be taught the basic skills to enable them to carry out scientific investigations and studies with accuracy, precision and safety. The processes involved in the planning of practical work, the acquisition and presentation of data obtained, and its subsequent analysis and interpretation also feature highly throughout the entire course.

Whilst emphasis is placed upon practical work, the academic component is also rigorous. The topics taught over the two years cover a wide range of subject areas and include:

#### S1

- Cells
- Structure and function of body systems
- Reproduction
- Particles
- Elements, Atoms and Compounds
- Reactions
- Acids and Alkalis
- Forces
- Sound
- Light
- Space

#### S2

- Health and Lifestyle
- Ecosystems
- Adaptations and Inheritance
- Periodic Table
- Separation Techniques
- Metals and Acids
- Earth
- Electricity and Magnetism
- Energy
- Motion and Pressure

The Oxford digital resource does allow for some basic assessment and information gathering in the form of online tests which teachers may use to assess progress. In addition, the pupils will also sit three longer written style assessments at the end of the Christmas, Easter and Summer terms.



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TOGETHER**

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