

The English Curriculum

Studying English develops the skills students need to be equipped for life beyond the school gates. Through exploring a range of texts, students will learn to analyse and evaluate ideas and become more critical thinkers and communicators. They will develop skills in writing in a range of forms and for different purposes and audiences, and learn to engage their readers using a variety of different methods. They will learn to communicate ideas effectively, and to write with clarity and purpose, adapting their tone and style as necessary. Through exposure to ground-breaking speeches which changed the course of human history, autobiographical writing and modern opinion pieces, students will have access to many different techniques to emulate in their own speech and writing. They will explore the nuances of language and how it is used, having the confidence to ask probing and challenging questions about what they read, and as such, be able to make up their own minds.

In the English classroom a collaborative atmosphere of enquiry is fostered, and in discussion-based work students are encouraged to be both open-minded and reflective listeners who can focus and reflect on a diverse range of opinions, whilst also forming and then articulating their own views clearly. Students will develop their abilities in deconstructing language and arguments, questioning and challenging ideas, and structuring and organising their thoughts so that they become more confident critical thinkers – something which is necessary in any field they choose to pursue. Exploring issues surrounding language encourages our young people to become more critical readers and independent thinkers, which is so important in a world where much communication is instant and unfiltered. Through English lessons, our young people are equipped with the tools to interrogate what they read and hear, and so be able to make up their own minds about any issue.

Mixed ability teaching gives our students equal access and entitlement to a rich literary diet, meaning that no student is excluded from, or restricted in their learning experience based on prior attainment; there is no ceiling on student potential. We believe that students should not be limited by their current cultural capital, but they should be exposed to a variety of texts from the literary canon, whilst being able to question and critique it. We are excited to teach a range of texts from Shakespeare and Romantic poetry, to Dickens and Conan Doyle, and we aim to achieve this in a way which is both engaging and accessible for students. We want to empower students with challenging content, whilst striving to make their learning relevant to their own experiences.

Great literature enriches lives, and through exposure to a wide range of texts, students develop their abilities as critical readers who understand the importance of language use and the relationship between language and power. Our intention is that reading a rich diet of literary texts enables students to understand their own experiences and views by contextualising them within the universal and shared experience of humanity. Learning about the representation of different times, cultures, perspectives and places in literature encourages students to be more observant, tolerant and reflective; we aim to enable students to see themselves and their own experiences reflected in what they read, whilst also being introduced to ideas and concepts they might not otherwise experience.

We are an experienced team of 20 teachers – our range of expertise and subject specialism as a team makes for effective and enthusiastic teaching based on teaching choices which are ambitious, authentic, and relevant. The expertise of the team means that the learning is made accessible and relevant to all through a wide range of differentiation strategies. The choices we make help to fulfil the individual needs of our classes; teachers regularly switch texts based on the needs, interests, and make up of their classes that year, and as such our practice remains fresh, and something we have ownership of; we continually re-evaluate the effectiveness of the choices we make. This approach gives us the flexibility to respond to emerging issues in society and adapt lessons accordingly, based on the needs of our students at the time, whilst still providing equal access to a broad and challenging curriculum.

Great literature is intrinsically valuable and there is nothing more engaging than immersing oneself in a great story. Our students explore a stimulating range of different texts which enable them to gain essential and compelling insights into different times, cultures, and places, whilst also exploring that which unites us, and what it is to be human.

KS3 English

Our ambition at KS3 is to make English enjoyable and tangible, while simultaneously preparing pupils for their GCSE studies. We seek to achieve this through enabling teachers to select texts that resonate most with their classes. All Year 9 pupils will study poetry, a Shakespeare play, and a novel. In addition, we focus on oracy, with a module dedicated to analysing rhetoric and culminating in pupils writing and delivering a speech of their own. To further develop oracy and critical thinking, all pupils have a fortnightly 'Let's Think in English' (LTE) lesson which covers a wide range of texts, including 19th century fiction, seminal world literature, non-fiction, and poetry. LTE helps to enhance students' skills of inference, deduction, and analysis.

KS4 English

At Key Stage Four, students are placed into mixed ability groups to begin the study of their GCSE courses in English Language and English Literature. There is significant crossover between the two subjects and it is through the study of Literature that students encounter a range of challenging literary texts which help to develop their language skills, vocabulary and understanding of important social issues, thus enabling them to access the demands of the skills-based Language exams, where they face challenging unseen reading materials from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

We are proud to teach a wide range of different texts which draw on our different enthusiasms, and which allow academic entitlement to a rich literary diet, including the work of Dickens, Conan Doyle, Shelley, Orwell, Priestley, and Shakespeare. Alongside canonical texts, where possible, we aim to include a wider range of literature, including using the unseen element of the literature course to include a more diverse range of writers. Ultimately, we aim to foster a curiosity, and a love of reading of both fiction and non-fiction which will stay with our young people throughout their lives.

Studying English develops students' analytical and critical thinking skills, extends their vocabulary and enables them to write detailed essays where they can support their viewpoints with a range of carefully considered evidence. The subject also develops creativity, imagination and students' ability to communicate for a range of different purposes and audiences. In the Speaking and Listening component, which culminates in giving a presentation on a topic of the student's choosing, they work to become better communicators who can present information to an audience with confidence and clarity. Success in English provides students with a wide range of skills which are necessary and attractive for almost any career path.

Sixth Form

In the 6th form we offer 6 courses: A Levels in English Literature, English Language, Media Studies, History of Art, Classics and GCSE English Language, for any student who has not yet attained this qualification at Level 4.

English Literature

A Level English Literature is concerned with the detailed analysis of literary texts, and students will explore a range of texts, including Shakespeare, some poetry and a drama text written before 1900. The A Level builds on the skills taught at GCSE and incorporates a wider range of literature, including the in-depth study of a contextual area, which is currently different for each teaching group. Teaching critical material enables students to become confident at integrating critical theory into their own responses to literary texts. We are excited to teach a wide range of texts including Milton, Webster, Shakespeare, and Austen, as well as more modern literature, such as Adichie, Butler, Butterworth, Churchill, Harrison and Heaney. Alongside the consideration of literary texts as great works in their own right, students will explore the contextual factors which informed them, as well as understanding of their critical reception over time. In exploring contextual factors, students will learn about contemporary society, history, religion, philosophy, politics, as well as literary and biographical context. As such, they will gain a greater understanding of what literature teaches us about the world and ourselves.

The non-examined assessment unit is an exciting opportunity which encourages and develops student autonomy. Each student creates their own essay question and thesis, and choice of text selection if appropriate, and this is excellent preparation for the skills needed in Higher Education. An extensive range of different coursework texts has been studied in recent years, and this section of the course allows for greater variety of wider reading and study.

Whilst a central concept unites the poetry, play and novel studied for the coursework, this is an exciting opportunity to extend the repertoire of literature which is studied.

In year 12, the curriculum is designed to introduce the more accessible elements of the A Level course to provide an appropriate bridge from GCSE study. Students begin year 12 with a focus on the short coursework essay and the Comparative and Contextual paper. They will study a modern text and then write an essay of 1000 words on their own question. Tackling this shorter coursework essay at the beginning of the first year hones the students' writing skills, preparing them for the more challenging comparative coursework to be undertaken in year 13. In year 12, the teaching of the Comparative and Contextual paper is shared between the two teachers: one teacher focuses on the unseen close reading task, involving a consideration of a wide range of extracts and texts in that genre, whilst the other teacher teaches the two novels for the comparative essay which come from the chosen synoptic area. In this way there is a cross over between the two teachers, and students gain the benefit of two different sets of expertise in their study of the Comparative and Contextual area. The work for this unit is taught in year 12 as it is more modern and the unseen element is rather more accessible, providing a more natural link with GCSE study. Different teaching groups currently focus on one of the following areas for the Comparative and Contextual paper: American Literature, Dystopian Literature, Gothic Literature, and Women in Literature and students sit a mock exam on this paper in May of year 12. Towards the end of year 12, students begin work on the set texts for their second, and more challenging coursework essay. Much of this work is set up before the summer holidays so that students can capitalise on their free time for much of the independent nature of the work.

In year 13, students complete their 2000 word coursework essay where they compare two texts on a similar theme. As with the short coursework completed in year 12, they create and construct their own essay question, and some students will select one of their texts for comparison, allowing for greater autonomy and an experience more in keeping with the demands of Higher Education. For this comparative essay, students consider a wide range of critical reading, much of which will be independently chosen, and this allows for greater ownership of their work. Alongside this coursework, students begin the study of their Shakespeare play and their poetry and drama texts which were written before 1900, and this paper is shared between the two teachers. The curriculum has been designed to delay these more challenging texts until year 13, so that students are better equipped to deal with them. There are mock exams in December of year 13 (another mock on the Comparative and Contextual paper) and a second mock in March on the poetry and Drama pre-1900 paper. Whilst one unit is being studied, teachers regularly set work and essays on units which have been previously taught to allow for continued development and progression.

Throughout the A Level, students have access to a wide range of literature and literary criticism which we hope will enable them to be excited about the subject and continuing a love of reading.

English Language

English Language A Level provides students with essential skills for decoding the written and spoken world. Building on the skills of comprehension and language analysis taught at GCSE, students learn about the key constituents of language and acquire the terminology of grammar which is necessary to be able to deconstruct writing and speech effectively. Analysing the speech and writing of others and understanding how meanings are constructed also teaches students how to write more precisely and accurately to suit a range of genres, which impacts positively on the study of their other subjects and equips our students to understand the nuances of communication ready for academia and professional applications. This knowledge of genres forms the basis of the first piece of coursework, which is a transformative task, allowing students to choose a style of writing to emulate and adapt to form a piece about a different topic. This is accompanied by a commentary which accounts for the rationale behind the students' decisions. In preparation for examined content, students engage with a range of concepts from the history of the English language, how it has changed and its global appeal and status, how power is exerted by institutions and individuals and how representations of social groups are constructed and maintained. The affordances of new technologies and medias and their impact upon the pace of language change is a new and popular area of study. Students will learn how to sample and research language concepts, preparing them for their coursework investigation and subsequent report of 2,000 words. The department and our resources centre are exceptionally well-stocked with a range of research material, used both in lessons and as directed wider reading.

Enrichment opportunities will shortly once again include visits to the British Library, the English Language Conference hosted in London by the English and Media Centre and a day course run by the University of the West of England. Support sessions for students who require extra help run after-school once per week, plus scheduled revision sessions are available for students to access either in person or via video recordings in half terms prior to internal and external examinations.

Media Studies

Media Studies is concerned with analysing how texts are constructed to achieve a variety of aims. The students are bombarded with media every minute of their lives and it is vital that they are able to critically review the material they come across, what it says about their lives and who is constructing the text itself. We look at a wide variety of texts from newspapers to marketing campaigns and deconstruct what the key elements of each specific text are. We explore how different groups are represented and how these images have been constructed and why. The media is changing rapidly and has numerous different forces pressurising it for their own agendas so it is essential the students can discuss current ideas about the media like the future of the BBC or how COVID, or recent events in Europe have been represented in the press. The students also develop key skills in written communication learning a new range of metalanguage which enables them to explore complex theoretical frameworks and evaluate their usefulness in analysing a broad range of contemporary texts and assessing the historical developments of medias and genres.

A Level Classical Civilisation

Intent

Classical Civilisation is the study of the culture, history and society of ancient Greece and Rome. It is one of the most varied and interdisciplinary of all subjects, involving the study of literature, history, politics, philosophy, art and religion. Our central aim is for students to develop a deep and wide-ranging knowledge of the ancient world; by the end of the course they will have acquired an understanding of the entire sweep of ancient history, from archaic Greece in the time of Homer to the Roman Empire under Nero. The set texts and topics for the OCR A Level provide a specific focus for our study, but it is our belief that students should appreciate and understand the connections and links between the source material and specified topics so that they are able to construct their own narrative of the ancient world.

Our intent is therefore not only to teach the appropriate examination specification but also to:

- Provide students with the opportunity to study a wide range of topics and sources which will inspire and motivate them to deepen their engagement with the Classical world
- To encourage students to respond critically and engage with a wealth of sources and ideas, thus equipping them with advanced analytical skills
- To engender and foster a love of and genuine interest in the Classical world, regardless of prior knowledge and/or study
- To encourage students to develop an awareness and appreciation of the links between modern society and that of the Classical world.

Implementation

We follow the OCR Classical Civilisation course; currently the units studied are: The World of the Hero, Greek Theatre and Love and Relationships.

We begin the course with a unit that we have devised: 'Classical World: The Necessary Knowledge'. This has been designed to ascertain levels of prior understanding and then to equip students with the relevant prior knowledge needed to access the A Level OCR specification. As part of this, we look at a diverse range of texts and topics, including but not limited to: Athens, democracy, Herodotus, Lysias, stoicism, Persia and the Augustan poets. It is our belief that students need cultural capital to be successful in the subject, hence our decision to begin with this broad focus on relevant contextual knowledge.

The teaching of the three exam units is shared between the two A Level teachers, in order to encourage students to appreciate the links and connections between texts, topics and contexts. For example, one teacher might study 'Frogs' by Aristophanes as part of the Greek Theatre unit, while another teaches Euripides' 'Bacchae' and Sophocles' 'Oedipus the King', but both teachers will make synoptic links that enable students to understand the Athenian institution of theatre as a whole.

Our curriculum is designed in a way that allows time for teachers to return to the three examined units once they have been taught initially. In practice, this would typically involve a piece of critical reading or wider reading being used as a means to go back and recap the content of a text in the period before a key assessment or mock exam. This enables us to work on long term memory and retrieval of knowledge, while ensuring that our students are continually developing and evolving their cognitive understanding.

We supplement our curriculum with high quality super-curricular experiences and opportunities. In the past, this has involved guest lectures from outstanding academics, such as Edith Hall, or trips to sites of cultural interest, such as the British Museum. We also run a Greek Club for those students who wish to learn the ancient language in order to broaden their study of the ancient world.