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# ABINGDON

LOWER SCHOOL  
CURRICULUM  
2022

## Introduction

The Lower School curriculum aims to provide a solid foundation for further study in the Middle and Upper School. Pupils study Latin and two modern foreign languages in the Lower School, and then have the opportunity to take up Ancient Greek and/or another modern language in the third form. We are careful not to assume too much about levels of attainment, as opposed to potential, when pupils enter the school.

Further information about the Middle School and Sixth Form curricula may be obtained by downloading documents on our website: [www.abingdon.org.uk/curriculum](http://www.abingdon.org.uk/curriculum)

### Period allocations (50 period fortnight)

	<i>Tutor</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Maths</i>	<i>Science &amp; Engineering</i>	<i>Mod Lang</i>	<i>Games /PE</i>	<i>Latin</i>	<i>History</i>	<i>Geog</i>	<i>RS</i>	<i>Music &amp; Drama</i>	<i>Art &amp; DT</i>	<i>Reading &amp; Research</i>
1st year	3	5	5	7	5	4	5	2	3	2	4	4	1
2nd year	3	5	5	7	5	4	4	3	2	3	4	4	1

All pupils have two timetabled tutor periods and one period of “Be More Griffen” in addition to seeing their tutor or housemaster at morning registration daily.

The Be More Griffen course is designed to encourage pupils to be:

- Growth-focussed: Believing in themselves and reflecting carefully on how to improve
- Responsible: Thinking about their own actions, putting their values into practice, and being a good team player
- Independent: Being able to set their own goals and coach themselves effectively
- Fearless: Prepared to take on new challenges and push themselves out of their comfort zone
- Flexible: Ready to adapt to new situations and show resilience when things don't go as planned
- Empathetic: Able to listen to and understand the ideas and views of other people
- Nurturing: Supportive of others, both in school and in the wider community

Lower School pupils have a Be More Griffen lesson with their tutors once a fortnight to discuss these ideas and hear from several inspiring outside speakers over the course of each year.

For further information about the curriculum contact the appropriate head of department listed in the sections below or contact me directly.

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## **Art and Design**

**Head of department: Mr P Williamson**

Boys are taught one lesson a week of art and design in the Lower School. This continues into the Middle School in the third year, after which Art & Design may be chosen as a GCSE option and later on for AS/A level.

We aim to introduce boys to the many different ways of generating and developing ideas, from looking at artists, drawing from observation to using their imagination as a starting point. Building confidence and enjoyment in the subject is vital and we work hard to deliver projects that provide them with scope to develop as artists.

A wide range of materials and techniques are taught, including drawing, painting, computer graphics, printmaking, ceramics, card, wire and plaster sculpture and collage. Looking at art from different cultures and times is also an important aspect of our curriculum and the boys will be challenged into thinking about why artists work in the way they do, taking into consideration the historical context. Sketchbooks and folders are provided and used for classwork and iPads are used in a variety of ways to extend, support and generate art.

Extra art is encouraged and the department offers clubs specifically targeted towards the Lower School such as a Ceramics club as well as general art clubs. Boys' work is regularly entered into competitions and work is exhibited around the school and in the Lower School house room.

## **Drama**

**Head of department: Mr B J L Phillips**

Drama is taught throughout the school at Abingdon, and is one of the subjects that naturally extends into the School's programme of extra-curricular (or "Other Half") activities. Boys can study the subject at all levels and gain academic qualifications in it, as well as auditioning for large- and small-scale productions that have nothing to do with the classroom. In 1st and 2nd year, every pupil receives one period of drama tuition per week, but he can also apply to join the Lower School Drama Club, which rehearses on Monday and / or Wednesday afternoons, and stages one extra-curricular production each year.

Drama has a three-dimensional character, and in the Lower School course, pupils are made aware of all the ways in which we communicate with each other. They are introduced to specific skills, shown how to bring ideas to life as a performer, and to stretch their imaginations. In the process, they learn how to explore short texts and create simple scripts. Perhaps most importantly, they are encouraged to work well with others.

The focus in the first year is "drama", as we help students develop the key skills of exploring and acting out imagined situations without the pressures of an audience. We aim to build pupils'

confidence and enjoyment of acting, and to introduce them to the demands of group work, controlled use of movement, voice and effective interaction with others. A drama session usually begins with a physical warm-up or concentration exercise, before focusing on specific tasks, often involving improvisation or exploration of a text, and leading to a short presentation to the other members of the class. Pupils offer each other feedback before learning points are underlined by the teacher.

In the second year, practical drama skills remain at the heart of the course, but the scope of the work widens to embrace "theatre" and the customs and conventions of acting that is presented formally in front of an audience, as in Greek or Shakespearean theatre, for example. We look at a range of theatrical styles and periods, and encourage pupils to perform short extracts from plays written by others as well as continuing to provide opportunities for them to create their own.

By the end of the Lower School course, pupils will have gained a broader understanding of the demands of performance, acquired skills and knowledge that enable them to create effective presentations, adopt roles, understand ways of telling and structuring stories in drama, consider the needs of an audience and explore a variety of voice and movement techniques (for example, mime, choral delivery, variations in pace, gesture and body language).

Thereafter, students can opt to study drama in 3rd year, where the course introduces students to the ideas of theatre practitioners alongside devising and scripted work as part of an introduction to the Edexcel GCSE Drama course that occupies the 4th and 5th years.

## **Design & Technology**

**Head of department: Mr D M Hughes**

Entrants into the first year will experience Design and Technology for one period a week throughout the year. During this time the boys will come in to contact with, and gain confidence in using, a wide range of materials and manufacturing processes. They will undertake many practical projects that will develop both their understanding of the subject and, most importantly, their confidence in a workshop environment. They will also begin to experience 'the design process' investigating existing products and exploring the role and responsibilities of a commercial designer.

In the second year pupils continue to develop their skills in Design and Technology. Throughout this time they will tackle more challenging projects, which are designed to further develop their making skills, materials knowledge and understanding of the design process. They will be encouraged to research problems, produce imaginative ideas and develop exciting solutions. They are encouraged to make sensible design decisions and begin to consider the environment and sustainability throughout their projects.

The department has recently had a lower school specific workshop commissioned and all pupils are given the opportunity to make use of the facilities to further develop their interest in the subject during the 'Other Half'.

## **English**

**Head of department: Mr M Coolin**

Creativity and engaging teaching and learning is at the heart of English lessons in Lower School at Abingdon. Lessons are fun and active, placing a large emphasis on pupils unlocking, nurturing, and revelling in the development of their own creative potential.

During their time in Lower School, one English teacher teaches pupils in mixed ability classes. All pupils read a broad range of texts and genres, with novels, plays, poetry, and non-fiction studied in every class each academic year. Texts and authors taught at present range from contemporary authors to classic works by writers such as Dickens and Shakespeare.

Lower School pupils are also encouraged to read regularly and widely outside the classroom. Our aims in all of the above are that pupils will gain an initial sense of the scope and variety of English Literature, and that we will engender them with a love of reading and language that will endure beyond their time with us in the classroom.

Lower School is also a time to consolidate and improve the technical accuracy of pupils' writing at word, sentence, paragraph, and whole text levels, as all future success in English is built upon the clarity and precision of written expression.

For similar reasons, close attention is paid to developing a vocabulary of critical terms and revision of grammar, punctuation and spelling. This enables pupils to explore with some rigour how exactly it is that writers in all genres achieve particular effects in their work. By the time that they move into Middle School, all boys are prepared for the close reading skills and the conscious crafting of language that is required of them at GCSE level.

Additionally, pupils will develop their exam technique having sat assessments and end of year exams in reading and writing during both the first and second year. We aim to stretch and challenge our pupils whilst also supporting them in lessons and via the Learning Support department, where necessary.

## **Geography**

**Head of department: Mrs A Donnelly**

The course aims to provide a broad curriculum of relevant and contemporary topics, and gives a strong grounding in the understanding and application of geographical skills.

During the first year, 5 themes are explored focussing on physical geography. Each unit is studied for a half term period and themes currently include; What is geography?, digital mapping and OS map skills, Geography of the UK, investigation of two different ecosystems and coastal environments. This range of themes allow us to develop suitable geographical skills which act as a foundation for further study in later years. ArcGIS (geographical information systems) is used regularly to allow students to engage with this spatial software and develop a skill set alongside the content covered.

The second year is also split into 3 themes focussing on the idea of inequality in human geography. A more regional approach is used to examine the underlying causes of development and globalisation. The Geography of Conflict allows students to explore a range of contemporary geopolitical events and the factors behind them. Finally, exploring fast fashion gives a better sense of our impact as consumers and how the fashion industry affects people and the

environment. This culminates in an evaluation of how people have an impact on all of the areas covered in the Lower School course and examines potential solutions for a more sustainable and equitable planet.

## **History**

**Head of department: Mr N Knowland**

The History Department places emphasis on bringing history to life. We hope to encourage a real enthusiasm for, and interest in, the past and we also strive to develop skills of analysis and evaluation – vital tools for effective study in many disciplines. A lively spirit of intellectual questioning is encouraged and boys learn to develop their own opinions and make their own judgments. We root all of our enquiries in the discipline of academic history, ensuring that pupils grapple with the different interpretations of the past that historians construct.

### **First Year**

In the first year we follow this theme: How did invasion, conquest and migration shape the British state and society, c.400 to 1400? All the topics we cover are led by enquiries. These include: How dark were the Dark Ages in Europe? English, German, Scandinavian! – Who were the Anglo-Saxons and what did they believe in? Did the Vikings get an unfair reputation? Alfred the Great – the most perfect character in History? How has the Battle of Hastings been remembered in England? William didn't conquer 'Britain' – he transformed it! How far do you agree? Did 'hammering' the Scots and the Welsh work for English kings? How far did migration shape Medieval Britain, 400-1400?

### **Second Year**

The theme for this year group is Where did power lie from c.1200-1918 with rulers, religion or rebels? We follow an enquiry-led approach to our units. The enquiries we study include: 'Was king John the phoney king of England? Why was Magna Carta not forgotten? Does it matter what the Peasants' Revolt is called? Was Henry VII the miracle king? Why did Henry VIII break with Rome? Elizabeth I or Akbar – who was the greatest? Did Britain ever have a revolution? What mattered to the rulers of Medieval African kingdoms? Why do historians disagree over the reasons for the abolition of the slave trade? Were rights won or given to working class British men and women?

## **Latin**

**Head of department: Mr H Price**

All Lower School boys study Latin for both years using the new *de Romanis* course. The aim is for the boys to gain a secure grasp of the basics of the language for the start of the GCSE course. This also makes boys familiar with the way that English operates, as they begin to think about the differences and similarities between the structures of the two languages. Reading and grammar work in class is reinforced by homework, which can consist of vocabulary or grammar learning, written exercises, or preparing reading for the next lesson.

The stories in the coursebooks are extended by a wealth of background information on Roman gods, mythology and history, and it is seen as an important element of the course that the boys

develop an understanding of the world in which the language they are learning was spoken. The material in the books is taken further by projects which the boys pursue through their own independent research in the library and on the Internet. The course is supported by relevant visits for the whole year group, for example to Bath at the end of the first year. There are also opportunities for more practical activities during the course.

## **Mathematics**

**Head of department: Mrs S Coull**

The Lower School Mathematics curriculum is broadly in line with the National Curriculum, incorporating much of the extension material. Students entering Abingdon School have all reached a certain level of mathematical proficiency, but have various experiences of the subject, so the principal aim of the teaching in these years is to ensure that all students obtain the necessary foundation for success further up the school. The content of the syllabus includes arithmetic, algebra and graphs, geometry and measurement, statistics and probability.

While these years are necessarily about consolidation and strengthening of core concepts, the introduction of more general concepts in number pattern and the beginnings of algebra, sees students begin to make the transition from their mathematical thinking being grounded in number to more generalised mathematical concepts. When possible, as much opportunity for open-ended tasks is offered, to help students to develop their own mathematical thinking. This is supported by the core syllabus material which gives students the tools with which to explore mathematical ideas.

All first year classes are taught in tutor groups for the whole year. Setting does take place for the start of the second year, with one set usually moving at a faster pace than the other two. All sets will cover the same syllabus material and have similar opportunities for extension work.

All Lower School students can enter the UKMT Junior Maths Challenge, and a good number of students progress to the Olympiad rounds of this competition each year. In addition, there is an annual Team Challenge competition held in school, specifically for Lower School pupils.

To give students extra opportunities to use their mathematical thinking skills, a weekly Maths Puzzle Club is run specifically for Lower School students.

## **Modern Languages**

**Co-ordinator: Mr N Brittain**

Our aim is to give pupils an introduction to language learning and to promote their enjoyment of it. We want them to start thinking about and to look for links between the languages they are learning, their mother tongue and any other language of which they have knowledge, including Latin.

Pupils therefore spend the first half of their first year at Abingdon studying German. At the halfway point, just before February half term, the pupils take a test and after this, they all begin learning French. They are taught in mixed ability form groups, but we cater for all the different levels of experience of French – from several years to none. Pupils are taught by the same French and German specialist teacher throughout the year. At the end of the first year they then decide which

of the two languages they will choose to take forward as their main foreign language into the second and third year. In the third year they will also be able to choose a second or even third modern foreign language from German, Spanish and Mandarin (subject to numbers). Please note that French in the Third Year is only available to those pupils who have studied it in First and Second year and is not offered as a beginner's course.

The pupils have 5 periods per fortnight, and at various points throughout the year may have contact with our foreign language assistants. Early lessons aim to accustom them to hearing and using the foreign language so that lessons can be conducted for the most part in that language. They will be encouraged to develop their ability to understand the written and spoken word, as well as to speak and write. Grammatical concepts are taught, but the emphasis is on enabling the boys to use the language they are learning creatively and in a variety of contexts.

A wide variety of games and other activities, often on the interactive whiteboard, are used to reinforce their learning, and pupils also have access to a wide range of online platforms to assist them with vocabulary and grammar practice, as well as online games.

We offer a biennial trip for lower school students to Europe to enable the boys to explore both French as well as German culture and practise their language in situ. A wide range of competitions are on offer to promote pupils' enjoyment of French- and German-speaking culture beyond the classroom.

## **Music**

**Head of department: Mr M A Stinton**

The overall aim of the Music Department is to *encourage and promote a lifelong knowledge and love of music* through "hands-on" experience as performers and in guided listening of and interaction with a broad spectrum of music.

Our first priority is to establish an active involvement in music for each and every pupil through the playing of a musical instrument and the use of the voice so that they may benefit from the many music-making opportunities at the school, particularly in ensemble work.

The initial emphasis for pupils entering the First Year, then, is to encourage them to try a musical instrument with a view to taking weekly individual lessons with the school's large and experienced body of visiting music teachers. Our experience is that the majority of pupils have already started taking music lessons before joining the school.

The *First Year* pupils have two music lessons per fortnight. One is a class singing lesson to prepare them for performances as a whole year group. The first of these takes place in the large-scale Christmas Concerts at the end of the first term. The other lesson comprises the study of musical instruments, some guided listening in topics and work on notation and simple word-setting. We aim to take all the Year 7 pupils to a Schools' Matinee performance in Birmingham in January, so that their understanding of orchestral instruments can be reinforced.

In the *Second Year*, pupils have one singing lesson and one class music lesson per fortnight. The singing lesson prepares them for their year group performance in the Spring Concert at the end of the Lent Term. To link with the singing lessons, in the classroom, pupils analyse musical styles and



contextualise the cultural history of song writing across the ages; Popular Music, Musical Fusion, and Musical Theatre.

There are a large number of activities which are laid on for the benefit of Lower School pupils and they include the following ensembles: Chapel Choir, Gospel Choir, Junior Strings, Second Orchestra, Lower School Band, Composers' Club and Lower School Choir. The smaller ensembles include LS Brass, Junior Blues and Open Mic. The Lower School also competes as a "House" in the annual House Singing Competition. From time to time there are Music Theatre productions (eg. "Bugsy Malone"), which, together with our regular weekly informal concerts, provide solo playing opportunities in a relaxed atmosphere, essential experience for promoting musical progress.

One of the last concerts of the academic year comprises the *Lower School Gala Concert* in late June. This is an opportunity for pupils of the Lower School to showcase their music in solos, ensembles, an orchestra, a band and a Lower School Choir in which both First and Second Year Choirs are brought together. The event provides a fitting celebratory finale of all that the pupils have achieved, musically, over the academic year.

More advanced pupils have also played in the school's senior ensembles when they are deemed to be able to make a contribution and to benefit from that experience.

## **Religious Studies**

**Head of department: Mr T Eames-Jones**

The course aims to cover a wide range of relevant and interesting topics, so as to provide a full introduction to the study of religion and philosophy, while developing key skills in thinking.

Each year consists of three courses of roughly equal length.

The first year begins with an introduction to Philosophy, looking at the nature of argument and Descartes' cogito. Next comes a study of Jesus, where we consider the age-old question of Jesus' identity and purpose. In the third term we study Buddha and Buddhism, considering its faith and practice, focusing particularly on the Middle Way as a path to enlightenment.

The second year begins with a study of ethics, and in particular the idea that society should be governed by the rule of the greatest good for the greatest number (Utilitarianism). Next we consider Judaism and its beliefs and practices, with special consideration of the Holocaust and the role it plays in building the Jews as a people. Lastly a study of Islam is used to act as a contrasting understanding of how religion builds community, with particular focus on the Hajj and the Umma.

## **Science**

**Co-ordinator: Mr R M Fisher**

Science in the Lower School is divided into Biology, Chemistry and Physics. A wide range of topics are introduced that provide an opportunity to develop key scientific skills. Experiments designed to speed up the development of the ability to think scientifically underpin the teaching of

many of the science course topics. The science teaching takes place in fully equipped laboratories in the Yang Science Centre.

In Biology, topics such as evolution, the heart and blood circulation, respiration and breathing, and food and diet are all investigated through experiments. Students learn about cells using microscopes. Open-ended practical investigations, such as mapping the tongue for taste sensors, the dispersal of sycamore fruits, and food preservation, are a feature of the first year work.

Bunsen burners are used early in the Chemistry course and there are a good number of simple experiments from which students are able to start to build a theoretical framework to help them understand chemical reactions.

Computing is taught in the 1st Year, before joining with Physics. The aim is to introduce text based coding concepts, research developments around AI and machine learning, and think about how students can use the internet to further their learning at Abingdon.

Physics is taught separately in First Year with topics studied including space, lenses and heat. In the Second Year we deliver a combined Physics, Electronics and Computing Course named Engineering Science which focuses on Electricity and how Physical Computing and Programming can be used as a tool in science.

## **Sport and Physical Education**

**Head of department: Mr P Bignell**

In the Lower School, the students have one lesson of Sport, and one lesson of curriculum Physical Education per week.

During the Sport lessons, the focus is predominantly on Abingdon School's team sports, as a number of students have not been exposed to these skills in their previous schools. They enjoy a rotation of activities on a termly basis, which includes an introduction and development of their rugby, hockey, cricket, tennis, athletics, and football skills.

Within Physical Education, at the beginning of the First Year, students participate in a set of fitness tests, which are entered into a database. These tests are then repeated at the end of the First and Second Year to develop a profile of each individual's development throughout the Lower School. During their time in the Lower School, they will focus mainly on the core areas of gymnastics, swimming, athletics and foundational movement skills. This scheme of work enables them to develop their physical literacy, fundamental movement skills and biomechanical awareness, whilst also acquiring the ability to observe and analyse others; additionally they will develop the confidence to observe performance of others and provide constructive feedback.

The emphasis is on individual effort and attainment, whilst promoting sporting excellence. The Department aims to maintain and/or stimulate their interest and enjoyment in Sport and Physical Education; thereby promoting and stimulating a life-long interest in physical activity and healthy lifestyle. We look to create an environment that enables students to develop self-esteem, whilst promoting a range of desirable personal qualities including politeness, perseverance, initiative and independence. Through the activities undertaken we seek to enable pupils to work independently, in small groups, and as part of a team, promoting the development of core skills such as communication, leadership and co-operation through both Sport and Physical Education.