



ST ALBANS  
SCHOOL

# Lower School Curriculum

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## PREFACE

St Albans School is an academically selective school and all pupils in the Lower School have shown their potential in successfully meeting our requirements in the entrance examination.

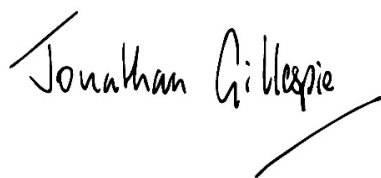
Nevertheless, our pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds – educational, cultural and social – and will have had very diverse experiences of school before coming here.

The curriculum in the Lower School, therefore, whilst it shares many of its aims with the curriculum throughout the rest of the School, is designed to take into account the inevitable process of adjustment. Our Learning to Learn (LTL) programme enables pupils to establish a framework of study which facilitates effective and efficient learning strategies. Pupils need to develop self-discipline and independent thinking skills in a more formal environment than many of them have previously encountered; they will also need to develop an awareness and understanding of the aims and ethos of the School so that they can thrive in its environment.

Some pupils will meet homework for the first time, whilst others will already be used to anything up to two hours per night. Tutors will provide help and support for pupils in developing skills of organisation and prioritisation to balance their work with other commitments whilst supporting their wellbeing.

The long-term academic objective of the curriculum in the Lower School is to ensure that pupils who join us at age eleven become effective learners, have reached the same academic level at the age of thirteen as those pupils who join us through Common Entrance from academic preparatory schools, and that *all* our pupils are well prepared to begin their career in the Middle School which will take them on to GCSE.

In the pages which follow, you will find a detailed explanation of the curriculum in the first two years.



*Jonathan Gillespie*  
Headmaster



# INTRODUCTION

St Albans School, as an independent school, can offer a curriculum broadly based on the National Curriculum while giving pupils the opportunity to study additional subjects.

This booklet describes the current provision for the Lower School.

Aims of the Lower School Curriculum:

- To develop imaginative, enquiring, and informed minds.
- To promote personal excellence in the pursuit of a wide range of sporting, recreational and cultural activities.
- To develop metacognitive skills through our Learning to Learn (LTL) programme.
- To provide opportunities for self-expression and aesthetic appreciation.
- To develop moral and spiritual values and a respect for other cultures
- To provide a balance between the various areas of learning.
- To connect learning through the application of knowledge, strategies, skills and values.
- To provide a rich educational environment which encourages a range of teaching and learning styles.
- To provide carefully defined schemes of work which allow for differentiated teaching to cater for the varied needs of the pupils.
- To be sufficiently broad to enable pupils to develop their talents and interests in a variety of fields.
- To prepare pupils for academic achievements which will enable them to pursue their ambitions in life.

In common with the curriculum in all sections of the School:

- To promote the pupils' intellectual, moral, physical, social and spiritual development and prepare them for future opportunities, responsibilities and experiences.

## SCHEDULE OF PERIODS

Subject	First Form	Second Form
Art	1	1
Computing	1	1
Design Technology	1	1
Drama	1	1
English	3	4
French	2	2†
Geography	2	2
German	1*	2†
History	2	2
Latin	2	2†
Mandarin Chinese	1*	2†
Mathematics	3	3
Music	1	1
PE & Games	3	3
Religion, Philosophy and Ethics	2	1
Science	4	3
Spanish	1*	2†
Learning to Learn	1	1
Total	30	30

\* A carousel arrangement: pupils have taster courses in German, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish over the year during one period.

† Pupils choose to take three of French, German, Latin, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish.

## ART

Art and Design have a crucial role within any curriculum. Pupils today learn as much through visual images as they do through words. The understanding of visual information is a necessity for any pupil in today's ever-changing world. Pupils need to learn that pictures, artefacts, and symbols can have several meanings and that different interpretations of them are possible in a modern civilised and multicultural world. This is best achieved by making, investigating, and understanding Art.

In the Lower School, pupils are introduced to the formal elements of line, colour, value, space, texture, shape, and form. They also begin to investigate the main areas of artistic activity: painting, drawing, printmaking, graphic design, and three-dimensional studies.

Drawing is seen as crucially important to all areas of study. Pupils are given every encouragement to improve their ability and their work is displayed regularly around the School. By studying works of art (the School has a considerable collection of original art), pupils are introduced to art appreciation.

## COMPUTING

The First Form curriculum starts with digital literacy skills to allow pupils to develop their competence and confidence as users of technology. This includes word processing, presentation skills, data modelling, touch typing and e-safety. Thereafter, pupils study Computer Science topics such as programming, flowcharting, artificial intelligence and website development. For those pupils who wish to further develop their knowledge, Computer Science is an option at IGCSE and A Level.

Computer Science club offers the opportunity to explore aspects of the subject that pupils will not meet in lessons. Topics vary by term and year group but include animation and Raspberry Pi projects.

## DRAMA

In the Lower School, Drama is taught in half sets. All lessons are taught in the excellently equipped New Place which has its own studio theatre and separate large teaching rooms. These sessions are mainly practical, and we aim to create an informal, relaxed environment in which all pupils feel able to work creatively. The course is flexible, and the main objectives are to increase the self-confidence, communication and presentation skills of the individual.

The students will also learn about dramatic concepts such as character, plot, setting, language and movement. This is achieved through introducing a variety of drama styles and techniques and encouraging the students to take responsibility for the structuring of their own Drama. Time is built into lessons to allow the students to reflect and respond constructively to their own work and that of others. Students' progress in creating, responding and performing is closely monitored and reported on in accordance with School policy. Above all, we aim to make the sessions and the learning enjoyable.

For those pupils who wish to develop theatre skills further, there is a thriving Lower School Drama Club which meets on Thursday after school and produces three public productions, one per term. This enables younger pupils to have the experience of performing on stage with full set, costume, sound and lighting.

The School has invested in excellent drama facilities: New Place has provided students with dedicated and supervised rehearsal spaces outside of lessons. It is a flexible performance space seating up to 70 people. The 'Amphitheatre' is used in the summer for outdoor performances.

## DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY

Design and Technology education at St Albans School is an important part of every pupil's curriculum. The aim is to provide students with the ability to learn from the past, to analyse and understand the present and to make things happen in the future. It is fundamentally concerned with being able to interact and make a positive contribution to the rapidly changing technological world in which we all live.

The two National Curriculum attainment targets, Designing and Making, form an integral part of the work undertaken by the students. The course aims to develop knowledge and understanding of materials, processes and techniques and employs a range of problem-solving techniques, with the combination of knowledge from other subject areas such as Science and Maths, to develop students' design and practical skills. It encourages their curiosity about, and enjoyment of, applying these other areas of the curriculum to solving problems and producing good quality, realistic prototypes. It is only once the product has been fully realised that the process can be completed with detailed testing and evaluation work to suggest possible modifications and better manufacturing systems.

During the first two years the students will gain experience in the use of a wide range of materials (primarily wood, metal and plastic), electronic systems and communication techniques. We encourage students to approach their work in a similar manner to that employed in business and industry. This includes the use of Computer Aided Designing and Computer Aided Manufacturing along with the investigation of industrial production techniques.



## ENGLISH

'How can I know what I think until I see what I say?' asked the novelist E.M. Forster, and the English Department at St Albans School takes its cue from the assumption behind that question. While emphasising accuracy at all levels – accuracy in spelling, grammar, observation, argument, and the expression of personal feeling – the English syllabus is aimed at encouraging the kind of discovery that comes through being able to write and speak with confidence and enthusiasm. In line with the National Curriculum, attention is also given to developing skills in speaking and listening (which involves pupils listening to each other with tolerant attention as well as holding the floor) and the habit of reading for pleasure. A wide range of fiction and poetry is introduced in the first year in conjunction with a well-stocked Junior Library and timetabled reading periods in the First Form. We continue to foster the reading habit throughout the School for all age groups. Course books and shared resources will develop students' skills in writing for different purposes – to imagine, explain, review and persuade – and there will be opportunities to revise and improve both handwritten and ICT-based work.

The Department is well-stocked with a variety of resources, organises theatre trips (notably a visit to the Globe Theatre in the Summer Term), invites writers to visit the School and talk about their work, runs its own annual Creative Writing competition and generally seeks to involve itself as much as possible in the cultural life of the School. The central position of the informatively decorated English Centre, adjoining the Abbey Gateway and the Library, serves to give the Department's activities a high profile. It offers a base for a number of activities and welcomes all students during breaks and after school hours.

## GEOGRAPHY

Geography at St Albans School is concerned with the investigation of interrelationships between people and their environment. The scale of investigation expands from selected local issues through national concerns to global problems, including deforestation of rainforests, geographical conflicts such as piracy on the seas, and climate change. Geographical issues usually have political, environmental, economic, and social dimensions and are often controversial, involving the pupils in an evaluation of a wide range of viewpoints. Geography lessons are varied, involving the pupils in local fieldwork within their home areas, in the use of drama with role play, video tasks and computer aided simulations, as well as traditional map interpretation and construction skills.

The strength of the Geography Department lies in its energetic and enthusiastic team of specialist teachers and excellent resources. It has five specialist teaching rooms which are well equipped, with fixed data projectors and large screens as well as teaching walls. Pupils also use the computer room in the Library upstairs at appropriate points during their lessons.

## HISTORY

The Department has its own specialist rooms of considerable historical interest in the Abbey Gateway. Contained within this building is the School Museum, housing a very wide range of books, collections of documents, pictorial material and maps catering for every age group in the School.

The study of History in the Lower School seeks to equip pupils with a broad grasp of major themes and events in world history and, stemming from this, the capacity to look critically at the past. These skills are fostered through investigation of available evidence and the methods by which that evidence is obtained. Pupils are exposed to original source material, be it written, pictorial or archaeological, and encouraged to develop their own interpretations. The History course is structured around key debates and historical enquiries, and class discussion forms a key part of our teaching. We seek to foster in our pupils an appreciation of how the past has shaped the present, and its continued influence on the way we see the world around us; therefore, several trips and experiences are offered, such as trips to Dover Castle and the National Civil War Centre.

## LATIN

Latin is introduced to all pupils in the First Form, and this initial year of study serves as an introduction to the language and lifestyle of the Romans. The Cambridge Latin Course is used, which follows the daily life of Caecilius and his family in Pompeii. The course incorporates translation from Latin as well as simple English into Latin sentences, considering how Latin has developed into many familiar English words. The pupils explore a traditional Roman villa, food and drink, entertainment at the amphitheatre and theatre and Roman schools. This first foundation year looks forward to the further study of Latin and is of great value to pupils with a flair for languages and those with an interest in English and History as well as providing an important window onto the Classical World.

At the end of the First Form, Latin is offered as one of the options chosen for further study in the Second Form. The Cambridge Latin Course continues to explore life in Roman Britain and Alexandria alongside further language work. A taste of Greek is introduced into this year's work as Greek, as well as Latin, is an option at GCSE.

Trips are offered to Cambridge and Verulamium and the boys are entertained by the annual visit of the Roman Soldiers. Both courses are enhanced by study of Classical myths and the legacy of Vesuvius.

## MATHEMATICS

Our entrance examination in Mathematics is designed with the intention of assessing natural ability rather than achievement resulting mainly from previous training. Hence, although pupils enter the School with a variety of mathematical experience and knowledge, they all have considerable potential.

Pupils are at first taught in forms and by the middle of First Form, they are placed in sets with a teaching approach appropriate to their ability and potential. Some pupils enjoy the challenge of high expectations and the opportunity to go beyond the syllabus, while others need more careful explanation and individual help. There is a considerable overlap of ability between the sets and set changes occur whenever it is clear that this will be beneficial.

The initial priority is to ensure that all pupils, regardless of their previous experience, have a sound knowledge of basic arithmetic, which is the essential foundation of Mathematics.

Thereafter, the principles of algebra are introduced as the generalisation of arithmetic and pupils are encouraged to look for patterns and to appreciate the similarities between apparently different situations. Their previous knowledge and intuitive understanding of shape and space and the basics of probability and statistics are built on and extended. The development of problem-solving skills is very important; pupils learn how to apply mathematical techniques and interpret questions.

By the end of the Second Form all students should have acquired the secure foundation in basic mathematics to enable them to embark on the IGCSE course.

All the teachers in the Department are specialist mathematicians with an enthusiasm for the subject which they are keen to share with their pupils. Recreational mathematics is promoted, and all pupils are entered for the Junior Mathematics Challenge, a national competition where the questions are less predictable and require lateral thinking.

## MODERN LANGUAGES

The Modern Languages Faculty has a suite of five classrooms and three computer rooms in a modern and well- equipped building. There are nine teachers of Modern Languages, most of whom teach two languages. In addition, we have three language assistants who conduct conversation classes with pupils in their own rooms. We are all committed to the use of the spoken languages in class and emphasise the importance of accuracy in written work.

In the First Form, all boys have two 50-minute lessons every week in French and Latin as well as taster courses in German, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish as part of a carousel of languages. In the Second Form, pupils choose to continue with three languages from a choice of five (Chinese, French, German, Latin and Spanish). All pupils must take at least one modern foreign language to GCSE, although students may choose to study two or three languages.

The four skills of listening comprehension, speaking, writing and reading comprehension have equal weight, although in the early stages of language learning a certain emphasis is placed on acquiring oral competence. Pupils should gain a practical knowledge of their chosen languages in order to enable them to cope with a variety of situations, for example, making introductions, talking about hobbies, finding the way, dealing with money, shopping and buying snacks.

Trips: Recent trips include a Lower School trip to the Christmas markets in Cologne, a French exchange trip to Chambéry, a German exchange trip to Usingen and a Spanish study trip to Murcia.

## MUSIC

All pupils in the Lower School follow a course in Music. The syllabus concentrates on various concepts in music: melody, rhythm, harmony, style, timbre and structure. The work centres on the areas of composing, performing, listening and appraising. First Formers also have the opportunity to perform a classic musical together in the Autumn Term.

A wide range of music is included in all these areas – from Medieval to Twentieth Century – including traditional and modern Folk styles, Rock, Jazz, Blues, Musicals and World Music. Performing includes both solo and group work, while most of the listening and appraising work is connected with the various composing assignments undertaken by the pupils. Music Tech forms a large element, with extensive use of Logic Pro on the iMacs.

There is an end-of-year exam in both years, which covers a mix of music theory and historical elements, based on topics studied during the year.

# PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND GAMES

The aim of the Physical Education Department is to discover and develop the sporting potential within every student. We aim to do this by:

- Delivering high quality teaching and support students drive to learn;
- Incorporating physical literacy as central to all teaching and learning in PE;
- Providing a broad and varied programme of opportunities at a range of levels;
- Expecting and encouraging a supportive and positive culture of trying hard and doing your best;
- Striving for and encouraging excellence in all areas of PE and Games.

The Physical Education programme covers three areas. Each year group has a whole afternoon of games each week for two hours either at our magnificent Woollam Playing Fields or at specialised sites specific to a particular sport. There is a PE lesson once a week in the Sports Centre for each form.

Co-curricular activities take place at lunchtimes, after school, at the weekends and in the holidays. These include team and individual inter-school competitions. Within any one week of the School year, a Lower School boy could, if he wished, participate in co-curricular sport on every night of the week.

In all years, every pupil will have an opportunity to enjoy and develop the sports of rugby, cross-country, hockey, cricket, athletics, tennis, basketball, badminton, climbing, football, gymnastics, swimming, table tennis and softball. Pupils will also have the opportunity to participate in activities aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle such as climbing, yoga, jogging and circuit training, to name a few. There is a curriculum emphasis on developing physical literacy and functional movements with each boy undergoing a range of tests before working on the aspects relevant to his development.

Within the Lower School there are opportunities for boys to participate in the following inter-school sports: rugby (Blue, Gold and Red), hockey (A, B, C and D), cross-country, cricket (A and B), swimming, athletics, basketball, tennis and table-tennis. There are also opportunities for boys to join sports tours in holidays to a variety of destinations including the UK and Europe.

## PSHEE

In common with the rest of the School, all pupils in the First and Second Forms have one tutor period per week allocated to Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHEE). Boys are encouraged to learn about, reflect on, and consider a whole range of personal and social issues by following the bespoke curriculum designed for their year group, looking at themselves, their community, and the world around them. Relationship and Sex Education is incorporated into the curriculum at appropriate points. They are led by individual form tutors and lend themselves both to a continuation of the pastoral work done in the School and to specific skills needed for academic study, for example, note-taking and study skills. Students have reflective booklets which they complete in their weekly sessions. There are regular PSHEE days, led by experts, which serve as the starting point for the discussions with tutors. Classes make presentations on aspects of the PSHEE curriculum, thereby developing important research, presentational and public speaking skills, in PSHEE assemblies.

## RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

In the First Form, the origins of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions are investigated and their development and evolution to the modern day is explored. In the Second Form, pupils study Hinduism and Buddhism in the same way. Pupils learn something of their peoples and times, and try to understand the importance of the founders, Holy Scriptures and sacred places as well as investigating what it is like to be a British Jew, Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist today.

Pupils are encouraged to think about themselves, their own beliefs and values, with the aim of reaching an understanding that many moral issues have no clear-cut solutions so that different approaches may be valid. Religion has a key part to play in considering the most profound and basic questions facing all human beings. The more we try to understand other people and their beliefs and traditions, the better chance there is that we may be tolerant and unprejudiced ourselves. It is to be hoped that pupils will come to recognise the importance of a spiritual dimension in the life of the School as a community and in their own lives as individuals. Thus, there is plenty of opportunity to debate issues arising and compare different religious views to secular or Humanist ones. The question of whether religions should protect tradition or change and evolve as society does will be explored throughout the course.

In the First Form, pupils visit the Masorti Synagogue and St Albans Cathedral and, in the Second Form, Bhaktividanta Manor (a Hindu Temple and Ashram).



## SCIENCE

In the First and Second Forms, pupils develop their knowledge and skills through an Integrated Science course. This aims for a lively introduction to science, closely related to the students' own experiences. The course involves experimental work, investigations, discussion, and reporting, and is intended to develop skills such as observation, the drawing of conclusions, co-operation and communication. The content of the course is a combination of the topics covered by the National Curriculum and Common Entrance specifications, designed to give pupils the best possible preparation for starting their GCSE course in Third Form. Topics covered over the first two years include chemical reactions, states of matter, diet and digestion, magnetic fields, cells, the solar system, reproduction, compounds and mixtures, electricity, the circulatory system, respiration, photosynthesis, movement, and microbes. Pupils work in fully equipped laboratories from the start, where they will use a wide range of equipment, including light microscopes and agar plates, and develop good laboratory practice, both in the interests of safety and for better learning. The varied activities are important in the development of practical skills and investigational processes in science and the more abstract skills of observation, fair testing, hypothesising, and predicting.

## TUTORS AND PASTORAL CARE

Boys in the Lower School stay in the same form with the same Tutor for their first two years. The Tutor is there to take a personal interest in them and to monitor both their academic progress and social development, and to guide them in PSHEE as described above. Tutors also lead a Learning to Learn lesson each week; in the First Form, this focuses on building good study habits and revision strategies, in the Second Form on research leading to a debate. For First Formers, the morning of the day before the new school year starts is given over to an induction session for all new boys – they spend this time with their Tutor and Form Prefect. The Prefects are assigned to forms to help with the organisation and running of day-to-day activities. We strongly believe that we can only do the best for our boys by maintaining good communication between the School and parents. To ensure that this happens, the Tutors are supported by the Head of Lower School, who has overall responsibility for pastoral work in the first two years, and their two Deputies.

There are three meetings arranged for parents during the first year – a social evening in the Autumn Term; a meeting with the Tutor and subject teachers later in the Autumn Term to discuss pastoral, social and academic matters and a Pen Arthur briefing meeting in the Summer Term. Parents also receive regular reports on their son's progress. Pen Arthur, the St Albans School Field Centre in South Wales, has been an important part of the education of the boys at St Albans School over the last thirty-five years and is an integral component of the First Form curriculum. During the Summer Term, the First Form classes experience a week's residential course at Pen Arthur. The boys go as a form and are accompanied whenever possible by their Tutor, with three other members of staff. Each group is introduced to a range of activities; this, in addition to the challenge of communal living, provides a change from the ordinary routine of life, whilst coping with the demands of outdoor activities in what can be bracingly testing conditions.



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