

English Curriculum Summary

In English, we aim to foster a love of language in our pupils: to stimulate the mind, encourage individuality, and engender creativity and excellence of expression in all areas of written and oral work. With this aim, we provide a varied curriculum that offers a wide range of learning experiences, which challenge and encourage pupils and are, at the same time, stimulating and fun. Below is an over-view of a pupil's English journey through St John's.

- **Kinetic Letters handwriting:** from KG to Form 2, pupils follow Kinetic Letters, a sensory-focused handwriting programme. It comprises elements supporting gross-motor and fine-motor development, letter formation, and handwriting flow and fluency. Pupils are taught print up to T1, and the joining programme begins in T2 and continues thereafter. The programme is taught in discrete lessons regularly throughout the week from KG to Form 2.
- **Sounds-Write phonics:** St John's uses the Sounds-Write method for phonics teaching and English language development. Instruction begins in KG and continues through to Form 4, when Sounds-Write phonics is merged with the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar. St John's achieved Sounds-Write Silver Accreditation in 2026 and will be able to apply for Gold once we have held Silver status for at least two years. Silver Accreditation recognises us as a champion Sounds-Write school, demonstrating consistently strong practice.
- **Library and Reading lessons:** weekly lessons from KG to Form 6, in which pupils learn about specific authors, widen their reading and are taught specific library skills.
- **Competitions and awards:** from story writing to poetry, we enter a variety of competitions throughout the year. These give pupils a real purpose for writing, and our pupils enjoy notable success. Our participation in the National Arts Award programme allows pupils to use English as a vehicle to harness, express and encourage their ability in speaking and writing in a cross-curricular setting. In addition, we run a Senior House 500-word story competition in the Lent Term, which all pupils enter.
- **Book Week:** pupils listen to talks from a variety of celebrated authors, take part in a creative writing competition and return to school in pyjamas for "Book at Bedtime" (with hot chocolate and cookies), among a wealth of enjoyable events.
- **IT:** pupils use digital technology as a tool for learning in a variety of contexts, from creating comic books using photographs of themselves to responding to peer and teacher comments on Google Docs to extend learning and share ideas. This area is continuously evolving as more English language and literature resources become available. We do, however, aim to maintain a mindful balance between the book, the screen, the pen and the keyboard.
- **Debating:** pupils learn the art of debating in Forms 3–6 and take part in House debating competitions, debating clubs and in-class debating sessions.

- **Public speaking:** pupils are taught to deliver speeches and poetry recitals throughout the year during English lessons. Form 6 pupils are taught to deliver poetry and readings for the Service in Preparation for Christmas, Poetry Evening and their final-day celebrations.
- **Shakespeare Day:** pupils in Forms 5 and 6 have an annual day reserved for Shakespeare, when the Young Shakespeare Company leads interactive workshops throughout the day. These help to make Shakespeare both accessible and fun.
- **Visiting authors and speakers:** throughout the year, and in conjunction with the Librarian, we welcome authors and speakers. These visitors attend during World Poetry Day and World Book Day.

Key skills by year group

Kindergarten (KG)

In KG the curriculum aims to build confidence and enthusiasm in speaking, listening, reading and writing. By the end of the year, pupils can read and write simple sentences, lists, stories and instructions. Most importantly, they gain a love of words and expression and are confident in their ability to communicate.

- **Phonics:** pupils begin Sounds-Write phonics instruction, starting with the Initial Code.
- **Reading:** pupils bring home a new decodable reader twice a week and take the lead in reading it. These books match the sounds pupils have learnt in their Sounds-Write lessons, and pupils read each book repeatedly for as long as they have it, in order to build automaticity. The books progress in complexity of code, word count, sentence structure and vocabulary across KG and T1.
- **Writing:** pupils write for real purposes, such as labelling the vegetables in the garden or writing a price list for the snacks they sell to the teachers.

Transition 1 (T1)

- **Phonics:** pupils continue with Sounds-Write Initial Code instruction and use their growing phonic awareness to decode more complex words and to write independently, using a broadening range of vocabulary.
- **Reading:** pupils read simple texts with accuracy and fluency, using a range of strategies to make sense of their reading. They continue to bring home decodable readers twice a week and take the lead in reading them; these books match the sounds pupils have learnt in their Sounds-Write lessons. Pupils also learn to:
 - recognise the organisational features of non-fiction texts, and understand that books on similar topics may contain different information or present similar information in different ways;
 - use and understand terms such as fiction and non-fiction, and identify and discuss characters, events and settings in stories.
- **Writing:** pupils write using a clear structure and use other texts as models for their own work. They plan and review their writing and write extended texts with support.

- **Punctuation:** pupils understand how punctuation helps a reader to understand what is written, and use capital letters, full stops and question marks more confidently in their writing.

Transition 2 (T2)

- **Spelling and phonics:** pupils move from the Sounds-Write Initial Code to an introduction to the Extended Code. They use a range of spelling strategies, including knowledge of word families, common prefixes and suffixes, and the ability to recognise smaller words within words.
- **Handwriting and grammar:** pupils form letters of regular size and shape, using a neat, cursive script, and learn some of the grammatical features of written Standard English.
- **Reading:** pupils read increasingly complex texts. They learn the connection between punctuation and sentence structure, intonation and emphasis, and use inference and deduction to make comparisons and draw conclusions from a range of texts. They also perform playscripts and undertake book studies.
- **Writing:** pupils use a range of punctuation, including exclamation marks, speech marks and commas, appropriately in their work. They develop proofreading and editing skills to make them more independent writers.
- **Reference skills:** pupils use a thesaurus and a dictionary confidently to check spellings and to make wider word choices.

Forms 1 and 2

In Forms 1 and 2, a range of texts is used, depending on the cross-curricular topic being covered and the pupils' interests. Comprehension skills are developed through the reading of these texts, along with a range of other well-chosen materials, and grammar is taught in context, giving it relevance.

- **Spelling and phonics:** pupils continue with Sounds-Write phonics, moving from the Initial Code to the Extended Code and then to polysyllabic words. They move past basic word families to apply complex morphological knowledge, mastering prefixes, suffixes and etymology (word origins) to spell unfamiliar academic vocabulary.
- **Handwriting and grammar:** pupils maintain a consistent, fluent and automatic cursive script that adapts to different writing speeds. They shift from knowing basic grammatical features to intentionally manipulating Standard English structures, such as using perfect verb tenses, active and passive voice, and varied sentence openers for stylistic effect. Grammar is taught through the Sounds-Write spiral curriculum, with a focus on the advanced Extended Code and on polysyllabic words.
- **Reading and comprehension:** pupils are taught to analyse complex, multi-layered texts, evaluating how authors use structural choices to create tension or mood. Inference and deduction evolve into critical analysis, in which pupils track themes across multiple texts, question character motivations and back up conclusions with specific textual evidence.
- **Drama and literature studies:** pupils adapt, direct or write original sections of playscripts, focusing on how performance choices alter meaning. Book studies deepen into comparative literature studies, analysing structural patterns, cultural contexts and authorial intent across diverse genres.

- **Reference tools:** pupils use physical and digital dictionaries, thesauruses and glossaries seamlessly during the drafting process. They use these tools not just for corrections but to curate a mature, precise vocabulary tailored to specific genres and audiences.
- **Punctuation:** pupils develop a wide range of punctuation.
- **Editing and proofreading:** pupils move from guided editing to collaborative and autonomous revision. They critically evaluate their own work for flow, tone and cohesive paragraphing, shifting the focus from fixing surface-level errors to improving overall writing quality.

Form 3

- **Reading:** pupils read fluently and with understanding, including higher-level inference. In Form 3 they begin to learn how to approach formal comprehension papers. Set texts are chosen each year from titles such as:
 - *Journey to the River Sea* by Eva Ibbotson
 - *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton
 - *The Boy at the Back of the Class* by Onjali Q. Raúf
 - *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* by Philip Pullman
 - *The Mystery of the Secret Room* by Helen Moss
- **Poetry:** pupils read and enjoy a wide variety of poetry, focusing on literary techniques such as personification, alliteration, rhyme, simile, metaphor and assonance. They study performance poetry through classical and contemporary poets.
- **Creative writing:** pupils are encouraged to write creative fiction, with a focus on character development, convincing settings, and strong openings and endings.
- **Non-fiction writing:** pupils are encouraged to write non-fiction texts (instructions, biographical accounts, newspaper reports, magazine articles and book reviews).
- **Spelling:** pupils develop their spelling through a variety of methods, including *My Spelling Workbooks* and the Sounds-Write Extended Code and polysyllabic word lists.
- **Punctuation and grammar:** pupils continue to study punctuation and grammar through the Sounds-Write curriculum.
- **Verbal reasoning (including vocabulary acquisition):** verbal reasoning is an emerging assessment criterion for future school examinations, and pupils are introduced to methods for completing different verbal reasoning tasks.
- **Oracy:** pupils are introduced to oracy (debating) through lessons and Debating Club.

Form 4

- **Reading:** pupils develop a higher level of understanding of inference and learn to answer formal comprehension papers independently, answering in their own words and incorporating quotations in their answers. They are introduced to the Point, Evidence and Explanation (PEE) structure for answering longer formal comprehension questions. Texts are varied: poetry, non-fiction, fiction and playscripts. Set texts are chosen each year from titles such as:
 - *The Machine Gunners* by Robert Westall

- *Holes* by Louis Sachar
- *Kensuke's Kingdom* by Michael Morpurgo
- *The Fire-Eaters* by David Almond
- *Montmorency* by Eleanor Updale
- **Creative writing:** pupils focus on developing powerful settings that grab the reader's attention; beginnings and endings; conveying the feelings of the narrator; using the senses to create atmosphere; developing plot and theme; creating tension; diary writing; and stories with time shifts.
- **Non-fiction writing:** persuasive writing, non-chronological reports, letters, reviews and recounts.
- **Spelling:** pupils follow a structured programme begun in Form 3, using *My Spelling Workbooks* with recourse to Sounds-Write phonics where appropriate. All rules are revisited and tested throughout the year.
- **Punctuation and grammar:** pupils continue to study punctuation and grammar through the Sounds-Write curriculum.
- **Verbal reasoning:** pupils tackle age-appropriate verbal reasoning tasks.
- **Oracy:** pupils develop their debating skills.

Form 5

- **Reading:**

Set texts are chosen each year from titles such as:

- *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio
- *Goodnight Mister Tom* by Michelle Magorian
- *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo
- *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness
- *Frankenstein* (playscript of the novel by Mary Shelley)
- *Skellig* by David Almond
- **Creative writing:** using conflict in story writing; stories with a twist; descriptive writing; diary writing; and poetry writing.
- **Poetry:** irony, sonnets and an introduction to iambic pentameter. Pupils develop poetry comprehension through an understanding of a variety of poetic techniques.
- **Non-fiction writing:** persuasive writing, newspaper writing, biographical writing, reviews, speech writing, adverts, letters and articles.
- **Punctuation and grammar:** pronouns, prepositions, direct speech, apostrophes, parts of speech, complex sentences and clauses, and higher-level punctuation such as colons, semicolons, ellipses and multiple commas. Pupils start a structured punctuation and grammar course: Key Stage 3 Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (CGP).
- **Spelling:** pupils continue to follow a structured programme of revision, adding new words, with regular dictations.
- **Verbal reasoning and oracy:** teaching and practice continues and increases during Form 5. Pupils encounter both online and paper-based tests.

- **Examination preparation:** Form 5 marks the beginning of formal examination preparation, honing technique and performance through a variety of future school English examination papers. These are skills that are indispensable to future GCSE courses.

Form 6

- **Reading:** pupils study a variety of literature that reflects their growing maturity and understanding of the world. Through these texts they encounter complex themes of systemic racism, human rights and social inequality, alongside the struggles for gender equality, individual freedom and survival against oppression. Set texts might include:
 - *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
 - *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel
 - *The Bone Sparrow* by Zana Fraillon
 - *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Anne Frank
 - *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai
 - *The Ruby in the Smoke* by Philip Pullman
 - *Noughts and Crosses* (playscript of the novel by Malorie Blackman)
 - *The Giver* by Lois Lowry
- **Creative writing:** descriptive writing using evocative language; writing in the second person; writing in the future tense; writing to entertain the reader; varying sentence openings and closings; and autobiographical writing. Off-site visits are used to inspire pupils (for example, IWM Duxford and University College Library). Poetry is written and performed.
- **Non-fiction writing:** letter writing (including formal letters of complaint), persuasive writing, speech writing and article writing.
- **Poetry:** metre, simile, metaphor, structure, and poetic devices and their effects.
- **Punctuation and grammar:** by Form 6, pupils are expected to have acquired the necessary punctuation and grammar skills, relative to their ability. Punctuation and grammar continue to be taught, targeting specific areas of weakness and importance (such as run-on sentences).
- **Verbal reasoning:** teaching and practice continue in earnest, as the majority of Form 6 pupils will be sitting verbal reasoning tests for their future school examinations. Pupils encounter both online and paper-based tests.
- **Oracy:** pupils continue their debating journey through Debating Club and during lessons. Oracy is also developed through formal and informal interview technique and preparation.
- **Examination preparation:** Form 6 English focuses on future school examination preparation, honing technique and performance through a variety of future school English examination papers. Pupils are prepared for their specific target school papers where necessary. These are skills that are indispensable to future GCSE courses and are key preparation for the next stage of their education.

Contribution to spiritual, moral, social and cultural education

English teaching at St John's College School makes a powerful contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) education. We use literature, creative expression and collaborative dialogue to explore the human condition.

Spiritual development

- **Exploring the human condition:** reading poetry, prose and drama allows pupils to reflect on universal themes such as awe, wonder, identity, meaning and mortality.
- **Reflective writing:** personal and expressive writing tasks give pupils a quiet space to process deep emotions, imagination and personal values.

Moral development

- **Analysing ethical dilemmas:** studying character motivations and the consequences of plot in literature prompts discussion of right and wrong, justice and responsibility.
- **Empathy:** structured classroom discussion of morally complex texts teaches pupils to weigh competing viewpoints and to articulate their own ethical stances respectfully.

Social development

- **Collaborative learning:** group work, drama activities and peer-review sessions build cooperation, active listening and mutual respect among classmates.
- **Relational awareness:** analysing relationships between characters helps pupils to navigate their own social interactions, peer dynamics and community responsibilities.

Cultural development

- **Diverse literatures:** introducing texts from varied cultural backgrounds, historical contexts and global traditions broadens pupils' worldviews and fosters cross-cultural empathy.
- **Heritage and voice:** exploring classic and contemporary texts helps pupils to understand how cultural heritage shapes societal norms, language and individual identity.