

PORT·REGIS



English: A Neverending Story

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Barbara Lonergan started teaching at The Dragon School in Oxford. She then moved to St John's College School in Cambridge before joining us at Port Regis in 2019. She feels passionately about the importance of English teaching as a means of empowering children, giving them the skills to become articulate, empathetic, and creative adults. She learned quite a bit about the subject whilst studying English and completing a PGCE at the University of Oxford, but has

learned most from the children she teaches, and from observing her own children learn to read and write.

Inspiration is Everywhere

Every day our pupils are experimenting with language. They might visit ancient Dorset trees to read to them, study Seamus Heaney and write poems about overripe blackberries growing around the boundary of the playing fields, describe the mysteries that lie beneath the surface of

of Bob's Pond, or take characters from their Classics studies and reimagine a myth. There is a real joy in sharing your own work and each spring term we hold a whole school short story competition where every child, from Reception to A Form, has the opportunity to harness their creativity and write a short story for an audience.

Superb Resources

As a department our greatest asset is our highly skilled staff, and every English teacher at Port Regis is encouraged to supplement the existing curriculum and to deliver our teaching objectives in the way best suited to the pupils they teach. We also recognise however that when teaching key skills consistency is key, particularly in the early years, and in Pre-Prep we use the Oxford University Press 'Read Write Inc' framework for teaching reading, with a phonic based approach that leads into a structured reading and writing programme. This continues with the

RWI spelling scheme now being used until the end of D Form in the Middle School. Following a post-Covid review of handwriting skills we have also introduced the Oxford University Press Nelson Handwriting scheme, which runs through Pre-Prep to C Form, and backed this up with specially printed handwriting exercise books to encourage pupils to maintain the highest writing standards in everyday written work. As our pupils move into Upper Key Stage 2 (D and C Form) and Key Stage 3 (A and B Form) we also draw on resources designed specifically for the ISEB curriculum including textbooks, revision guides and Key Stage 3 Spelling, Grammar, and Punctuation schemes.

Ensuring Every Child Achieves their Potential

We support our teachers as they follow the needs of their individual classes, and this freedom is underpinned by a tightly organised framework for assessment and review.

Even in the Upper School, English teachers are fortunate enough to see their pupils almost every day so each English teacher has a detailed understanding of the English development, and the pastoral needs, of pupils in their classes. Once pupils move away from the form teacher model of teaching in Middle and Upper School, the staff teaching English to each year group hold termly 'progress meetings', attended by the Head of English, Head of Learning Support, and all English teachers for that year. There is no substitute for teacher assessment, but we supplement this with standardised data to ensure we have as thorough as possible a picture of the progress and areas for development of each pupil. Whilst each score is only ever a numerical snapshot of a child's performance on a specific day, these test scores provide valuable supporting data for assessing progress and determining whether pupils are achieving the standard of work in lessons we would expect based on their underlying ability.



We discuss any anomalies or concerns as a department and with our Head of Learning Support, so any interventions can be put in place without delay.

Communication

As an academic discipline our English curriculum is rigorous, preparing our pupils for their Common Entrance and scholarship exams, but as a life skill the subject has an even greater significance. As a community the adults at Port Regis work together, guiding our students to develop the register of their language so they are confident whether leading the cheers after a sports match, showing visitors around the school or advocating for their fellows in school council. Our English curriculum develops these oral skills further with our work on debating and public speaking. The result is pupils who are a credit to this school and their families and who most importantly can express their views and participate in civilised discussion no matter how contentious the topic.

Bespoke Teaching

There is no single model for how we organise the sets in each year group, this depends entirely upon the needs of each cohort as they move up the school. Pupils are normally taught English in mixed ability form groups until the end of D Form, with ability sets being introduced in C Form as we branch away from the National Curriculum and start to follow the ISEB syllabus. At this point some pupils are placed in sets where they will receive the time and support they need to ensure they can approach Common Entrance with confidence, whilst others move at a slightly faster pace as they prepare for scholarship exams. Our holistic approach to assessing pupils is very much at the forefront here, and many pupils with learning support profiles enjoy considerable success in our upper sets precisely because their needs have been identified and we are able to implement the strategies they need to fulfil their potential. Use of laptops, reader pens and reading software is seamlessly integrated into our English



classrooms. The upper 'scholarship' set in A and B Form receives an increasingly personalised curriculum, depending on the specific requirements of individual senior school exams.

Reading and our Library

We prioritise the importance of reading, and any tour of our school begins with a trip to our school libraries. Our two libraries, situated in the heart of the mansion and Pre-Prep, look magnificent, but their true worth is evident when you see them in use. The Prep library is open every day at breaktime and lunchtime when children of all ages choose to come here to share books, magazines and games, to research projects and to complete prep under the supervision of our school librarian, an extremely experienced Port Regis ex-Head of English. Every child is a reader, it is just a matter of finding the right book and a look at the library borrowing records reveals a vast range of fiction and non-fiction is being consumed by our pupils every week. Some children need little encouragement, grazing their way along the shelves whilst others need to be tempted. Every English class spends a lesson each week in the library where they can





share book recommendations and their English teachers set individualised reading targets so every child regularly receives recognition for their success in reading. Our carefully curated 'lighter reads' section provides a wide selection of high quality, accessible texts and is especially popular with our EAL pupils and those who receive Learning Support.

Our emphasis on reading is crucial to the development of our pupils. Reading and sharing stories gives our children the opportunity to explore places, lives and situations outside their own existence. To paraphrase the former Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman, children's books should be 'a mirror as well as a window' and we take this responsibility very seriously. We want our pupils to find stories about children who look and feel like them, and books about adults like them who have achieved success. We celebrate the diversity of our school community in our collection and in the books we choose to promote. Reading boosts our pupils' expressive and receptive vocabulary, giving them the tools they need to express their own increasingly sophisticated ideas.

Our Curriculum

The increased role of the ISEB Common Pre-Test in C Form is giving us cause to review the curriculum we deliver in the Middle School. These Pre-Tests are adaptive, and you cannot and should not teach to the test, but what we can do is ensure our pupils are familiar with being asked questions in the format they can expect to see in the Pre-Test. The new ISEB syllabus for English took effect from September 2021 with the first Common Entrance exams in the new format due in the summer of 2023. This new syllabus changes the structure of the final CE examination papers, with separate reading and writing papers. It also sees the introduction of multiple choice and longer 'essay-style' reading comprehension questions for all, when previously these have been the preserve of scholarship papers. We have reviewed our curriculum to reflect these changes and our first cohort have already sat internal examinations based on this new syllabus. The ISEB have also reintroduced play scripts to the curriculum. Port Regis has always taught Drama, but this syllabus change gives the English Department

the opportunity to work more closely with our Drama Department and, of course, to arrange more theatre trips!

The Road to Success

Our pupils, including those with Learning Support profiles, enjoy a 100% success rate at Common Entrance, with many pupils receiving academic scholarships and all successfully gaining entry to their chosen schools.

Parents often ask how they can support their children in developing their English skills. Firstly, encourage all reading – books, graphic novels, comics and newspapers are all valuable – everything your child reads will develop their receptive and expressive vocabulary. Secondly, take every opportunity to talk to your child. Ask their opinions, listen to their answers, and encourage them to justify these whether you are talking about a character in a book or film or discussing current affairs.

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