

THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

AT ST HELEN'S SCHOOL

The department comprises the Head of English, a second-in-department, two full-time and three part-time English specialists, one of whom is also Head of Support Tuition. Special arrangements are made for girls who, for various reasons, require additional individual support with English. The chartered librarian and her team of assistants liaise closely with the department.

Teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 takes place in a suite of specialist rooms. At Key Stage 5 teaching takes place in dedicated rooms in the sixth form area. All rooms have interactive whiteboards, and access to class sets of laptops is simply a matter of booking in advance. In years 7 and 8, for example, we follow an interactive poetry scheme, and the use of ICT is encouraged throughout the department.

Results at A2 level in literature in 2011 were 100% A*-B. We follow the OCR syllabus in literature and the AQA Specification B in English language. English literature is a core subject of the International Baccalaureate. Girls choose between standard and higher levels in the IB. In both, world literature and oral presentations are core requirements. A good proportion of girls go on to study English at university.

At Key Stage 4 all girls study English language and English literature. We follow the University of Cambridge IGCSE in both subjects. In language the girls are required to submit a portfolio of three assignments which comprises 50% of their grade. In addition, they sit one Reading Passages paper which comprises the remaining 50%. In literature, the girls submit a portfolio of two essays which comprises 25% of their grade. In addition, they sit an Open Books paper involving drama, poetry and prose which accounts for the remaining 75% of their final grade. Teaching time in Key Stage 4 is generous with 3 hours per week dedicated to English.

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is interesting and varied, and girls study a range of novels, plays, short stories and poems. In addition, the girls read and study a Shakespeare play in each of the three key stage years. The interactive poetry scheme includes poets ranging from Hardy and Blake to John Agard and Grace Nicholls. ICT is used to teach grammar and punctuation. In January of years 7 – 10 all girls participate in the class debating competitions. In years 7 and 8 the girls follow an independent reading scheme which requires them to read at least one text from six of nine genres each year. Class reading time is an integral part of each week's experience of English.

The English department offers a range of extra-curricular activities. We organize several theatre trips each year. We also offer girls the opportunity to debate in the Oxford Schools, Cambridge schools and the ESU competitions. In public speaking, we participate in the ESU and Rotary Youth Speaks competitions. Year 10 girls recently won through to the regional final of the ESU public speaking competition. The librarian organizes an author visit each year; recent visitors have included Malorie Blackman, Marcus Sedgwick and Sally Gardner. There is also the annual Andrew Motion prize for best poem, a competition begun following the poet's visit to the school.

The English department at St Helen's is a lively, experienced and successful department. Expectations are high, and colleagues are talented, personable and good-humoured.