

The Quality of Education: Government and Politics - Purpose and Provision



St Christopher's:
A Church of England Academy

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither-
whatever they do prospers.

Psalms 1:3

The Purpose of Study

The A-level politics course is designed to be lively, relevant and controversial. The department aims to help students understand their own place in the world and the power they have to change the world around them in meaningful ways. A quick glance at the news headlines is all it takes to understand this is one of the most interesting and engaging subjects for young minds to study. The course is firmly rooted in news and current affairs from the UK and the US. Not only does the course provide students with detailed knowledge and understanding of these two political systems it also provides them with research skills, enhance written communication and the ability to express and debate difficult ideas. The course is designed to do all these things but the department aims to go further; cultivating confident young people who are not afraid to get their voices heard and want to actively engage with the world around them.

The course is designed to help students:

- comprehend and interpret political information
- critically analyse and evaluate the areas of politics studied
- construct arguments and explanations leading to reasoned conclusions
- identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of the areas of politics studied
- construct and communicate arguments and explanations with relevance, clarity and coherence
- use appropriate political vocabulary
- make connections between the different areas of politics studied
- make comparisons across two political systems.

Politics as a subject is inherently synoptic. The course also aims to give students a complete and holistic understanding of the subject by requiring that they inter-relate areas of content within each module and when appropriate across modules.

The Government and Politics Course Focuses on:

Government and Politics of the UK

The nature and sources of the British Constitution. Issues and debates around recent constitutional changes and individual and collective rights. The structure, processes and work of Parliament. The effectiveness of Parliamentary scrutiny, discipline and representativeness.

The relationship between the Prime Minister and their Cabinet. How policy is made and the relationship between the Executive and Parliament. The UK Judiciary and the role of the Supreme Court. The power of the court and its impact on government, legislation and policy making.

The roles, powers and responsibilities of the different devolved bodies in the United Kingdom. The debate surrounding devolution in England and the impact devolution has had on UK Politics.

The nature of democracy and the development of suffrage in the UK. Patterns of participation, different forms of participation and debates surrounding how and why people participate.

Electoral systems which are used in parliamentary elections and in elections to devolved bodies of the UK, the advantages and disadvantages of these electoral systems. Case studies of three key elections- 1983, 1997 and 2019

The origins, ideas and development of the three main UK parties. Arguments surrounding the development of a multi-party system in the UK and the impact on governance and policy due to these changes.

The types and methods of pressure groups and their influence on political parties, the government and the media. Debates surrounding the impact pressure groups have on democracy in the UK.

The aims of the EU and the extent to which they have been achieved the impact of the EU on UK politics and policy making.

Government and Politics of the USA and Comparative Politics

The nature and significance of the US Constitution. The framework of government and the significance of the constitutional principle on politics in the USA.

The structure, role and powers of US Congress, debates surrounding its functions, powers and effectiveness. The relationship between the Congress and the executive branch of government.

The sources of presidential power supported by relevant examples. The difference between enumerated powers and the informal powers of the President. The constraints on the President's ability to exercise their powers. The relationship between the President and EXOP, the Federal Bureaucracy and Federal Agencies. The imperilled and the imperial Presidency.

The process of selection and appointment of Supreme Court judges and the current composition of the courts. The nature of judicial power, the significance of judicial review and examples of landmark rulings. The significance of the judiciary

The Electoral Systems used in the USA and the main characteristics of the presidential and congressional campaigns. Candidate selection in primaries, caucuses and at the nominating conventions. The factors which determine electoral outcomes – finance, media and issues, incumbency and leadership. Direct democracy at state level and an evaluation of its impact. Analysis of the main variable in US voting behaviour and the links between parties and their core voting coalitions. Split ticket voting and absenteeism in the US elections.

The two main political parties and their ideologies, values, policies and traditions. The factions which exist within parties and the debates concerning their weakness. The dominance of two party politics and significance of parties and independent candidates.

The extent of political pluralism in the USA, typologies of pressure groups. The methods and tactics used by pressure groups to influence and the different levels of Government targeted. Funding of candidates, iron triangles and lobbying. The relative power of pressure groups and political parties. Debates concerning the power and influence of pressure groups in the USA.

Protection of American rights and liberties under the Constitution, Bill of Rights, Amendments and Supreme Court decisions. The role of pressure groups in supporting rights. the impact of civil rights on us politics in relation to abortion, race, freedom of speech, the right to bear arms.

Comparative politics – analysing and explaining similarities and differences between UK and USA in structural, rational and cultural ways.

Political Ideas

Liberalism - debates around the nature of liberalism. The core ideas and values concerning the individual and freedom. The study of key thinkers and their impact on liberal thinking about the state, society, the economy and human nature.

Conservatism - debates around the nature of conservatism. The core ideas and values concerning the individual and freedom. The study of key thinkers and their impact on liberal thinking about the state, society, the economy and human nature.

Socialism - debates around the nature of socialism. The core ideas and values concerning the individual and freedom. The study of key thinkers and their impact on liberal thinking about the state, society, the economy and human nature.

Feminism - debates around the nature of feminism, core feminist views and values concerning equality of treatment, recognition of gender differences and affirmative action. Analysis of liberal and radical feminism as well as differences and post-feminism. The study of key thinkiers and their views on human nature, the state, society and the eeconomy.

Complementing the School Purpose

Foundation Scripture

Knowing that all we are, all we have and all we do is through God the Politics Department focuses on each student as “fearfully and wonderfully made”. Students are to be treated holistically and with the belief that if they can be “watered” through a compassionate but challenging education then they will go on to flourish and use all of the gifts given to them by God. The department acknowledges that these gifts will vary from student to student and not all will necessarily excel in the subject but all will be supported and encouraged to do their very best.

Key Themes

- Knowing what it is to be fully alive
- Learning to live together
- Securing wisdom and understanding

The Politics curriculum teaches students about their role in their communities, country and the wider world. It encourages students from the moment they embark on the course to learn more about themselves by finding their voice and then using their voice to advocate for others and for themselves. The topic of participation particularly focuses on how students can find causes which are important to them and advocate for their own interests, discussions surrounding electoral participation prepare them for their civic duty of voting in the many and varied elections in the UK. Students are encouraged to analyse how different groups and communities have been negatively treated both in the UK and the USA and explore how laws and judicial decisions have effected these groups, while also considering the work which remains to be done particularly through the topics of civil rights and feminism. Politics will always require that student consider issues from various points of view and requires an understanding that there is often not a right answer but different answers supported by different people or groups and using different evidence. Critical analysis and debate are always encouraged but this is always done with tolerance and respect and the understanding that people and ideas can change through gentle education and conversation rather than confrontation.

Christian Virtues

Christian virtues are explored throughout the curriculum. In Politics, patience is found in analysing the work of pressure groups working to influence the Government and change policy which can sometimes take years, an example such as Greenpeace whose advocacy for climate action was ignored for decades has now been vindicated. Hope is demonstrated through the candidates and political parties which stand for office but also in the lives of voters who cast their ballot with the hope and desire for continuity or change. Most importantly love is fostered, first and foremost a love for the subject, the department works hard to enthuse students and support them so they feel loved and in turn will love coming to their lessons and love the subject, passing on their interest to the wider Sixth Form community and family and friends at home.

Curriculum Aims

Provide opportunities for all students to learn and achieve

The lessons are created and delivered to ensure that every student has an opportunity to participate in every lesson. Students are always asked to contribute their answers, ideas and opinions and are praised for their involvement in the lesson. Students ALPs target grades are used to ensure work and expectation for each student is personalised and they are both challenged and supported to achieve their very best.

Promote the moral, cultural, mental and physical development of all students

Students are challenged in lessons to consider many and varied ideas and viewpoints. The course requires that they critically analyse the key ideologies which underpin the UK's main political parties and the UK and USA's political parties as well. Through the topic of civil right and the judiciary students are presented with the fight for rights which minority groups have had to pursue and encouraged to think about how they would respond in similar circumstances.

Prepare students for the opportunities and responsibilities of adult life

The curriculum keenly stresses the importance of political engagement and participation in both formal and informal ways and helps students understand the role they play in a healthy democracy through active citizenship. It is gratifying to note that past students have gone on to stand for election and win seats as parish councillors and MPs. Students are also prepared to be understanding, tolerant and respectful in their dealings with others even when they disagree with them, whether that be about Politics or wider issues. More generally the skills and knowledge gained through the course will certainly prepare them for undergraduate study or other career opportunities.

Complementing the School Provision

1. Challenge

Every lesson in the Politics department is based around a challenging question which through the course of the lesson/lessons students should explore through a range of activities and then feel confident in providing an answer to. Undergraduate textbooks, political autobiographies and other specialist materials are used to encourage challenge. Students are often set independent research tasks which challenge them.

2. Explanation

The department is confident in their knowledge and ability to provide thorough explanations of the topics in the specification but also of wider political issues as teachers keep up to date through a range of news sources and encourage students to do so too. Explanations are given verbally and there are often activities which encourage lots of class discussions however the department is very aware that students need to translate these activities into long form notes which they can work on and revise from in the future. Almost all lessons have an accompanying PowerPoint where written explanations and instructions are provided. Whenever more freeform discussions or activities have taken place in class these are always followed by “consolidation” activities which require students to reflect on their learning so information and explanations are recorded in their notes.

3. Modelling

Modelling is used most often to help students develop the exam skills they need to complete the extended essay questions. Planning past paper questions together with their teacher modelling how to challenge the question, create sustained analysis and employ keyterms is done at least once through every topic of the course. Students are also given successful responses from previous students to analyse and activities are built around finding various strengths. Modelling takes place every lesson in the key terms used, technical language and academic explanations which the teacher provides.

4. Practice

Students are given the opportunity to practice all the skills they will require in their final exam through the activities and homework. They regularly complete 9 mark and 25 mark essay questions independently. In addition student practice planning essays in pairs and as a class and complete “Iceberg Analysis” activities and “Outstanding Paragraph” activities to drill into and allow them to practice how to achieve the top levels of sustained analysis. Students practice using key-terms and up to date examples through discussions and their answers in lessons.

5. Feedback

Students are given personalised feedback to every written essay in the form of “What Went Well” and “Even Better If”, there are also some assessments which are returned with “No Grade” so as to encourage students to really read and take on board the personalised feedback. When returning assignments the whole class will have verbal feedback as to some of the key mistakes being made and what was required to get the best marks. After milestone assessments there will be one on one feedback provided for some students and all students are encouraged to share plans before they write essay or to discuss their feedback once it has been returned to them.

6. Questioning

Every lesson in Politics is framed around a challenging question and questions play a central role in every lesson. They are used to help students recall at the beginning of the lesson through “Quick Quizzes” or “Blankety Blank” games or to place the lesson and help students recall what they have previously learnt. Questions are used to challenge students thinking and encourage them to keep up to date with the news by asking them about certain current events. Questions are also used in consolidation activities and to prepare students for the questions they will face in the exam.

There are high expectations for all students laid out from their first lesson both verbally by their teacher but additionally through the Politics Handbook which they are all given. This gives clear instructions about behaviour in lessons, homework and independent study. Students are encouraged to mirror the positive attitude of the teacher and become enthusiastic about the Politics course and the activities which take place. The atmosphere in lesson is positive, encouraging and supportive combined with a desire to do well for all. Students are made to feel comfortable about contributing as this is expected from day one and there are opportunities for every student to hear their own voice in every lesson. This gives the students a feeling of being on their toes and being involved in the subject.

To inspire a love of the subject beyond the specification, students are regularly encouraged to discuss what is happening in the news and when there are important events such as General and Presidential Elections these will be followed at the beginning of each lesson with reference to the headlines and key news stories of the day. There is a large selection of books particularly about American Politics which have been made available to students in S1, along with copies of Politics Review Magazine and students are regularly recommended podcasts, television shows and films which link to the UK and USA courses such as The West Wing and The Thick of It. On Synergy “Resource Libraries” have been created where students can find broader resources to use in their own time to supplement their independent study.

The Politics Department has organised for students to attend BBC filming of Question Time and two attended BBC events at Political Party Conferences in Manchester. There have also been trips to Westminster organised with the Parliamentary Education Unit and tours round the Supreme Court. The Department has led the Sixth Form trip to Washington and New York for five years, giving students the opportunity to visit the United Nations, Congress, the Supreme Court and the 'Newseum' as well as tour the Mall and visit the Lincoln Memorial.

Though there are high expectations the department caters for all students and does not have any specific entry requirements. It is often the case that students who have not achieved particularly well previously/in other subjects do well in Politics because they are "bitten by the Politics bug" and their interest in the subject, along with advice and support from their teachers helps them to exceed expectations. Close attention is paid to ALPs target grades but these do not limit what students can achieve. Those who find extended writing tasks are supported one on one with feedback at the end of lessons or in lunchtimes. The department will work with the Head of Year to support students who are struggling to adjust to the demands of the course and give students the opportunity to repeat work and have it remarked or complete additional tasks to improve.

Ad Gloriam Dei

To the Glory of God



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