

Outdoor Education at St Katherine's School

WELCOME BACK



With the timely arrival of some cooler autumnal weather we return to school. With more than a little relief, the rains are bringing a fresh green colour back to the countryside, and the brightness of fresh growth.

And so we start another year, and look forward to our busy school schedule. In this hectic time and nervy time of new classes, new pencil cases and new beginnings it's worth taking a breath of the cooler air and enjoy hearing the wind dance a chilly breeze through the trees again.

This newsletter will hopefully serve as a chance to celebrate those moments, but also highlight the amazing outdoor activities that take place in our school community. So keep an eye out for useful information, fantastic pictures and some resilience on display.

There's lots ahead for everyone at St Katherine's school so keep an eye out for chances to get out and have an adventure!

And just like that... here we go again!

Sugar Loaf 2026

TAKING THE FIRST BIG STEPS



Welcome to St Katherine's Year 7! These first few days and weeks in Year 7 are a heady mixture of excitement, nerves and a real sense of stepping into a new phase in growing up. Although it won't be long before you get your head around all the timetables, rooms and new teachers, it takes lots of courage to get going!



At St Katherine's, however, we barely let you get your feet under a desk before we put you to the test. A trip to Bannau Brechiniog (Brecon Beacons) to scale Yr Fal (Sugar Loaf 596m). You and your tutor group will face steep slopes and exposed ridges as you work together to get to the top. Enjoy the views as the full sweep of valleys and rolling hills open up before you.

We hope to give you a chance to get to know your tutor group and start building strong friendships. With your new friends encouraging you and support from the Outdoor Education team, you'll be amazed at what you found yourself doing!

It's not an easy climb, but well worth the effort for the view at the top and the shared

memories of your first of many adventures here at St Katherine's School.

Information on what to bring will be sent round closer to your trip!
Dates for the trip are currently scheduled for:

22nd September 7S1
29th September 7S2
2nd October 7T1
6th October 7T2
9th October 7Y
13th October 7P



Duke of Edinburgh Award



The Duke of Edinburgh Award programme starts in earnest this term. With Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards enrolling in September. This is an exciting time and a really fantastic opportunity to take part is something great. Last year saw the largest number of students get involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award and take on the character developing challenge.



Last Summer saw the 2025/26 expedition season finish with Year 9 students completing Bronze Expeditions. Under the blazing hot conditions, the students did amazingly well to find themselves on the very top of the Mendips.

Students covered over 30km, walking with heavy packs. The expeditions are independent, they must carry their own kit and must navigate themselves without help.

There certainly were highs and lows, and the heat took its toll on the expeditioners, but perseverance and hard work paid off. Well done to all survivors of the expedition, you were a credit to yourselves and to the school!

Whilst the expeditions are done, the time now turns to completing assessor reports and getting those final sections finished.

Although the programme is international and the biggest of its kind, the unusual sight of teenagers with backpacks trudging around looking lost leaves many with lots of questions.

At St Katherine's School, we have a large Duke of Edinburgh programme that is staffed in house - so it is your teachers helping you through it. We typically have nearly 120 students start Bronze, 50 at Silver and 20 at Gold. So to help make sure everyone knows what's what, here are some Frequently Asked and Answered Questions.

What is the DofE?

The Duke of Edinburgh Award is the largest youth development award in the world. It is an opportunity for young people to develop soft skills and personal characteristics to prepare them for the modern world. It is an opportunity for young people to get recognition for helping others, keeping active and developing skills. It is a chance to put yourself out of your comfort zone and learn something new about yourself.

You complete the DofE at 3 levels: Bronze (Year 9), Silver (Year 10) and Gold (Year 12+13).

You will work on three sections for a considerable amount of time, showing commitment and dedication. The sections are physical, skills and volunteering.

You will work with a team to complete an independent expedition. Planning the route, organising resources and carrying everything you need on your backs, you will head out into the countryside to complete the aims of your journey.

After all your hard work and effort you will have completed an amazing achievement - something universities, colleges and employers value.

How long are the expeditions?

Bronze - 2 days 1 night

Silver - 3 days 2 nights (although we travel down the night before it starts)

Gold - 4 days 3 nights (same travelling time as Silver)

Silver and Gold require you to complete a practice expedition as well.

Silver - 2 days 1 night

Gold - 3 days 2 nights

Where are the expeditions?

Bronze is on the Mendips - around Cheddar Gorge and Beacon Batch

Silver will train on the Quantocks and do the expedition exploring Exmoor.

Gold is in a mountainous environment, we usually go to Bannau Brycheiniog and Eryri.

What do I do for volunteering?

The volunteering section is sometimes quite hard to find. However, the criteria are pretty broad so you can be fairly creative. As long as you are doing something that helps a group or another person, and not getting paid for it, it will probably count towards the DofE.

What do I do for skills?

Skills can be equally broad, and also doesn't need to be something new. Here is the list of recommended ideas from the DofE, and another page of ideas [here](#).

Just like with volunteering, there are options to learn remotely. The key idea is to find something you will enjoy - it doesn't have to be very imaginative - photography (maybe of a sport you enjoy), journalism, learning some sign language can all work!

What can I do for physical?

Physical is very clear - the one requirement is that it must raise your heart rate! It needs to be a sustained physical activity. Any sport or physical activity can count, team or individual. It doesn't need to be a new sport - it can be something you are already doing. Likewise it doesn't need to be a sport - getting fitter for your expedition works!

Outdoors at St Katherine's School



There has been extensive work to the beautiful woods that surround the site, including some clearing down in the forest school.

With some nifty rope work, the canopy for the fire circle has been set up, providing a cosy and quiet shared space.

Ms Blaney, Mr Hodgson and Mr Bradshaw have been working with small groups in this area exploring the area and taking in the stillness.

It's sloe season, and Ms Blaney was cooking up some cordial over the fire. The Outdoor Ed club had their first meeting and found their favourite sticks.

We are looking forward to adding to this area and seeing how it changes through the seasons. Any spare material or know-how would be greatly appreciated - please do get in touch with the team at hodgsont@skdrive.org.

Remember

Sugar Loaf	22nd September 7S1 29th September 7S2 2nd October 7T1 6th October 7T2 9th October 7Y 13th October 7P
DofE Enrolment	Bronze Form (Year 9) Silver Form (Year 10) Gold Form (Year 12)
Gold Expedition	22nd-24th October Heading to Bannau Brechiniog (Brecon Beacons) Kit list here Leaving from school and returning to school.
Bouldering League	12th October



St Katherine's Website



Term dates



Termly newsletters



DofE Frequently Asked Questions