GCSE Options Guide 2026-2028



St Mary's School
Gerrards Cross

Dear Students and Parents,

This booklet provides an overview of the subjects and courses available at GCSE and IGCSE level at St Mary's. Its purpose is to help you understand both the compulsory and optional elements of the curriculum so that informed choices can be made.

GCSEs are nationally recognised qualifications that form the foundation for future academic and career pathways. They are an important milestone in every student's education, marking the transition from broad learning to more specialised study. The majority of students will take nine GCSEs at the end of Year 11. Every student will study the five **compulsory, core** GCSE subjects: English Language and Literature (two GCSEs), Mathematics and Science (at least two from Biology, Chemistry and Physics). In addition, students choose four subjects from a wide range of options. To ensure a balanced and enriching academic experience, we strongly recommend selecting a Language, and at least one Humanity from the Options Subjects. The GCSE options process enables students to take greater ownership of their learning, shape their own curriculum and explore subjects that reflect their interests and aspirations. Decisions made now will help prepare students for A Levels, university, and beyond.

Compulsory Subjects

English Language
English Literature
Mathematics
Science 1*
science 2*

***Biology, Chemistry, Physics**

Options Subjects

Biology
Business Studies
Chemistry
Computer Science
Dance
Drama
Fine art
Food and Nutrition
French
History
Geography
Media Studies
Music
Physical Education
Physics
Religious Studies
Spanish
Textiles

It is important that each student chooses courses that allow her to make excellent progress, achieve strong results, and enjoy a fulfilling learning experience. We recognise that every young person is unique, and some may need additional support to reach their full potential. For these students, we offer tailored pathways with targeted assistance to ensure access to appropriate GCSE programmes. Our aim is to guide students towards choices that are both suitable and successful.

In addition to the examined GCSE and IGCSE courses, students will study PSHCEE and PE, supporting both mental and physical wellbeing. Students will also benefit from a bespoke programme designed to equip them with essential life skills. This programme includes study strategies to support success at GCSE, as well as digital literacy, financial education, careers guidance, and political awareness. These skills not only complement academic learning but equip students for personal challenges and opportunities of life at school and beyond.

Choosing Options Subjects

Students must select **six subjects** from the options list: **four preferred choices and two reserves.** These must be placed in order of preference. While we make every effort to accommodate first choices, this cannot always be guaranteed. Providing six options in order of preference ensures we can allocate subjects fairly. Whatever the final selection, success will depend on commitment and hard work over the next two years, setting students up for the next stage of their education.

Key Dates:

- **Options Day**: Monday 19th January 2026
- Students will take part in taster lessons for GCSE and IGCSE subjects, hear from professionals in a range of careers, and meet Heads of Department to learn more about each subject. The day will conclude with a presentation for students and parents at **3:10pm in Oakdene Hall**, outlining the options process and providing details about core subjects.
- **Year 9 Parents' Evening**: Thursday 22nd January 2026
- An opportunity to discuss enjoyment, progress and aptitude in all subjects.

After these events, students should have a clear understanding of the pathways available.
Deadline for submitting GCSE option choices: Wednesday 11th February 2026.
We appreciate the importance of this decision and are committed to supporting every student and family throughout the process.

Good luck with your choices!

Mr Lars Fox
Head

St Mary's School
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English Language and Literature (AQA)

The study of English Language and Literature at GCSE is essential preparation for all subjects studied at A Level and for the world of work. It is recognised as a vitally important qualification, and students at St Mary's have a tradition of excelling in both aspects of the subject.

The courses aim to develop the essential reading and writing skills that support critical thinking and communication, both within the subject and across the curriculum. Students analyse a variety of short literary and non-fiction texts and thus develop their appreciation of the ways in which writers employ their techniques to convey thought-provoking themes and attitudes.

In addition, the focus on writing both creatively and analytically enables students to write for a variety of purposes, tailoring their response to a range of target audiences. Students will be expected to study both IGCSE Language and GCSE Literature over the two years, and thus the focus will alternate between the two subjects over the KS4 course.

Wider reading is essential to support the range of skills taught in both Language and Literature. Students are expected to read fiction and non-fiction of an appropriate level at home.

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English Literature (AQA)

The AQA English Literature GCSE covers a range of literary texts including:

- Shakespeare
- 19th century fiction
- Poetry from different time periods
- Modern drama

Students will not only develop the confidence to read and respond to whole texts but will also learn how to analyse the writers' techniques and evaluate the effects on the reader as well as consider the writers' purposes. The course has been structured and designed to challenge students to develop their thinking and understanding of literature from a range of different writers and periods.

We aim to build success in literature, and in order to do this, students will be encouraged to read regularly and choose ambitious texts to read in their own time. They will learn to show proficiency in all aspects of academic writing, develop sound comprehension skills, and respond personally and critically to aspects and contexts of literature.

GCSE English Literature Paper 1: 1 hour 45 minutes. Examination (50%)
Exam Board: AQA - Shakespeare and the 19th Century Novel

Section A: Macbeth - closed book exam
Shakespeare: One question on the play. Students will be required to write in detail about an extract from the play and then to write about the play as a whole.
Section B: Pride and Prejudice/A Christmas Carol - closed book exam
The 19th Century Novel: One question on the novel. Students will be required to write in detail about an extract from the novel and then to write about the novel as a whole.

GCSE English Literature Paper 2: 1 hour 45 minutes. Examination (50%)
Exam Board: AQA - Modern Texts and Poetry

Section A: An Inspector Calls - closed book exam
Modern texts: One essay question from a choice of two on the studied modern drama text.
Section B: Love and Relationships Poetry - closed book exam
Poetry: One comparative question on one named poem printed on the paper and one other poem from the anthology cluster you studied.
Section C: Unseen poetry
One question on one unseen poem and one question comparing this poem with a second unseen poem.

English Language (Edexcel)

Through studying IGCSE English, students will develop their ability to appreciate how both literary and non-fiction texts use techniques to communicate meaning, and thus become independent critical readers. In addition, the course will give them opportunities to think both creatively and reflectively, developing their ability to evaluate, redraft, and improve their work. The critical discussion of texts promotes collaborative learning, enabling students to operate as part of a team, show leadership and explore how to challenge and extend their peers' ideas. By the end of the course, students will express themselves confidently, accurately, and lucidly in both speaking and writing. These skills are the basis for study in the Sixth Form and beyond and are essential for effective interaction in the workplace. The study of English in texts from a range of cultures, enhances students' understanding of the world around them and encourages a balanced informed, open-minded response. Throughout the course, students will:

- Develop skills to analyse how writers use linguistics and structural devices to achieve their effects.
- Explore links and connections between writers' ideas and perspectives.
- Develop transactional writing skills for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- Use spelling, punctuation and grammar accurately.

IGCSE English Language Paper 1: 2 hours 15 minutes. Examination (60%)
Exam Board: Pearson Edexcel

Section A: Reading
Short/long-answer questions related to non-fiction text from Part 1 of the Anthology and one unseen extract.

Section B: Transactional Writing
One 45-mark transactional writing task, from a choice of two involving a given audience, form or purpose.

IGCSE English Language Paper 2: 1 hour 30 minutes. Examination (40%)
Exam Board: Pearson Edexcel

Section A: Reading
Long-answer question related to fiction text from Part 2 of the Anthology.
Section B: Creative Writing
One 30-mark creative writing task, from a choice of three.

Edexcel Functional Skills
A select group of students will be identified to study the coursework option of the Edexcel IGCSE English Language course, and may take a Functional Skills course alongside this to support their learning at GCSE. This is a separate award delivered via an integrated course. This combination will hopefully enable these students to access the content of the GCSE specifications in the most successful way possible in order to learn, progress and gain GCSE English qualifications. A decision to enter students for the Functional Skills in English will be made in collaboration with department staff, parents and the student. It may be that if this pathway is followed, students will not be entered for GCSE Literature.

Mathematics (Edexcel)

Students at St Mary's will be sitting the Edexcel IGCSE examination. The new GCSE was given a major overhaul recently, emphasising problem- solving skills rather than testing the mathematical ability of a student. Despite the IGCSE being subject to the same changes, the style of questioning remains user-friendly and therefore far more accessible, allowing students to show off their mathematical skills. Additionally, it is very similar to the Edexcel GCSE syllabus.

The study of Mathematics at IGCSE level continues to be essential preparation for A Level work in many different subjects. Even for those who do not use Mathematics beyond Year 11, this is recognised as a vitally important qualification, and girls at St Mary's have a tradition of not only responding positively to the many challenges of the subject but also enjoying them.

The new IGCSE is very similar in style compared to the GCSE specification. The questions a re designed to encourage students to think more for themselves. More specifically, it aims to enable students to learn how to reason, communicate, and problem-solve in a range of mathematical contexts.

Although a few topics have been removed from the curriculum, making space for many new concepts, the essentials of Mathematics remain the same - the learning of skills and the training of minds to enable us to solve the problems of the world.

There are two tiers of entry – Higher and Foundation Level - both of which will be on offer to our girls.

Higher Tier candidates can achieve a Grade 3 - 9
Foundation Tier candidates can achieve a Grade 1 - 5

All examinations have to be taken at the end of the course. There are two papers to be taken, both of which require a calculator:

Paper 1 – Calculator; 2 hours = 100 marks
Paper 2 – Calculator; 2 hours = 100 marks

Both papers cover the whole specification and have a range of questions covering the following topics: Number, Algebra, Geometry and Measures, Statistics and Probability.

Biology (AQA)

Biology is the study of living organisms and life processes.

What does the course cover?

Students will study a range of topics covering the mechanisms supporting plants and animal life. These include:

- Cell Biology
- Enzymes and Digestion
- Disease
- Photosynthesis and Respiration
- Nerves, Hormones and Homeostasis
- Inheritance and Evolution
- Ecology

What skills do you develop as part of this course?

Most importantly you will develop a passion for the amazing living world!

You will also develop:

- Knowledge and understanding of key areas of biology and its application
- Confidence in a variety of practical skills and understanding of the scientific method
- Problem solving and analytical skills plus an understanding of the relationship between data, evidence and explanations
- Understanding of how society makes decisions about scientific issues

Assessment, Structure and Components?

The assessment for this course consists of two papers, each 1 hour and 45 minutes, sat in the summer of Year 11. Each paper is worth 50% of the available marks.

The exam board also sets eight required practical activities that students must complete which will expose them to a range of practical techniques and applications. These are part of the many practical activities we undertake with students.

Next Steps with this GCSE?

Studying science is important to show analytical skills. Careers in the Biological Sciences have massively increased in recent years as technology has progressed research, medicine and healthcare. There are over 400 Biology related degrees available in the UK.

Chemistry (AQA)

GCSE Chemistry helps students explore the building blocks of matter and the reactions that shape our world, from the air we breathe to the materials we use every day. Chemistry deepens understanding of the natural and industrial processes that impact our lives, fostering curiosity and informed decision-making.

What does the course cover?
Students will study a range of topics thinking about different materials and where and how they are used. The topics they covered in Year 9 on Atomic Structure and Structure and Bonding underpin the rest of the course.

Topics in Chemistry:
·Atomic Structure
·Rate and Extent of Chemical Change
·Structure and Bonding
·Organic Chemistry
·Quantitative Chemistry
·Chemical Analysis
·Chemical Changes
·Chemistry of the Atmosphere
·Energy Changes
·Using the Earth's Resources

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
Most importantly we hope you will develop a passion for understanding how the materials we have around us work! You should also develop:

- Knowledge and understanding of key areas of Chemistry and its application
- Confidence in a variety of practical skills and understanding the scientific method.
- Problem solving and analytical skills plus an understanding of the relationships between data, evidence and explanations
- Understanding of how society makes decisions about scientific issues.
- Relevant mathematical skills which will include problem solving and an appreciation for sizes of objects.

Assessment Structure and Components?
The assessment for this course consists of two papers, each 1 hour and 45 minutes, sat in the summer of Year 11. Each paper is worth 50% of the available marks. The exam board also sets eight required practical tasks that students must complete. These will expose them to a range of practical techniques and applications. These form part of the many practical activities we undertake with students.

Next Steps with this GCSE?
Studying Chemistry GCSE is essential preparation for Chemistry A Level. Chemistry is a subject which teaches you the skills needed in a wide variety of jobs; some possible careers include materials science, food science or a career in chemical engineering. It is taken by many students hoping to study Medicine or Veterinary Medicine at university.

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Physics (AQA)

Physics is the study of physical processes from the very large to the very small.

What does the course cover?

Students will study a range of topics including:

- Energy Stores and Energy Resources
- Current, Electricity and Electrostatics
- The Particle Model, Density and Gas Laws
- Atomic Structure and Radioactivity
- Forces and Motion
- Wave Mechanics and Electromagnetic Waves
- Magnetism and Electromagnetism
- Astrophysics and Cosmology

What skills do you develop as part of this course?

Physics helps you to understand how the world works and means you can explain it to all your friends and family. You will also develop:

- Knowledge and understanding of key areas of Physics and its application
- Confidence in a variety of practical skills and understanding the scientific method
- Problem solving and analytical skills plus understanding of the relationships between data, evidence and explanations
- Understanding of how society makes decisions about scientific issues

Assessment, Structure and Components?

The assessment for this course consists of two papers each 1 hour and 45 minutes, sat in the summer of Year 11. Each paper is worth 50% of the available marks.
The Exam Board also sets eight required practical tasks that students must complete which will expose them to a range of practical techniques and applications. These are part of the many practical activities we undertake with students.

Next Steps with this GCSE?

Physics opens the doors for a wide range of careers – it shows potential employers that you have an analytical mind and good practical skills. Popular with students are engineering degree courses, including mechanical, civil, electrical and chemical engineering. Other courses that look for GCSE and A Level Physics include Audiology, Architecture, Computer Science and Games Development, Climate Science, Astronomy, Geoscience and Meteorology to name just a few. Finally, the numerical skills you develop also help with careers in Economics and Finance.







Art and Design - Fine Art (Edexcel)

What type of student should study this course?
Students wishing to study a subject that encourages self-expression and creativity and build self-confidence as well as a sense of individual identity. Students wishing to be creative - as this can help with wellbeing and improve health and happiness, and can act as an outlet for releasing the pressures of studying as well as those of everyday life. Students wishing to develop their critical thinking and ability to interpret the world around them.

What does the course cover?
Students will develop ideas for their work by drawing from direct experience and their own imagination and by referring to the work of other artists and designers. They will also explore using a variety of media and are expected to refine and modify their ideas in order to produce outcomes that are highly individual and that show the students' skills to their advantage.

The course encourages students to use a variety of media including drawing, painting, printing, photography, working in 3D and other fine art practices, so that they have a broad range of skills to show off and select from when producing their portfolios of evidence.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
The aim of the Edexcel Art and Design course is to develop visual perception and understanding including the creative, imaginative and practical skills for working in Art, Craft and Design and to develop an appreciation for the diverse richness of our cultural artistic heritage through practical and critical responses. It is an exciting time for students to be able to develop independence in their creative studies; they are given opportunities to explore art works first hand and to experiment with developing and recording their own personal artistic styles.

Assessment Structure and Components?
Unit 1- Personal Portfolio – 60% - This is based on work created during the whole of Year 10 and the Michaelmas term of Year 11. Typically, it consists of two larger projects, one chosen and directed by the teacher, and one self-directed and supported by the teacher.

Unit 2 - Externally set Assignment- 40% - Students will be given a single word as a starting point which is supported by numerous visual and written sources of inspiration from the work of artists, craftspeople and designers, and from which they produce their own supporting work and person response in the 10 hour examination at the end of the course in April/May. Towards the end of the examination period, students will undertake a 10-hour, practical, unaided examination based on a study of their topic. This is marked by the school and then moderated, at the school, by a member of the examination board.

Next Steps with this GCSE?
This course is an excellent foundation for studying Textile Design, Fine Art and History of Art at A Level. Studying Art and Design helps to create a broad and balanced curriculum, which is an excellent foundation for any future. The transferable skills you will acquire, such as creativity, analysis and problem solving, complement a range of other subjects and careers.

Business Studies

What type of student should study this course?

- Those who enjoy communicating and explaining their ideas.
- Creative thinkers and decision-makers.
- Those with an interest in learning about the world of business through real and relevant companies.

What does the course cover?

Students will start by exploring the world of small businesses through the lens of an entrepreneur: How and why do businesses ideas come about? What makes a successful business? Students will learn how to develop an idea, spot an opportunity, and turn it into a successful business. The course facilitates an understanding of how to make a business effective, manage money, and see how the world around us affects small businesses and all the people involved.

The course then moves on to investigating business growth and how a business develops beyond the start-up phase. Students will learn about key business concepts, issues and decisions made when growing a business and working in a global business. Topics include: meeting customer needs, marketing, operational functions, and financial and human resource decisions. Students will explore how the wider world impacts the business as it grows.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?

With this qualification, students will understand the world of business and develop skills in:

- Making decisions and developing persuasive arguments
- Creative and practical problem solving
- Understanding data, finance, and communication methods

Assessment Structure and Components?

Paper 1 – 1 hour 45 minutes. 50% of the mark – This paper examines content from Theme 1
Paper 2 – 1 hour 45 minutes. 50% of the mark – This paper examines content from Theme 2
Each paper will consist of calculations, multiple-choice, short-answer, and extended-writing questions.

Theme 1

Topic 1.1 – Enterprise and entrepreneurship
Topic 1.2 – Spotting a business opportunity
Topic 1.3 – Putting a business idea into practice
Topic 1.4 – Making the business effective
Topic 1.5 – Understanding external influences on business

Theme 2

Topic 2.1 – Growing the business
Topic 2.2 – Making marketing decisions
Topic 2.3 – Making production decisions
Topic 2.4 – Making financial decisions
Topic 2.5 – Making human resources decisions

Next Steps with this GCSE?

Analytical skills developed will prepare students for a wide range of A Level courses. It, of course, provides a great stepping stone to studying A Level Business or A Level Economics. It can also help prepare for entrepreneurial roles and gives an understanding of what is involved in a business-related profession such as accountancy, law, marketing or the leisure and tourism industry. Whatever career path you choose there will always be elements of business in it.

Computer Science (Cambridge)

What type of student should study this course?
The IGCSE Computer Science course is perfect for students who are curious about how technology works and eager to develop logical thinking and programming skills. It combines creativity with problem-solving, giving students the tools to design, code, and understand the systems that power our digital world.

What does the course cover?
The CIE IGCSE Computer Science syllabus allows students to study principles and practices of computing and gain confidence in computational thinking and programming. They learn to program by writing computer code and develop their understanding of the main principles of problem-solving using computers. Students apply their understanding to develop computer-based solutions to problems using algorithms and a high-level programming language, for example Java. They also develop a range of technical skills, as well as the ability to test effectively and evaluate computing solutions.

This qualification helps students appreciate current and emerging computing technologies and the benefits of their use. They learn to recognise the ethical issues and potential risks when using computers.

The skills learnt will be useful to them in their work across the curriculum and will prepare them for future employment.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
The aims are to enable students to develop:

- Computational thinking skills
- An understanding of the main principles of solving problems using computers
- The skills necessary to solve computer-based problems using a high-level programming language
- An understanding of the parts of a computer system and how they interrelate
- An understanding of the Internet as a means of communication and its associated risks
- An understanding of the development and use of automated and emerging technologies

Assessment Structure and Components?
Paper 1: Computer Systems – 50%
Written examination: 1 hour 45 minutes
Paper 2: Algorithms, Programming and Logic – 50%
Written examination: 1 hour 45 minutes

Next Steps with this GCSE?
The course provides an excellent stepping stone to A Level Computer Science, but its benefits go far beyond that. Students develop logical thinking, problem-solving, and computational skills that are highly valued in many fields—not just technology. These abilities underpin careers in science, engineering, finance, and data analysis, as well as roles in emerging areas like cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Even if students choose a different path later, the capacity to think critically and solve complex problems will serve them well in any profession.

Dance (AQA)

What type of student should study this course?
The GCSE Dance course is ideal for able dancers who are both practically strong and academically able. The students need to be passionate about dance and enjoy creating, performing, and watching dance.

What does the course cover?
This course acknowledges the important role that dance plays in young people's lives, and students will study a range of dance styles that acknowledge aspects of the repertoire of dance for theatre that can be seen in the United Kingdom today.

- Safe Practice -Students will develop knowledge and understanding of health, fitness, and safe working practices relevant to performing and choreographing dances.
- Choreography – Students will learn the art of creating their own dances.
- Critical Appreciation -Students will demonstrate their ability to appreciate and critique dance, developing knowledge and understanding of the work of different choreographers and professional dance work.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
Dance is a powerful and empowering form of nonverbal communication which is both physical and expressive, and it develops creative, imaginative, emotional, and intellectual capacities. Studying AQA GCSE Dance students will learn to choreograph, perform, and appreciate dance as an art form. They will also develop key life skills and attributes including decision-making, critical and creative thinking, and the ability to cooperate with others.

Assessment Structure and Components?
Component 1: Performance and Choreography – practical examination (60%)
Performance

- Set phrases through a solo performance (approximately one minute in duration).
- Duet/trio performance (three and a half minutes in duration).

Choreography

- Solo or group choreography – a solo (two to two and a half minutes) or a group dance for two to five dancers (three to three and a half minutes).

Component 2: Dance Appreciation – written examination (40%)
What's assessed:

- Knowledge and understanding of choreographic processes and performing skills.
- Critical appreciation of own work.
- Critical appreciation of professional works.

Next Steps with this GCSE?
The course provides an ideal stepping stone for A Level Dance and is a valuable foundation for many other subjects. Possible future careers include performing, teaching and choreography and community dance.
There are also many other types of jobs related to dance in areas such as costume, technical aspects of theatre, journalism, therapy and notation.

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Drama (AQA)

What type of student should study this course?
If you enjoy a challenge and love to create and perform theatre, and always strive to improve, then you will make a terrific Drama student! You must also be able to have fun, look foolish occasionally and work as a team, as well as be capable of working independently. You should enjoy watching theatre, as well as be able to analyse and evaluate theatre, both orally and in written work.

What does the course cover?
Drama GCSE offers opportunities in both practical and theoretical study. You will explore different plays and styles of performance. You will also direct others in smaller and larger groups as well as offer constructive criticism to explore how theatre makers create effective performances.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
As your studies progress your understanding of the art form and of world issues outside the theatre will improve, and you will expand your knowledge of practitioners and plays. Drama will also greatly enhance your analytical and evaluative writing skills.

Assessment Structure and Components?
Component 1 – The Written Examination (40% of the overall grade)
The written paper is taken at the end of Year 11 and will ask you to provide answers based on the knowledge and understanding gathered throughout the course. You will answer questions based on: your knowledge of theatre, a play we study and a live play we have seen.

You will watch several plays over the two years and will take notes throughout the performances. You will then be asked questions about "a performance you have seen". Your answer can therefore be based on any live performance that we have seen. This allows you to choose the one that you have found to be of particular interest.

Component 2 – The Devised Performance (40% of overall grade)
You will work as a group to perform a piece of devised theatre. You will be given a choice of stimuli and will choose the one which interests you the most. The piece can be based on any genre or style of theatre you wish. As you create your piece, you will take notes and gather ideas; your Devising Log. This will be marked to show how you have created your drama and the challenges you overcame on your way to creating it. It can be filmed and edited into a short film, be written, or be in scrapbook form.

Component 3 – The Extracts (20% of overall grade)
The final component is a chance for you to perform extracts from a published playwright. You can perform a monologue or work in groups to perform two short extracts from a particular play. You will study the play as a whole so that you understand it entirely, but you will just need to present the short extracts to an external examiner.

Next Steps with this GCSE?
The skills you gain in confidence, presentation skills, empathy, team working and problem solving will support you in many different further study and career paths.

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Food and Nutrition (AQA)

What type of student should study this course?
Students with a passion for food and catering, who love learning about how the food we eat affects the health of our body and mind, will really enjoy this GCSE. The course combines creativity with science, teaching practical cooking skills alongside an understanding of nutrition, health, and the food industry

What does the course cover?
- Food, Nutrition and Health
- Food Science
- Food Safety
- Food Choice
- Food Provenance

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
This is a practical subject and around half of your lessons will involve the handling and cooking of food. You will be expected to work with others when evaluating and solving problems. You will also need to work independently on your non-examination assessed work, so it is important that you can organise and manage your time well.

Assessment Structure and Components?
Part 1 – Written Examination – 50%
covering theoretical food preparation and nutrition knowledge from sections 1 to 5 above.
1 hour 45 minutes – 100 marks
(20 marks = multiple choice, 80 marks = short paragraph and essay style questions.)

Part 2 – Non-exam assessment (NEA) – 50%
Task 1: Food investigation – a 1500–2000 word report including photographic evidence of a practical investigation. This will test your understanding of the working characteristics, and functional and chemical properties of ingredients. Practical investigations are the main tool of this NEA task. You will work as part of a group to solve food science related problems.
Task 2: Food preparation assessment – Written portfolio including photographic evidence of practical work. Practical skills are assessed in a three-hour practical examination. This will test your knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to: planning, preparation, cooking, presentation food and application of nutrition related to the chosen task. You will be required to prepare, cook and present a final menu of three dishes in a three-hour practical examination.

Next Steps with this GCSE?
You can continue to study Food Science and Nutrition in Sixth Form and onto degree level. A Food qualification can lead to a range of career opportunities within the food industry such as: food product development, food technology, dietetics, sports nutrition, hotel and catering management, retailing, recipe and product development, teaching or the environmental health service. This qualification supports knowledge gleaned from GCSE Science, Physical Education, Geography and Religious Studies.

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Geography (AQA)

What type of student should study this course?
If you have an interest in the world, its people and current affairs then Geography is the subject for you! You must be willing to work hard and complete all tasks set, as well as following current affairs in the world around you.

What does the course cover?
The course covers a wide range of Human and Physical Geography topics building upon ideas and concepts studied in Years 7 to 9, and introducing new topics that will further expand students' understanding. Students will investigate many of the major issues that currently face us as citizens of the world as we look ahead to the challenges of the future. Geographers develop an understanding of global citizenship, the ways in which places and environments are interdependent, and the importance of sustainable development in these interactions.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
Students will not only gain a better understanding about the world around them but will also develop a wide range of key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT and transferable skills such as the ability to research, critically analyse and evaluate.

Assessment Structure and Components?

Unit 1 – Living with the Physical Environment
35% of total marks, 1 hour 30 minutes examination. Topics to be studied are:
· The challenge of Natural Hazards including tectonic and weather hazards
· The Living World, including tropical rainforests and desert ecosystems
· Physical Landscapes in the UK created by rivers and ice

Unit 2 – Challenges in the Human Environment
35% of total marks, 1 hour 30 minutes examination. Topics to be studied are:
· Urban Issues and Challenges
· The Changing Economic World
· The Challenge of Resource Management with an in-depth study on water resources.

Unit 3 – Geographical Applications
30% of total marks, 1 hour 15 minutes examination There are two sections to this examination: Issue evaluation: This section focuses on critical thinking and problem solving. A pre-release is given 12 weeks before the examination; students will be required to use this information and their geographical skills to complete a decision-making exercise.

Fieldwork
Understanding of the enquiry process will be assessed through questions based on girls' fieldwork/enquiry work.

Fieldwork is an important component of the GCSE course and all students are required to complete a minimum of two enquiries out in the field. These fieldtrips will incur an additional cost.

Next Steps with this GCSE?
A Level Geography – highly valued qualification that is well respected by universities and employers. Geography is also closely related to careers in environmental or climate science, meteorology and geology.

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History (Edexcel)

What type of student should study this course?

History is perfect for those students who love to ask questions and to look at issues from different points of view. There is a lot of debate on this course and during the two-years there are continuous opportunities to discuss and compare opinions. History contains a lot of critical thinking, challenging sources and commonly held ideas. This is also a great subject for those with a flair for verbal and written communication. Above all, History is about being curious and inquisitive about who we are and where we have come from.

The Development of Dictatorship: Germany 1918-45

- The establishment of the Weimar Republic and its early problems
- The recovery of Germany 1924-1929
- The Rise of Hitler and the Nazis
- Life in Nazi Germany
- The impact of the Second World War on Germany

Progress in the mid-19th century

- Discovery and development 1960-1975
- Accelerating change, 1875-1905
- Government action and war, 1905-1920
- Advances in medicine and public health, 1920-1948

Superpower Relations and the Cold War 1941 - 1991

- The origins of the Cold War – 1941-1958
- Cold War Crises – 1958-1970
- The end of the Cold War – 1970 - 1991

Early Elizabethan England 1558- 1588

- Queen, government and religion – 1558-1569
- Challenges to Elizabeth at home and abroad – 1569-1588
- Elizabethan Society in the Age of Exploration – 1558-1588

What skills do you develop as part of this course?

Critical thinking, source analysis, debating, comparative/relative significance, extend writing to create balanced arguments, research skills and techniques.

Assessment Structure and Components?

Paper 1 – 1 hour 15 minutes assessing Medicine Through Time Paper 2 – 1 hour and 45 minutes assessing Early Elizabethan England and Superpower Relations.
Paper 3 - 1 hour and 20 minutes assessing Weimar and Nazi Germany.

Next Steps with this GCSE?

The natural next step is to study the subject at A Level and then university. The skills developed at GCSE complement the study of Politics, Sociology and Psychology at A Level. Many of the most famous faces in the media and politics have a background in History and studying it can lead to wide-ranging careers such as in the legal profession, museum curatorship, journalism or publishing.

St Mary's School
Gerrards Cross

Media Studies (OCR)

What type of student should study this course?
You should have an interest in how the media influences society and how media conglomerates operate. Representations of gender and ethnicity feature prominently so you should be interested in the problematic ways in which such groups are represented or under-represented in various media contexts. You should also have an interest in creating media products - video and print-based - and learning how to use editing software such as Final Cut and Photoshop.

What does the course cover?
Media Studies equips you with the skills needed to critically analyse these texts/media forms and explore the hidden messages within them - including political bias as well as a sexist and racist ideology. In lessons, you will explore four key concepts: media language, institution, audience and representation, as well as the contexts in which media texts are made. You will also gain practical experience in web and graphic design, as well as photography and image manipulation, using industry-standard software and equipment.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
Analytical Skills, practical design, and ICT skills.

Assessment Structure and Components?
The course consists of three components, two of with are assessed by written examinations:

Component 1: Exploring the Media Analysing set texts, including newspapers, magazine covers, film posters and adverts, applying all key concepts.
(1 hour 30 minute written examination - 40%)

Component 2: Understanding Media Forms and Products Analysing set television and radio programmes as well as websites and video game promotion, applying a range of key concepts.
(1 hour 30 minute written examination - 30%)

Component 3: Creating Media Products Plan, research and create your own media production, including film posters, websites, or magazine content.
(Non-examination assessment - completed in class - 30%)

Next Steps with this GCSE?
The analytical skills you will develop will benefit your study of English, as well as prepare you for a range of A Level courses including; Media Studies, English Language/Literature, Politics and Sociology. You will also gain practical design and ICT skills, which you can use in a variety of careers, for instance marketing, advertising as well as graphic and web-design.

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MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES (EDEXCEL)

Students may choose one or two Modern Foreign Languages from French, German and Spanish. Students can only select German or Spanish if they have studied this language in Years 8 and 9.

The aims of each Language course:

- To develop the ability to communicate confidently and successfully with native speakers in speech and writing.
- To listen to and understand clearly articulated standard speech at near-normal speed.
- To deepen knowledge about how language works and enrich vocabulary in order to increase independent use and understanding of extended language in a wide range of contexts.
- To acquire new knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking through the ability to understand and respond to a rich range of authentic spoken and written material, adapted and abridged, as appropriate, including literary texts.
- To develop awareness and understanding of the culture and identity of the countries and communities where the language is spoken.
- To develop language-learning skills both for immediate use and in preparation for further language study and use in higher education, employment and leisure.

There are four externally examined papers based on the four key language skills:
Each paper is available at Foundation tier or Higher tier. Students must be entered for a single tier across all papers.

Paper 1 – Speaking – 25%	Paper 2 – Listening and Understanding – 25%	Paper 3 Reading and Understanding – 25%	Paper 4 – Writing – 25%
The ability to communicate and interact effectively in the language for different purposes and is assessed through a read aloud task, a role play, and picture-based task.	Understanding of standard spoken language by one or more speakers in a range of public and social settings is assessed through multiple-response and short-answer open response questions. There is also a dictation task and students are assessed on their ability to transcribe the spoken language into written language.	Understanding of the written language across a range of different types of texts is assessed through multiple-response and short-answer questions. One task will involve translation from the target language into English.	The ability to communicate effectively through writing in the language for different purposes is assessed through extended responses of varying lengths and types to express ideas and opinions. One task will involve translation from English into the target language.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES (EDEXCEL)

Themes and topics

The course is organised into six themes, each broken down into topics and sub-topics:

- My Personal World
- Lifestyle and Wellbeing
- My Neighbourhood
- Media and Technology
- Studying and My Future
- Travel and Tourism

All themes and topics are studied in the context of both the students' home country and that of the countries and communities where the target language is spoken.

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Music (Edexcel)

What type of student should study this course?
Do you enjoy music? Do you listen to music? Do you enjoy singing or playing your instrument? If you can answer yes to all of these questions, then GCSE Music is for you! Taking GCSE Music is not an easy option but with hard work, students can create superb performances, imaginative compositions and develop a greater appreciation and understanding of a huge range of musical pieces. GCSE Music is aimed at all students who have an interest in music and who are able to sing or perform well.
Students should be taking singing or instrumental lessons and have a basic knowledge of music notation at the very least. However, musical ability, enthusiasm and an ability to work hard are the most important prerequisites.

What does the course cover?
The Edexcel GCSE Music course is very practical and is broadly divided into three areas: **Performing, Composing and Listening,** known as Appraising. Teaching time is shared between practical sessions, listening, music theory and composing.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
Students will develop their knowledge and understanding of a range of musical genres. They will experience this by listening, performing and composing in different styles. Students will gain confidence in performing, which is assessed regularly, and be able to compose to a high standard.

Assessment Structure and Components
Component 1: Performing (30%)
Students prepare one solo piece for performance and one group performance. The final recordings are made in Year 11 and the combined total time should be at least four minutes. Any instrument or voice is acceptable. It is useful to be about Grade 5 standard by the end of the course. These pieces are recorded and assessed by the teacher.
Component 2: Composing (30%)
Students compose two pieces of music either acoustically or by using the Sibelius software, which allows students to compose and listen to their work on a computer. The combined duration of these two pieces should be at least three minutes. These compositions are assessed by the teacher.
Component 3: Appraising (40%)
This takes the form of a listening examination at the end of the course, where students listen to recorded excerpts of music and answer questions which focus on listening skills related to eight set works. These set works range from a Beethoven Piano Sonata to a song from Wicked, with a Queen song, film music and musical fusions added into the mix!

Next Steps with this GCSE?
Musicians at this level demonstrate self-confidence, self-discipline and creativity, all character traits that are important to future employers. The ability to be part of an ensemble or group shows teamwork and the ability to work together on a project. The analytical, composing and performing skills learnt at GCSE can lead to the study of Music at A Level.

Physical Education (AQA)

What type of student should study this course?
You must be competing, or have the capacity to compete, in three activities either in school or externally — please discuss with your teacher if you have any questions.
You must have an interest in sport to undertake this course.

What does the course cover?
- Developing knowledge and understanding of a range of factors that may affect physical performance
- Gaining an insight into the functions of the human body
- Developing an understanding of what it means to lead a healthy and active lifestyle
- Identifying a range of socio-cultural factors that may affect participation
- Understanding how data analysis can be used in sport

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
You will develop skills in a wide range of sports that you might not have played before, as well as gain experience in leadership, teamwork, and resilience.

Assessment Structure and Components?
Paper 1: The Human Body and Movement in Physical Activity and Sport
What is assessed?
- Applied Anatomy and Physiology
- Movement Analysis
- Physical Training
- Use of Data

How is it assessed?
- Written examination: 1 hour 15 minutes
- Total: 78 marks
- 30% of the GCSE

Paper 2: Socio-cultural Influences and Wellbeing in Physical Activity and Sport
What is assessed?
- Sports Psychology
- Health, Fitness and Wellbeing
- Use of Data

How is it assessed?
- Written examination: 1 hour 15 minutes
- Total: 78 marks
- 30% of the GCSE

Practical Performance in Physical Activity and Sport
What is assessed?
- Students are assessed as a player/performer in three different activities
- Written/verbal analysis and evaluation of performance

How is it assessed?
- Internal assessment
- External moderation
- Total: 100 marks
- 40% of the GCSE

Next Steps with this GCSE?
Studying Physical Education GCSE is essential preparation for the A Level course. It is great for careers in sport, physiotherapy, coaching, nutrition, teaching, and many more.

Religions Studies (AQA)

What type of student should study this course?

- Those who are religious, agnostic or an atheist, and interested in understanding diverse beliefs, cultures, and world views
- Those who enjoy discussing moral issues, exploring different viewpoints, and asking big questions about life, religion, and society
- Those who like considering ethical perspectives and forming their own opinions, as well as analysing arguments and engaging in debate

What does the course cover?

You will study Christianity and Islam in depth, exploring their key beliefs, teachings, and practices. You'll also look at major ethical and philosophical themes, including relationships and families, peace and conflict, crime and punishment, and life issues (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, pollutions, etc.)

What skills do you develop as part of this course?

You will develop a range of skills as part of this course including:

- Critical thinking and the ability to analyse different viewpoints
- Structured writing and argument development
- Empathy and understanding of diverse beliefs and cultures
- Evaluation: weighing up evidence and forming justified conclusions

Assessment Structure and Components?

The course is 100% examination-based and is presented in a two-paper format, each worth 50% of the GCSE.

Paper 1: The Study of Religions – Beliefs, teachings, and practices of two selected religions – 1 hour 45 minutes.
Paper 2: Thematic Studies – Four themes on moral, ethical, and philosophical issues – 1 hour 45 minutes

Next Steps with this GCSE?

This GCSE provides a strong foundation for A Level Religious Studies, as well as a wide range of other subjects. It supports progression into a variety of university courses and careers, such as medicine, law, journalism, politics, education, social work, counselling, and roles within the public services. The GCSE is useful for a career that requires thought, empathy, an understanding of the wider world, and the ability to communicate clearly and confidently.

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Textile Design (Edexcel)

What type of student should study this course?
Textile Design is defined as the "creation of designs and products for woven, knitted, stitched, printed or decorative textiles that might have a functional or non-functional purpose." Development and recording of ideas underpin the course, so strong drawing skills are beneficial as a starting point.

What does the course cover?
As the course progresses, students must develop and apply their knowledge, understanding, and skills to realise personal intentions relevant to textile design and their selected area of study.

Through their own investigations, students will explore visual and tactile elements such as texture, pattern, decoration, and repetition. They will study the work of other artists, designers, and craftspeople in order to contextualise their own work and creative path.

Students will explore a variety of textile processes and media and are expected to refine and modify their ideas in order to produce outcomes that are highly individual and that show their skills to their advantage.

What skills do you develop as part of this course?
The Edexcel Textiles course encourages students to use a variety of techniques, including batik, felting, appliqué, construction techniques, and printing, so that they have a broad range of skills to exhibit and select from when producing their portfolios of evidence.

Assessment Structure and Components?
Unit 1: Personal Portfolio – 60%
This is based on work created during the whole of Year 10 and the Michaelmas term of Year 11. It typically consists of two larger projects: one chosen and directed by the teacher, and one self-directed and supported by the teacher.
Unit 2: Externally Set Assignment – 40%
Students will be given a single word as a starting point, which is supported by numerous visual and written sources of inspiration from the work of artists, craftspeople, and designers. From this, they will produce their own supporting work and personal response in a 10-hour examination at the end of the course in April/May.

Towards the end of the examination period, students will undertake a 10-hour, practical, unaided examination based on their study of their topic. This is marked by the school and then moderated, at the school, by a member of the examination board.

Next Steps with this GCSE?
This course is an excellent foundation for studying creative subjects at A Level, including Textile Design, Fine Art, and History of Art. Studying Textiles helps to create an inquisitive mind, encourages risk-taking, and assists in developing creative thinking, not to mention refining fine motor skills. These are all hugely transferable skills for many different careers.

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