



The Birley Academy
A L.E.A.D. Academy

KS4 OPTIONS

GCSE CURRICULUM GUIDE

Academic Year
2025/26



Lead • Empower • Achieve • Drive

Contents

| | | | |
|---|---|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 3 | Good Reasons for Choosing Subjects | 9 |
| GCSE Options - Guidance for Parents..... | 5 | Poor Reasons for Choosing Subjects | 10 |
| National Performance Measures | 7 | Careers Guidance | 10 |
| Further Guidance for Pupils..... | 8 | | |

Core & Non-Examined Subjects

| | | | |
|--------------------------|----|----------------------------------|----|
| English Language | 12 | Mathematics | 14 |
| English Literature | 13 | Combined Science (Trilogy) | 15 |

Non-Examined Core Subjects

| | | | |
|---------------------------|----|----------------|----|
| Physical Education | 16 | Computing..... | 16 |
| Religious Education | 16 | PSHEE | 16 |

Optional Subjects

| | | | |
|---------------------------|----|---------------------------------|----|
| Geography | 18 | Art..... | 26 |
| History | 19 | Art & Design: Photography | 27 |
| Religious Education | 20 | Food & Nutrition | 28 |
| Biology (Triple) | 21 | Resistant Materials | 29 |
| Chemistry (Triple) | 22 | Music (Performing Arts) | 30 |
| Physics (Triple)..... | 23 | Citizenship Studies..... | 31 |
| French..... | 24 | | |

Optional Vocational Subjects

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|-------------------------|----|
| Engineering Manufacturing | 34 | Sport Studies | 36 |
| Health and Social Care | 35 | Travel and Tourism..... | 37 |

Curriculum Choices and the Options Process

Dear parents/carers

The selection of optional subjects at GCSE is one of the most exciting and important moments in any child's secondary education.

We aim to ensure that the information and guidance provided will support you and your child in exploring what options are right for them. Their informed choices will lead to them fulfilling their potential and flourishing in the future.

This booklet will provide you with information about the various curriculum choices available as your child moves into Years 10 and 11. It also provides you with some general information about the qualifications we offer that are appropriate for this age group of pupils. Specific details about the courses we offer are also given.

At our options evening, we will give you and your child the opportunity to see the different range of course that are available to them. You will also be provided with opportunities to speak to the various subject staff about certain subjects.

Your child's options form will need to be completed in a timely manner. If for any reason you anticipate having difficulties completing the form by the deadline, please contact the academy by telephone and ask for a member of the leadership team to call you back.

Throughout the options process, the academy will be conducting a quality assurance review. This may mean that you are invited to attend a meeting with a member of the leadership team to review provisional option choices, career progression and learning pathways to best suit your child.

Pupils will receive final confirmation of their Key Stage 4 options during the Year 9 summer term.

Welcome to your GCSE Curriculum Guide

Dear pupil

Now that you are in Year 9, you are about to begin one of the most important and exciting stages of your education so far - choosing your GCSE subjects. This is an important step in your academy journey, and this booklet will help you understand the subjects you can choose, how the options process works and how to decide what's right for you.

Over the next two years, you will study a combination of core subjects and optional subjects that you select. These choices will shape your learning journey through Years 10 and 11, and likely influence your future education, training, and career pathway.

Choosing your GCSE options can feel like a big decision, but you will get lots of help. Your teachers, tutor, careers advisors and parents or carers are all here to support you. In this booklet, you'll find clear information about each subject, what you'll learn, how it's assessed, and what careers it could lead to in the future.

Take your time reading it. Think about what you enjoy, what you're good at, and what you might want to do after you leave secondary school. Choose subjects that will keep you motivated and help you do your best.

We wish you the very best as you take this exciting step forward in your education.

GCSE OPTIONS

GUIDANCE FOR PUPILS AND PARENTS

The options process is about your qualifications and your future.

The national curriculum requires all pupils in Years 10 and 11 to study:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Computing
- Physical Education (PE)
- Citizenship

Schools must also offer at least one subject from each of these areas:

- Humanities
- Modern Foreign Languages
- Design and Technology
- Arts

They must also provide:

- Religious Education
- Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSE)

At our academy, this is organised as follows:

- English Language
- English Literature
- Mathematics
- Science (Combined Science Trilogy or Triple Science: Biology, Chemistry and Physics if opted for)
- Core PE (non-examined)
- Computing (non-examined)
- Religious Education (non-examined)
- Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHEE) which includes RSE, Citizenship and Careers (non-examined)
- Option programme

In addition to the taught PSHEE lessons, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development will also be covered through various curriculum areas, in assemblies and in events. The academy has mapped its SMSC provision in detail to ensure pupils receive a high-quality education in these areas.

Across the curriculum, there are opportunities for pupils to use information technology to enhance the work they are doing in the various subject areas.

Pupils will access at least two hours of PE fortnightly as part of their curriculum provision. In addition, the PE department offers a variety of other physical activities that will enable pupils to understand how to fulfil a healthy active lifestyle during school and after they leave education.

A full, and growing, programme of co-curricular activities is on offer that support the core curriculum provision. These activities are open to every pupil.

Choosing a Combination of Subjects

At our academy, we try to ensure that pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum up to the age of 16. This means ensuring that pupils study a full range of different subjects up to the age of 16. For example, the core subjects of English, mathematics and science along with a humanity, a language, an arts subject and one other.

Studying a range of subjects is one way of recognising achievement across a set of academic GCSE subjects. Having qualifications in a range of subjects will help pupils to keep their options open for further study and a range of future career pathways.

At present, universities are continuing to base their offers on Level 3 qualifications. Competition for places for some universities and courses has meant that they are looking at GCSE grades, and subjects studied, in some cases.

Why study a language?

Languages give young people a competitive advantage

Studying a foreign language can be extremely rewarding and exciting. It provides an insight into other cultures and can open the door to travel and employment opportunities. It can also broaden pupils' horizons, helping them flourish in new environments.

If your child finds language difficult, don't forget that they will have been studying them for much less time than their other subjects and while it can be a challenge, learning a language will greatly enhance their future opportunities.

What's more, we know that employers value languages, as they are increasingly important to make sure we can compete in the global market. Because of this, languages are increasingly becoming a requirement for many graduate schemes, such as those offered by Lidl.



The Russell Group has named languages as subjects that open doors to more degrees at universities."

The Russell Group is a group of 24 universities with a shared focus on research and a reputation for academic achievement



"Having language skills under your belt will help make you stand out from the crowd, whether you're applying for an entry level position, a management role or an internal transfer."

Steve Cassidy,
Senior Vice President & Managing Director, UK & Ireland, Hilton

National Performance Measures

GCSE Grading

In 2017 a new grading scheme was brought in alongside a new GCSE curriculum in England. The highest grade is 9, while 1 is the lowest, not including a U (ungraded).

The numerical grades apply to all subjects. There is no exact equivalence between the old and new GCSEs. However, grades 7 and above are roughly equivalent to the old grades A-A*, and grades 4-6 are roughly equivalent to the old grades C-B.

School performance tables report the percentage of pupils who achieve a 'strong pass' (5 or above) in both English (Language or Literature) and maths.

| Current grades | Old grades equivalent |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 9 | A* |
| 8 | |
| 7 | |
| 6 | B |
| 5 | |
| 4 | |
| 3 | D |
| 2 | |
| 1 | |
| U | |

Table: 9 to 1 grading scale compared to previous A* to G scale (source www.gov.uk)

Progress 8 and Attainment 8

Progress 8

This is a measure of how much progress children make between the end of primary school and the end of secondary school. It is designed to encourage good quality teaching across the curriculum.

This measure is calculated across a pupils' best eight subjects which must include the following: English Language and Literature; mathematics; three optional subjects (usually the sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages); and three further subjects. English and maths are double weighted in this calculation to reflect their importance.

Attainment 8

This is a measure that shows how well a pupil has performed across their GCSE subjects at the end of Year 11. It is based on a pupil's best eight results. Attainment 8 helps give an overall picture of a pupil's GCSE achievement across a broad and balanced curriculum and is used alongside Progress 8 to understand both attainment and progress.

GCSE OPTIONS

FURTHER GUIDANCE FOR PUPILS AND PARENTS

The options process is about your qualifications and your future.

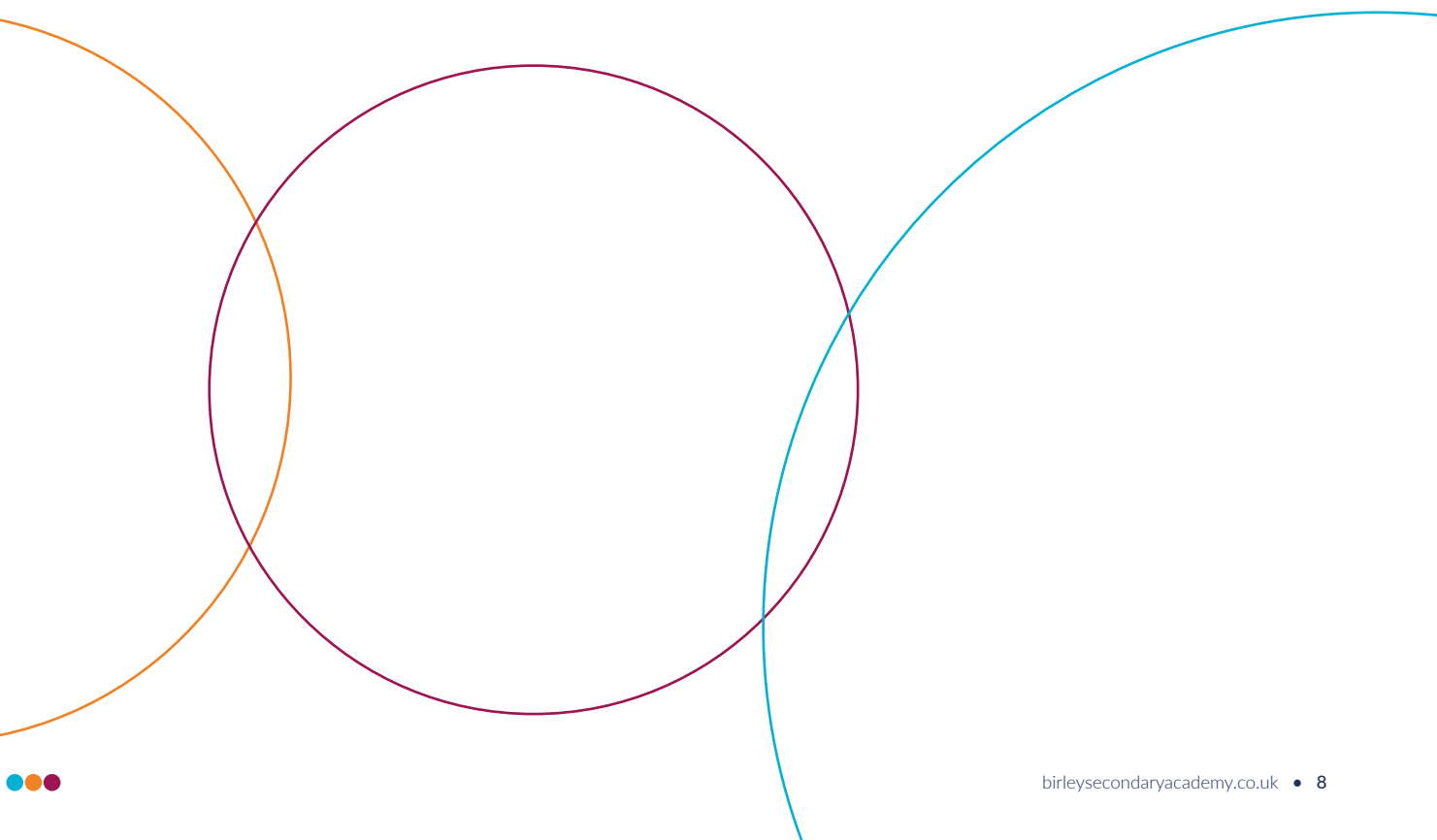
As part of our options process, it is anticipated that most pupils will pick up to four option choices. Pupils must aim to choose at least one subject from each of the following families of subjects: humanities and languages.

Our option blocks are not rigid, but they provide a guide as to how most pupils will successfully decide on the right balance of option choices. We pride ourselves on our individual care and personalised curriculum offer where possible.

Some courses may not run if the numbers of pupils picking the subject are too small or staffing difficulties arise. Likewise, some subjects are limited by facilities and resources. Therefore, we need to impose maximum group sizes and numbers of classes. Due to this, we ask that all our pupils pick two reserve subjects. We will, however, do our very best to satisfy as many of our pupils' option choices as possible.

GCSE Options

You are now approaching a very important stage of your education where key decisions need to be made. It is important that you think carefully about these choices as they will have an impact on later decisions you might want to make about potential level 3 courses (A Level/equivalents), apprenticeships and ultimately about university routes should that be your preference. And, of course, the world of work.



GOOD REASONS FOR CHOOSING SUBJECTS



Build on success:

- Choose subjects in which you feel you will do well.
- Use your school reports/and teacher consultation to help you make an informed choice.



Go for motivation:

- Choose subjects which interest you.
- You are then likely to work hard and do well.



Choose subjects which match your learning needs:

- Some pupils prefer a course with a large quantity of 'project' work and independent learning, others prefer exams.
- Think about what type of assessment suits you best. Do you do better with coursework, or do you prefer written exams? Different courses will suit different pupils because of the way they are assessed.
- Look carefully at subject areas in which you are successful and at new courses that you have not studied at school so far.



Think about your future career:

- Try to consider a balance of subjects. You might have ideas about your future, but you could change your mind! That is why we offer a broad curriculum which keeps options for the future open.

We want to make sure that you are educated in a way that means you can adapt to changes during your working lives and respond to future opportunities. Use the internet to find out which subjects are required for any career you might be interested in.

If you do have an idea about the specific career you want to follow, check out the qualifications you need.



Beyond 16

You will be expected to stay in some form of education or training beyond the age of 16.

Many pupils will move onto a Sixth Form, where the courses cater for a wide range of ability and interests; however, a college or employment with training is also an option for many pupils.

Some pupils will continue their education and training at college or with an employer.

Ask for advice from your teachers, parents and other pupils.

POOR REASONS FOR CHOOSING SUBJECTS GCSE OPTIONS

AVOID CHOOSING A GCSE SUBJECT JUST BECAUSE...



"My friend is doing it."

It might not suit you and you may not be in the same class.



"My parents liked it at school."

Subjects change and your strengths and interests may be different.



"It sounds interesting."

Always find out more first, ask questions, speak to teachers, read the course guide.



"I don't know what else to pick."

Pick something that genuinely interests you, supports your strengths and future plans.



"I like my current teacher."

There is no guarantee that you'll have them next year – focus on the subject, not the teacher.



"It has less exams."

Subjects with lots of coursework or rehearsals also require consistent effort and time commitments.



"I think I need it for my career."

Check requirements carefully, do not assume. Ask for advice before committing.

GCSE OPTIONS



We're committed to helping every pupil build the skills they need for future success – whether in further study, training, or employment. The GCSE options they choose at 14, and later at 16 and 18, play a key role in shaping those pathways.

Some pupils will already have a clear direction, while others may need more support and guidance. Whatever the journey, our priority is to ensure every pupil has the right information to make confident, informed choices that reflect their strengths, interests, and aspirations.


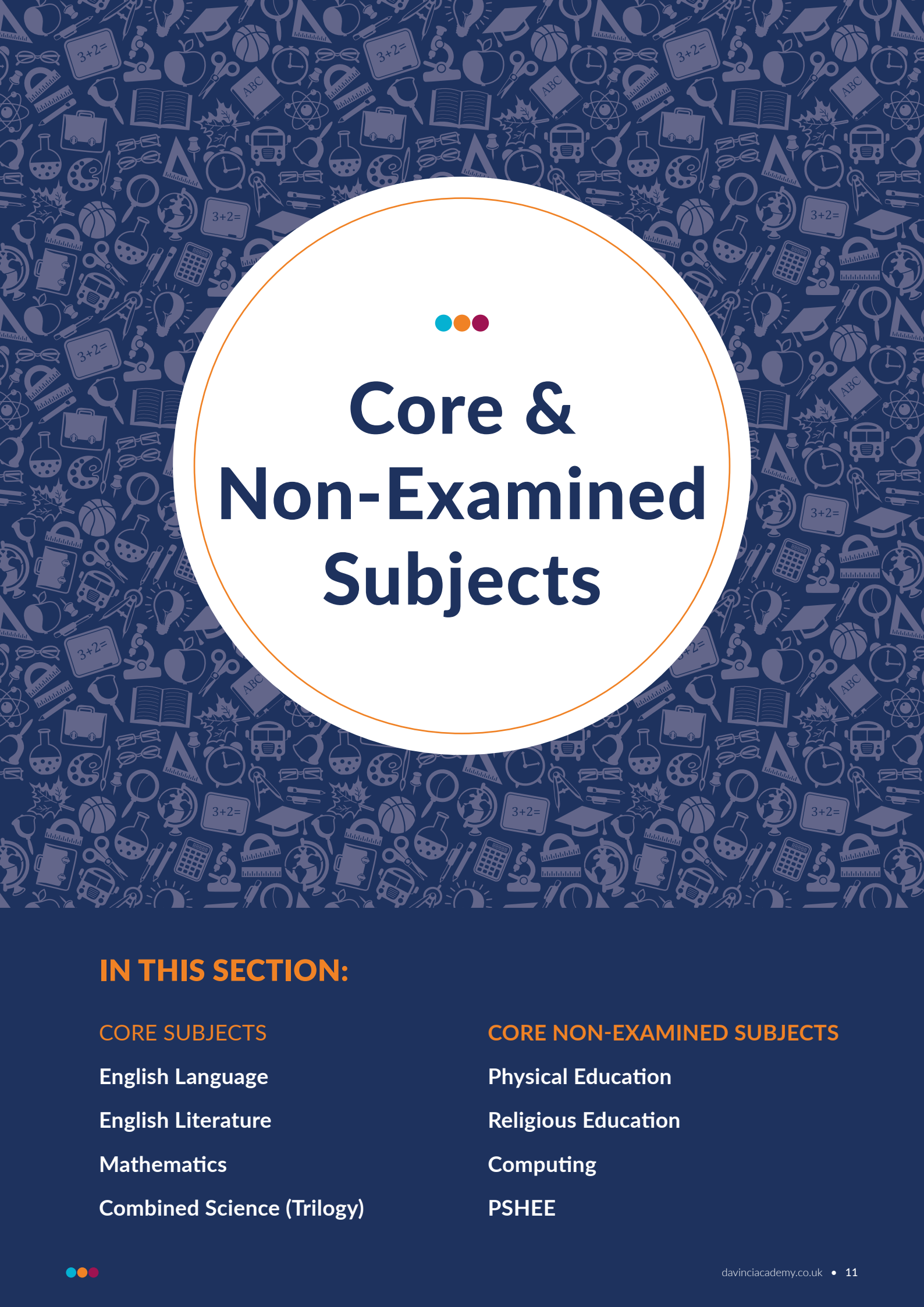
CAREERS GUIDANCE



Careers guidance is a key part of our provision for pupils and families as they make important choices at Key Stage 4 and beyond.

From Years 7 to 9, pupils have explored careers through form time, lessons, activities and subject focussed discussions that help them understand their individual strengths, interests, and skills. This exploration supports pupils in making an informed decision about their choice of GCSE subjects to match their future career or pathway.

For further information and support visit our website which has useful links to careers information and guidance.



Core & Non-Examined Subjects

IN THIS SECTION:

CORE SUBJECTS

English Language

English Literature

Mathematics

Combined Science (Trilogy)

CORE NON-EXAMINED SUBJECTS

Physical Education

Religious Education

Computing

PSHEE



English Language

GCSE English Language helps you become a better reader, writer, and communicator. You'll study a range of fiction and non-fiction texts and learn how to write clearly and creatively. The course also helps you build speaking and listening skills. English Language is a core subject, and it is important for college, work, and everyday life.



COURSE CONTENT

Paper 1: Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing

Section A: Reading

- One literature fiction text (unseen)
- Focus: how writers use narrative and descriptive techniques to engage readers

Section B: Writing

- Descriptive or narrative writing

Paper 2: Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives

Section A: Reading

- One non-fiction and one literary non-fiction text (unseen)
- Focus: how different writers present a similar topic over time

Section B: Writing

- Writing to present a viewpoint (e.g., article, speech, letter)

You will learn how to:

- Read fluently and with understanding a wide range of texts from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries
- Write clearly, coherently, and accurately using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures
- Use figurative language and analyse texts critically
- Develop higher-order reading and critical thinking skills



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | 2 examinations | Total marks |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |
| Plus spoken language assessment | Non-examined – Assessed throughout the course | 0% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE English Language is essential for future study and will help you get onto a wide range of career pathways. These careers might include:

- Screenwriter
- Literacy Critic
- Publisher
- Lecturer
- Public Relations Specialist





English Literature

GCSE English Literature lets you explore stories, plays, and poems from different times and places. You'll study famous works like Shakespeare, a 19th-century novel, modern texts, and poetry. You will learn how to understand characters, themes, and language, and how to write about them clearly.



COURSE CONTENT

Paper 1: Shakespeare and the 19th-Century Novel

Section A: Shakespeare (Macbeth)

- Pupils answer one question on their chosen play, analysing an extract and the play as a whole.

Section B: 19th-Century Novel

- *A Christmas Carol* – Charles Dickens

Paper 2: Modern Texts and Poetry

Section A: Modern Prose or Drama

- *An Inspector Calls* – J.B. Priestley

Section B: Poetry Anthology

- Power and Conflict
- Comparative question on two poems (one printed, one from memory)

Section C: Unseen Poetry

- One question on an unseen poem
- One comparative question on a second unseen poem

You will be expected to:

- Read and understand whole texts
- Analyse language, form, and structure
- Explore context and authorial intent
- Use quotations effectively
- Write clearly and coherently under timed conditions



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE English literature helps you to think deeply. It is important for future study and will help you to embark onto a wide range of career pathways. These careers might include:

- Speechwriter
- Copywriter
- Translator
- Lexicographer
- Communications Officer



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | 2 examinations | Total marks |
|------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 40% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 2 hour 15 minutes | 60% of GCSE |



Mathematics

GCSE mathematics builds your skills in number, algebra, geometry, ratio, probability, and statistics. You'll solve real-world problems and develop logical thinking.

This course deepens your knowledge across the six main areas of mathematics: Number, Algebra, Ratio and Proportion, Geometry, Statistics, and Probability. You'll focus on developing multiplicative reasoning and learn to apply mathematical concepts in varied contexts, including substituting and rearranging formulae, which are skills valuable across many subjects.



COURSE CONTENT

The course is divided into six main content areas:

1. Number
2. Algebra
3. Ratio, Proportion and Rates of Change
4. Geometry and Measures
5. Probability
6. Statistics

You will be expected to:

- Develop fluency in mathematical methods
- Apply techniques to solve real-world problems
- Reason mathematically and construct arguments
- Interpret and communicate mathematical information effectively



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

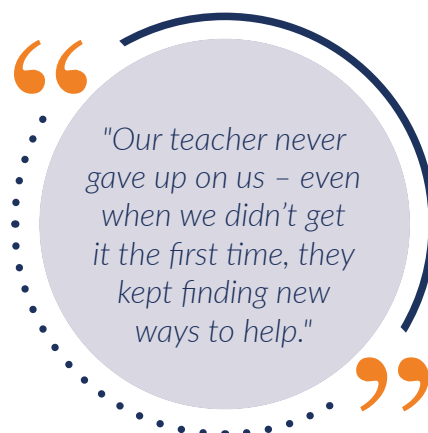
| Components | 3 examinations | Total marks |
|------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 30 minutes | 33% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour 30 minutes | 33% of GCSE |
| Paper 3 | 1 hour 30 minutes | 33% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

GCSE mathematics is one of the most useful subjects to hold. It is essential for future study and career pathways. Some of the careers available to you with a qualification in maths include:

- Actuary
- Engineer
- Data Analyst
- Architect
- Accountant



Combined Science (Trilogy)



GCSE AQA Combined Science: Trilogy covers biology, chemistry, and physics. You'll learn about cells, the human body, chemical reactions, energy, forces, and more. It's designed to build your science skills through experiments, problem-solving, and real-world examples. This double award qualification gives you two GCSEs.



COURSE CONTENT

Biology Topics

1. Cell biology
2. Organisation
3. Infection and response
4. Bioenergetics
5. Homeostasis and response
6. Inheritance, variation and evolution
7. Ecology

Physics Topics

1. Energy
2. Electricity
3. Particle model of matter
4. Atomic structure
5. Forces
6. Waves
7. Magnetism and electromagnetism



Chemistry Topics

1. Atomic structure and the periodic table
2. Bonding, structure, and the properties of matter
3. Quantitative chemistry
4. Chemical changes
5. Energy changes
6. The rate and extent of chemical change
7. Organic chemistry
8. Chemical analysis
9. Chemistry of the atmosphere
10. Using resources

Required practical activities
are assessed through written
exams, not coursework



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | 6 examinations | Total marks |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| Biology Paper 1 (topics 1-4) | 1 hour 15 mins | 16.7% of GCSE |
| Biology Paper 2 (topics 5-7) | 1 hour 15 mins | 16.7% of GCSE |
| Chemistry Paper 1 (topics 8-12) | 1 hour 15 mins | 16.7% of GCSE |
| Chemistry Paper 2 (topics 13-17) | 1 hour 15 mins | 16.7% of GCSE |
| Physics Paper 1 (topics 18-21) | 1 hour 15 mins | 16.7% of GCSE |
| Physics Paper 2 (topics 22-24) | 1 hour 15 mins | 16.7% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSEs in combined science helps prepare you for further science study or for future careers in science. The career pathways available to you with science qualifications are endless. Possible career pathways might include:

- Biomedical Scientist
- Environmental Scientist
- Pharmacist
- Forensic Scientist
- Engineer

Physical Education

SUBJECT OVERVIEW

Core PE helps you stay active, healthy, and build teamwork skills. You'll take part in a range of sports and fitness activities, improving your strength, stamina, and coordination. There are no exams—just practical lessons that support your physical and mental wellbeing. It's a great way to stay fit, have fun, and learn how to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Religious Education

SUBJECT OVERVIEW

Religious Education helps you explore different beliefs, values, and moral issues. You'll discuss topics like justice, equality, and human rights, and learn how religion influences people's lives and choices. Lessons focus on debate, reflection, and understanding others. There are no exams - just thoughtful discussions that help you develop respect, empathy, and critical thinking.

Computing

SUBJECT OVERVIEW

Computing helps you understand how technology works and how to use it safely and effectively. You'll explore topics like digital safety, data handling, and how computers impact everyday life. Lessons focus on real-world skills like using software, solving problems, and thinking logically. There are no exams - just practical learning to prepare you for life in a digital world.

Personal, Social, Health, Careers and Economic Education (PSHEE)

SUBJECT OVERVIEW

PSHEE (Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education) helps you build life skills and understand important issues. You'll learn about relationships, mental health, staying safe, careers, and money management. Lessons focus on discussion, reflection, and making informed choices. There are no exams—just practical learning to support your wellbeing and prepare you for adult life.



Optional Subjects

IN THIS SECTION:

HUMANITIES

- Geography
- History
- Religious Studies

SCIENCE

- Biology (Triple)
- Chemistry (Triple)
- Physics (Triple)

LANGUAGES

- French

CREATIVE ARTS

- Art
- Art & Design: Photography
- Food and Nutrition
- Resistant Materials

PHYSICAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

- Music (Performing Arts)

OTHER

- Citizenship Studies



Geography

GCSE Geography helps you understand the world around you - how people, places, and environments are interconnected. You will gain critical knowledge and informed opinions about topics like climate change, global development, urban growth and hazard management. The course includes map skills, fieldwork, and real-world case studies.



COURSE CONTENT

Component 1:

Investigating Geographical Issues

- Three structured themes:
 - Changing Places – Changing Economies
 - Changing Environments
 - Environmental Challenges
- Includes decision-making exercises based on a resource booklet

Component 2:

Problem Solving Geography

- A skills-based paper based on your knowledge of component 1 requiring you to:
 - Interpret and analyse data
 - Apply knowledge to unfamiliar contexts
 - Make and justify decisions
- Build on content from Component 1

Component 3:

Applied Fieldwork Enquiry

- Based on two fieldwork enquiries (human and physical geography)
- As part of the course, you will be expected to:
 - Understand the enquiry process
 - Analyse fieldwork data
 - Evaluate methods and conclusions

Skills Developed

Cartographic, graphical, numerical, and statistical skills

Critical thinking, decision making and problem-solving

Application of knowledge to real-world scenarios and geographical challenges



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | 3 written examinations | Total marks |
|------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 40% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour 30 minutes | 30% of GCSE |
| Paper 3 | 1 hour 30 minutes | 30% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

By studying GCSE geography, you will learn the foundational knowledge you need to enter career pathways such as an:

- Urban planner
- Environmental consultant
- Climate change analyst
- Armed forces
- Global business developer
- Sustainability manager





History

GCSE History helps you understand key events, people, and changes that shaped the world. You'll study topics like medicine through time, Elizabethan England, the Cold War, and Weimar and Nazi Germany. The course builds skills in analysis, argument, and using evidence.



COURSE CONTENT

Paper 1: Thematic Study and Historic Environment

- One thematic study (long-term development over time)
- One historic environment (linked to the thematic study)
- Medicine in Britain, c1250–present and The British sector of the Western Front, 1914–18

Paper 2: Period Study and British Depth Study

- One British depth study
- Anglo-Saxon and Norman England, c1060–88

Or

- Early Elizabethan England, 1558–88

And

- One period study
- The American West, c1835–c1895

Or

- Superpower relations and the Cold War, 1941–91

Paper 3: Modern Depth Study

- Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918–39



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | 3 written examinations | Total marks |
|------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 20 minutes | 30% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour 50 minutes | 40% of GCSE |
| Paper 3 | 1 hour 30 minutes | 30% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE history will help to prepare you for a wide range of history-based career pathways. These careers might include:

- Lawyer
- Archaeologist
- Historian
- Journalist
- Teacher





Religious Studies

GCSE Religious Studies explores key beliefs, teachings, and practices in religions such as Christianity and Islam. You'll also examine moral and philosophical questions about life, death, peace, and justice. The course builds skills in analysis, evaluation, and respectful debate.



COURSE CONTENT

Component 1:

Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the Modern World

- Themes: Relationships, Life and Death, Good and Evil, Human Rights

Component 2:

Study of Christianity

- Beliefs and teachings
- Practices

Component 3:

Study of Islam

- Beliefs and teachings
- Practices



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

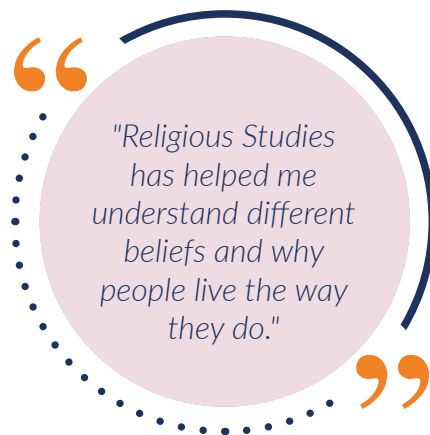
| Components | 3 written examinations | Total marks |
|------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 2 hours | 50% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour | 25% of GCSE |
| Paper 3 | 1 hour | 25% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

A GCSE in religious studies helps to lay the foundations for future career pathways in:

- Human rights lawyer
- Charity worker
- Lecturer
- Social worker
- Civil servant





Biology (Triple)

GCSE biology explores how living things work and interact. You'll study cells, the human body, genetics, ecosystems, and more. The course includes practical experiments and real-life examples to help you understand key ideas. It builds skills in investigation, analysis, and problem-solving. This must be studied alongside chemistry and physics.



COURSE CONTENT

The course is divided into 7 main topics:

1. Cell Biology
2. Organisation
3. Infection and Response
4. Bioenergetics
5. Homeostasis and Response
6. Inheritance, Variation and Evolution
7. Ecology

There are 10 required practical activities, including:

- Microscopy
- Osmosis
- Enzymes
- Food Tests
- Photosynthesis
- Reaction Time
- Plant Responses
- Field Investigation
- Decay
- Sampling Techniques

Required practical activities are assessed through written exams, not coursework



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

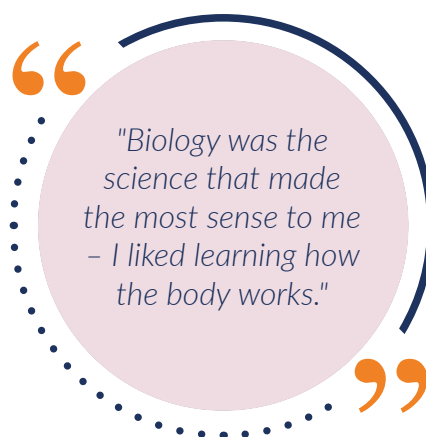
| Components | 2 examinations | Total marks |
|------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE biology will help prepare you for a wide range of science-based career pathways. These careers might include:

- Doctor or a nurse
- Biomedical scientist
- Environmental scientist
- Geneticist
- Marine biologist





Chemistry (Triple)

GCSE Chemistry helps you understand the substances that make up our world. You'll study atoms, chemical reactions, the periodic table, acids and alkalis, and more. The course includes hands-on experiments and real-life applications. You'll build skills in analysis, problem-solving, and scientific thinking. This must be studied alongside biology and physics.



COURSE CONTENT

The course is divided into 10 main topics:

1. Atomic Structure and the Periodic Table
2. Bonding, Structure, and the Properties of Matter
3. Quantitative Chemistry
4. Chemical Changes
5. Energy Changes
6. The Rate and Extent of Chemical Change
7. Organic Chemistry
8. Chemical Analysis
9. Chemistry of the Atmosphere
10. Using Resources

There are 8 required practical activities, including:

- Making Salts
- Electrolysis
- Temperature Changes
- Rates of Reaction
- Chromatography
- Identifying Ions
- Water Purification
- Neutralisation

Required practical activities are assessed through written exams, not coursework



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

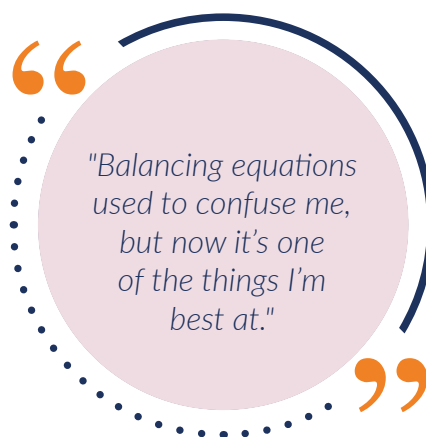
| Components | 2 examinations | Total marks |
|------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE chemistry will help prepare you for a wide range of science-based career pathways. These careers might include:

- Pharmacist
- Forensic scientist
- Chemical engineer
- Materials scientist
- Toxicologist





Physics (Triple)

GCSE Physics explores the laws and forces that shape our universe. You'll study energy, electricity, motion, waves, and space, using experiments and real-life examples to understand how things work. The course builds skills in problem-solving, data analysis, and scientific thinking. This must be studied alongside biology and chemistry.



COURSE CONTENT

The course is divided into 7 main topics:

1. Energy
2. Electricity
3. Particle Model of Matter
4. Atomic Structure
5. Forces
6. Waves
7. Magnetism and Electromagnetism

There are 10 required practical activities, including:

- Specific Heat Capacity
- Thermal Insulation
- Resistance
- IV Characteristics
- Density
- Light – Reflection and Refraction
- Lenses
- Forces and Extension
- Acceleration
- Waves in a Solid and a Liquid

Required practical activities are assessed through written exams, not coursework



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

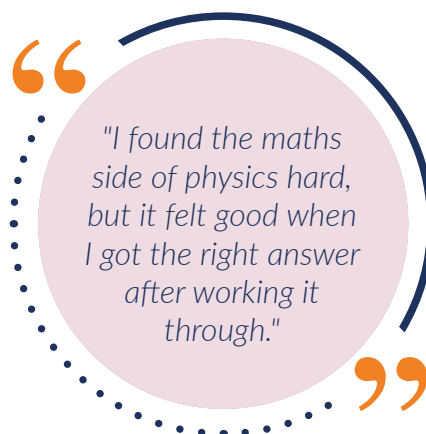
| Components | 2 examinations | Total marks |
|------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE physics will help prepare you for a wide range of science-based career pathways. These careers might include:

- Aerospace engineer
- Medical physicist
- Renewable energy engineer
- Robotics engineer
- Theoretical physicist
- Financial analyst





French

GCSE French helps you build confidence in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in French. You'll learn to talk about everyday topics like family, school, holidays, and future plans. The course also explores French-speaking cultures.



COURSE CONTENT

The course is structured around three main themes, each with several subtopics:

Theme 1: Identity and Culture

- Family and friends
- Daily life (e.g. food, technology, leisure)
- Cultural life (e.g. celebrations, music, film)

Theme 2: Local Area, Holiday and Travel

- Local area and region
- Holidays and travel
- Tourist transactions

Theme 3: School

- School life and routine
- School subjects and rules
- Future plans

Theme 4: Future Aspirations, Study and Work

- Using languages beyond the classroom
- Ambitions and career choices
- Work experience

Theme 5: International and Global Dimension

- Bringing the world together (e.g. sports, music events)
- Environmental issues and global citizenship



This is assessed in four parts:

1. Listening

- Includes comprehension questions in English and French

2. Speaking

Conducted by the teacher

Includes:

- Role-play
- Picture-based task
- Conversation

3. Reading

Includes:

- Comprehension questions
- Translation from French into English

4. Writing

Includes:

- Structured writing tasks
- Translation from English to French



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | Examinations | | Total marks |
|---|---|--|-------------|
| | Foundation | Higher | |
| Paper 1 Speaking | 7 to 9 minutes + 15 minutes preparation time | 10 to 12 minutes + 15 minutes preparation time | 25% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 Listening and understanding | 45 minutes including 5 minutes of reading time | 60 minutes, including 5 minutes of reading time | 25% of GCSE |
| Paper 3 Reading and understanding | 45 minutes | 60 minutes | 25% of GCSE |
| Paper 4 Writing | 1 hour 15 minutes | 1 hour 20 minutes | 25% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE French will help to prepare you for a wide range of languages-based career pathways. These careers might include:

- Diplomat
- Translator
- Journalist
- Teacher
- International Lawyer





Art

GCSE Art helps you explore your creativity through drawing, painting, sculpture, and mixed media. You'll develop practical skills and learn how to express ideas visually. The course includes studying artists and creating a personal portfolio.



COURSE CONTENT

Component 01: Portfolio (60%)

- You will produce a portfolio of practical work based on a personal response to a theme, starting point, or brief.
- Work will be presented in formats appropriate to the title and area of study.

Component 02: Externally Set Task (40%)

- You will select a starting point from an externally set task provided by OCR in January of Year 11.
- You will develop ideas and prepare during a preparatory period.
- The final piece is created in a **10-hour supervised exam (usually over one or two days)**.
- Written work accompanies practical work, including exploration of the theme, analysis of artists, and personal reflection.



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | 1 examination | Total marks |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Portfolio (non-exam assessment) | Coursework | 60% of GCSE |
| Externally set task | 10 hours | 40% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE art will help to prepare you for a wide range of art-based career pathways. These careers might include:

- Marketer
- Freelance designer
- Fine artist
- Animator
- Art therapist



Art & Design: Photography

GCSE Photography is a creative course where students learn technical camera skills (aperture, ISO, shutter speed), digital editing (Photoshop), focusing on themes like portraiture, landscape, or still life to develop personal projects presented in sketchbooks and portfolios.



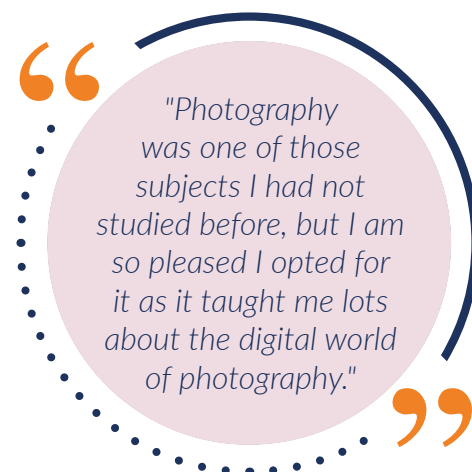
COURSE CONTENT

- **Technical Skills:** Manual camera settings (aperture, shutter speed, ISO) for different effects.
- **Digital Manipulation:** Using software like Photoshop for editing and creating effects.
- **Traditional Methods:** Exploring darkroom techniques (developing, printing).
- **Composition & Elements:** Understanding line, shape, form, tone, texture, colour, and composition.
- **Critical Analysis:** Researching and responding to the work of professional photographers and artists.



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | Assessment | Total marks |
|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Component 1 | Portfolio of work | 60% of GCSE |
| Component 2 | Externally set assignment | 40% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE Photography will help you get onto a wide range of career pathways. These careers might include:

- Photographer
- Photojournalist
- Web Designer
- Film/TV
- Photo Editor



Food and Nutrition

GCSE AQA Food Preparation and Nutrition teaches you how to cook and understand food. You'll learn about nutrition, food science, safety, and where food comes from. The course includes practical cooking skills and creating your own dishes.



COURSE CONTENT

The course is structured around five core topics, with practical skills integrated throughout:

1. Food, Nutrition and Health
2. Food Science
3. Food Safety
4. Food Choice
5. Food Provenance

There are 12 key skills:

- Knife Skills
- Preparing Fruits and Vegetables
- Use of Equipment
- Cooking Methods
- Making doughs
- Raising agents
- Sauce making
- Tenderising and marinating
- Making batters
- Setting mixtures
- Use of eggs
- Presentation and garnishing



CAREER PATHWAYS

A GCSE in food and nutrition is great preparation for further study and careers in nutrition, catering, health, or food science.

- Executive chef
- Food scientist
- Nutritionist
- Food photographer
- Catering manager

You will complete two key components:

- **Written Exam:** Testing your knowledge of food science, nutrition, and practical food preparation.
- **Non-Examined Assessment (NEA):** A practical portfolio where you research, plan, prepare, and evaluate dishes in response to a brief. This is split into two parts.



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | 1 examination | Total marks |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |
| Non-exam assessment (NEA) | 30-35 hours | 50% of GCSE |





Resistant Materials

GCSE Resistant Materials teaches you how to design and make products using wood, metal, and plastic. You'll learn about tools, materials, and manufacturing processes, while developing creative and practical skills. The course includes design work, making projects, and understanding sustainability.



COURSE CONTENT

The course is structured around three key areas:

Component 1: Core Technical Principles

- New and emerging technologies
- Energy generation and storage
- Developments in new materials
- Systems approach to designing
- Mechanical devices
- Materials and their working properties

Component 2: Specialist Technical Principles - Resistant Materials

You will focus on one material area in depth, such as:

- Woods
- Metals
- Polymers (plastics)
- Composites and smart materials

Topics include:

- Selection of materials and components
- Forces and stresses
- Ecological and social footprint
- Scales of production
- Surface treatments and finishes



Component 3: Designing and Making Principles

- Investigation, analysis, and evaluation
- The work of others (designers, engineers)
- Communication of design ideas
- Prototype development
- Selection and use of tools, equipment, and processes
- Accuracy and quality control



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | 1 examination | Total marks |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 2 hours | 50% of GCSE |
| Non-exam assessment (NEA) | 30-35 hours | 50% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE design and technology will help to prepare you for future study and a wide range of design-led career pathways. These careers might include:

- Engineer
- Product designer
- Architect
- Industrial designer
- Carpenter



Music (Performing Arts)

Level 1/2 Technical Award in Performing Arts helps you develop confidence, creativity, and performance skills. You'll explore acting, dance, or musical theatre through practical workshops and projects. The course includes creating and performing work, as well as learning about the industry.



COURSE CONTENT

Component 1: Performing

Focus: In this unit learners will gain a holistic knowledge and understanding of the skills and techniques needed to reproduce an existing piece of professional/published work.

Tasks include:

- Researching and selecting performance material
- Planning and scheduling rehearsals
- Performing to an audience
- Reflecting on strengths and areas for improvement

Component 2: Performing

Focus: In this unit learners will gain, develop and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the skills and techniques needed to create and refine original work in the performing arts.

Tasks include:

- Researching practitioners and genres
- Developing a creative brief
- Experimenting with performance elements (e.g. movement, sound, staging)
- Presenting the final piece and evaluating the process

Component 3: Performing Arts in Practice

Focus: This unit introduces learners to areas of the performing arts that need to be considered when responding to an industry commission.

Learners will need to draw on their knowledge of the skills and techniques needed to reproduce an existing piece of professional/published work from Unit 1 alongside their knowledge and understanding of the skills and techniques needed to create and refine original work from Unit 2.

Tasks include:

- Responding to a commission brief
- Researching and planning an event
- Budgeting, scheduling, and marketing
- Pitching the event to a panel and evaluating the process

Skills Developed

- Performance and creative development
- Teamwork and communication
- Project planning and time management
- Industry awareness and professional practice



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | Assessment | Total marks |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| 1 - Performing | Coursework | 30% of GCSE |
| 2 - Creating | Coursework | 30% of GCSE |
| 3 - Performing in practice | Externally Assessed Brief | 40% of GCSE |



"I want to work in theatre, and this course has given me real experience with scripts, rehearsals, and even lighting design."



CAREER PATHWAYS

A qualification in performing arts is great preparation for further study and careers in theatre, media, or the creative arts. Possible careers might include:

- Sound engineer
- Musician
- Composer
- Music therapist
- Theatre performer



Citizenship Studies

Citizenship Studies is about how people take an active part in democratic politics and work together for a better society, locally, nationally and globally. Students will learn about power, democracy, the operation of government and the legal system, and the role of the UK in the wider world. They will explore and learn about different controversial and topical issues with political, social, ethical, economic and environmental dimensions in local to global contexts. They will experience taking citizenship action and learn from trying to make a difference themselves.



COURSE CONTENT

1. Living together in the UK

Students learn about:

- How have communities developed in the UK?
- What is identity?
- What are democratic values and where do they come from?
- How does local democracy work?

2. Democracy at work in the UK

- Who runs the country?
- How does Parliament work?
- How is power shared between Westminster and the devolved administrations?
- How does government manage public money?

3. Law and Justice

- What is the law for and how does it affect us?
- How does the justice system work?
- Is crime increasing in society?

4. Power and influence

- What power and influence can citizens have?
- What role and influence should the media have?
- Does the UK have power and influence in the wider world?

5. Taking Citizenship action

A practical element where students:

- Plan and carry out an investigation or campaign on a real issue they care about
- Engage with decision-makers, communities or organisations
- Reflect on the impact of their action



Skills Developed

- Critical thinking and analysis
- Evaluation of evidence and arguments
- Communication and debate
- Research and project-planning
- Understanding of political and legal structures



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW


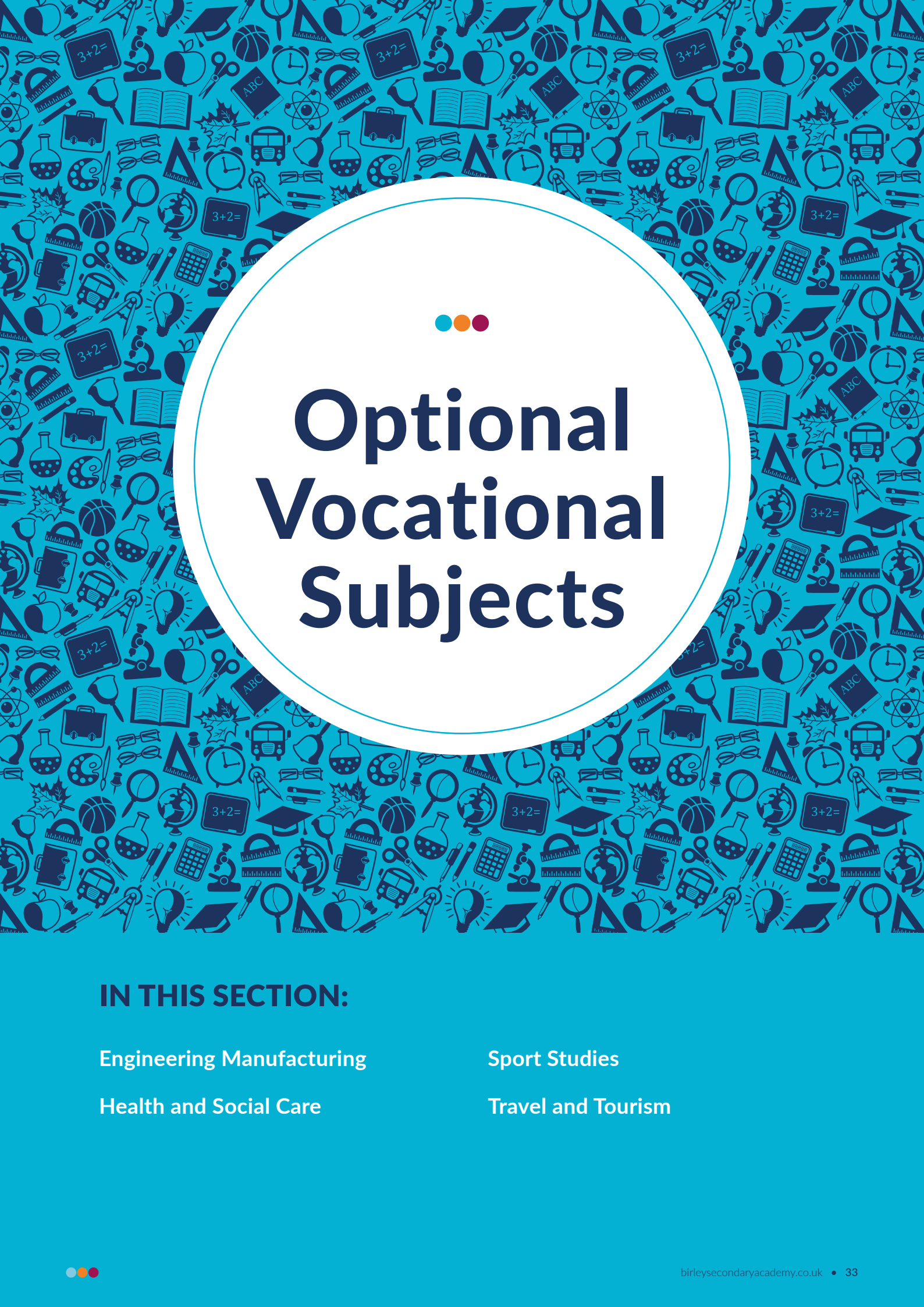
| Components | 2 examinations | Total marks |
|------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Paper 1 | 1 hour and 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |
| Paper 2 | 1 hour and 45 minutes | 50% of GCSE |



CAREER PATHWAYS

Studying GCSE Citizenship Studies will help you get onto a wide range of career pathways. These careers might include:

- Solicitor/Barrister
- Local government officer
- Public services such as Police and Fire
- Armed Forces
- Youth worker
- Journalist



Optional Vocational Subjects

IN THIS SECTION:

Engineering Manufacturing

Sport Studies

Health and Social Care

Travel and Tourism



Engineering Manufacturing

A Level 1/2 qualification in Engineering Manufacturing introduces you to how products are made in the real world. You'll learn about tools, materials, processes, and quality control used in manufacturing. The course includes both practical and theory work, helping you develop problem-solving and technical skills.



COURSE CONTENT

CORE UNITS (MANDATORY)

Unit 1: The Engineered World

- Explores how engineering impacts daily life.
- Covers different engineering sectors and how products are made.

Unit 2: Investigating an Engineered Product

- Learners disassemble and analyse a product to understand its design and function.

OPTIONAL UNITS (examples include):

Unit 5: Engineering Materials

- Focuses on the properties, uses, and testing of materials used in engineering.

Unit 6: Computer-Aided Engineering

- Introduces CAD software and its application in design.

Unit 8: Electronic Circuit Design and Construction

- Covers basic electronics and circuit building.

Unit 10: Manufacturing Techniques for Engineering Products

- Practical unit involving making a product using workshop tools and processes.

Unit 6: Mechanical Devices

- Explores mechanical systems and their applications.



CAREER PATHWAYS

A qualification in Engineering is good preparation for further study and careers in engineering, manufacturing, or product design.

Future careers could include:

- Mechanical engineer
- Manufacturing engineer
- Quality control engineer
- Robotics engineer
- Supply chain manager

Each unit includes a mix of practical tasks, written assignments, and in some cases, external assessments.



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | Assessment | Assessment Weighting |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| RO14 | Exam | 40% of total Grade |
| Manufacturing a one-off product | Coursework RO15 | 30% of total Grade |
| Mass Production | Coursework RO16 | 30% of total Grade |

“

"Engineering has shown me that I'm capable of more than I thought."

”



Health and Social Care

The Level 1/2 in Health and Social Care teaches pupils how to support people's health and wellbeing. It covers topics like care values, health needs, and how to plan support for individuals. Pupils learn through real-life examples and practical tasks.



COURSE CONTENT

MANDATORY UNITS

Unit 1: R032: Principles of care in health and social care settings

- Rights of individuals
- Person-centred values
- Effective communication
- Protecting individuals in care settings

Unit 2: R033: Supporting individuals through life events

- Types of life events (e.g. bereavement, illness, moving home)
- Impact on individuals
- Support available and how it is delivered

Skills Developed

- Understanding of care values and rights
- Communication and empathy
- Planning and evaluating support and activities
- Awareness of health promotion and life events
- Research and presentation skills

OPTIONAL NEA UNITS

Unit 3: R034: Creative and therapeutic activities

- Types of creative and therapeutic activities
- Benefits to individuals
- Planning and delivering an activity

Unit 4: R035: Health promotion campaigns

- Purpose and methods of health promotion
- Planning and creating a campaign
- Evaluating effectiveness



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | Assessment | Assessment Weighting |
|--|-------------|----------------------|
| Principles of care in health and social care settings | Examination | 40% |
| R033 Supporting individuals through life events | Coursework | 30% |
| R035 Health promotion campaigns | Coursework | 30% |



CAREER PATHWAYS

A qualification in health and social care is ideal for anyone interested in working with children, the elderly, or people with additional needs in careers like nursing, social work, or care services.

Possible career choices are:

- Social worker
- Nurse
- Care manager
- Occupational therapist
- Public health educator



Sport Studies

The Level 1/2 in Sport Studies helps pupils learn about sport in society, leadership, and how to plan and lead sports activities. It also covers media in sport and how it affects people's views. The course includes both practical and written work. It's ideal for pupils who enjoy sport and want to explore different roles in the sports industry, such as coaching, media, or event planning.



"This course has shown me that there are so many careers in sport, not just being an athlete."



COURSE CONTENT

MANDATORY UNITS

Unit 1: R184: Contemporary Issues in Sport

- Participation levels and barriers
- Promotion of values and ethical behaviour
- Role of high-profile sporting events
- National Governing Bodies
- Use of technology in sport

Unit 2: R185: Performance and Leadership in Sports Activities

- Skills and techniques in two sports
- Officiating and leadership
- Planning, delivering, and reviewing a sports session

OPTIONAL UNITS

Unit 3: R186: Sport and the Media

- How sport is covered in the media
- Positive and negative effects of media on sport
- Media roles and revenue sources

Unit 4: R187: Increasing Awareness of Outdoor and Adventurous Activities

- Types of outdoor activities
- Planning and safety considerations
- Benefits of participation

Skills

Developed

- Leadership and teamwork
- Performance analysis
- Media literacy
- Understanding of sport in society
- Outdoor activity planning and safety



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | Exam Type | Total marks |
|--|------------|-------------|
| R184 Exam Unit | Exam | 40% |
| R185 Performance and Leadership in Sports Activities | Coursework | 30% |
| R187 Increasing awareness of OAA | Coursework | 30% |



CAREER PATHWAYS

A qualification in sport can lead to further study in sport or careers in sport and exercise. These careers might include:

- PE Teacher
- Physiotherapist
- Personal Trainer
- Sports Coach
- Fitness Centre Manager



Travel and Tourism

The Level 1/2 in Travel and Tourism introduces pupils to the world of travel, tourism, and customer service. It covers UK and international destinations, how the industry works, and how to meet customer needs. Pupils learn through real-life examples and practical tasks.



COURSE CONTENT

Component 1: Travel and Tourism Organisations and Destinations

- Aims and roles of travel and tourism organisations
- How organisations work together
- Types of travel and tourism
- Features of tourist destinations
- Travel routes and accessibility

Component 2: Customer Needs in Travel and Tourism

- Market research in travel and tourism
- Identifying customer needs and preferences
- Selecting appropriate products and services
- Planning a holiday to meet specific customer needs

Component 3: Influences on Global Travel and Tourism

- Factors influencing global travel and tourism (e.g. economic, environmental, political)
- Responses of organisations and destinations to these factors
- Impacts of tourism on global destinations
- Sustainable tourism and managing tourism development



CAREER PATHWAYS

A qualification in travel and tourism is ideal for anyone interested in working in travel, tourism, or hospitality, such as travel agents, tour guides, or hotel staff.

Potential career choice might include:

- Travel consultant
- Hotel manager
- Event coordinator
- Airline pilot
- Cabin crew

Skills Developed

- Research and analysis
- Planning and decision-making
- Sustainable tourism awareness
- Understanding of customer service
- Knowledge of global tourism trends



ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

| Components | Assessment | Assessment Weighting |
|---|-------------|----------------------|
| Component 1: Organisations and Destinations | Coursework | 30% |
| Component 2: Customer Needs Non-examination assessment | Coursework | 30% |
| Component 3: Influences of Global Travel and Tourism | 2 hour Exam | 40% |

Frequently Asked Questions

Alternative questions and answers we could consider:

What is the difference between GCSEs and Vocational courses?

A GCSE course is a traditional qualification, usually assessed through 100% examination. Vocational qualifications are assessed through a mixture of exams and coursework. Both qualifications are of equal difficulty but the nature of coursework in vocational qualifications may be more suitable for some pupils.

What is a Cambridge National qualification?

This is a broad and engaging level 1 and level 2 qualification that equips pupils with applied knowledge and associated practical skills. Similar to a BTEC qualification, they will have a coursework element to them.

Are Cambridge Nationals worth the same as GCSE subjects?

All subjects are worth the same: one GCSE equivalent

If I do a Cambridge National qualification, can I still get into Sixth Form?

Yes, as long as you have a minimum of five GCSEs at grade 4/ CNAT qualifications, in four separate subjects. These must include English and mathematics.

Are subjects first come, first served?

No, providing the options are submitted by the deadline.

Are any options easier than others?

All subjects are of equal academic difficulty so subject choices should not be made because of the perceived difficulty of a subject compared to another.

Can I do a mixture of Cambridge National and GCSE subjects?

Yes.

Will I get all of my first choices?

While the vast majority of pupils do get their first choices, we do sometimes have to allocate a number of reserve choices, so it is important you select reserve choices that you are willing and able to do. If you have a specific career direction or outside interest in mind, you should write this on the options form so that we can take this into account when we allocate subjects.

Do I have to take a language?

We strongly recommend all pupils take a language. Having a language will open more doors to post-16 study and employment.

What science option will I take?

All pupils will study combined science unless they opt to study separate qualifications in biology, chemistry and physics. Where pupils are finding the breadth of content of separate science challenging, there is the option of moving pupils onto combined science instead. This award covers all three sciences and is equivalent to two GCSEs. Pupils following this route and achieving good grades (grade 5 or above) are eligible to study science A levels.

When do I find out which subjects I have been given from my choices?

You will find out which subjects you have been allocated later in the summer term.

If I start a subject and later realise that I have made a mistake, what can I do?

This happens to some pupils every year. There are only two weeks at the start of term when we look at requests for changes and make them if we can. Sometimes subject groups are full, and pupils are unable to move but we will do our best to help.



The Birley Academy
A L.E.A.D. Academy

The Birley Academy

Birley Lane, Sheffield S12 3BP

t. 0114 239 2531

e. enquiries@birleysecondaryacademy.co.uk

birleysecondaryacademy.co.uk