

Options Booklet for courses starting in September 2026



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OPTIONS PROCESS



Dear Parents, Carers and Students

At Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre, we take seriously the academic journey of our students. We work together to ensure students reach their full potential and maximise their success. This booklet has been created to provide the necessary guidance at this important stage of their academic career, helping students select the most suitable subject and qualification combinations for future opportunities.

This is an exciting period for students. Since joining us, students will have studied a broad range of subjects. In Year 9, students will choose from a range of GCSE or other Level 2 qualifications, which they will complete in the summer of 2028.

It is therefore important to consider these choices carefully. Highdown will provide a clear timeline to support students through this process, including an Options Assembly (15th Jan), an Options Evening (29th Jan), and meetings with senior leaders (Term 4). We encourage all students to take these opportunities seriously, as they provide vital information to support informed decision-making.

Additionally, please read this booklet carefully together and discuss the combinations of subjects you are interested in. Discussing your thoughts with peers, trusted adults, and school staff—such as your mentor—is an important and valuable stage in helping you think through your choices in detail. Furthermore, this booklet outlines the timeline and subject information needed to understand when decisions must be made and the potential consequences of those decisions.

This is a good opportunity to reiterate that decisions made now may impact future opportunities in education, training, or the world of work. All subjects offered at Highdown provide progression to post-16 education and/or training; however, we encourage students to speak with staff, including subject teachers, if they have questions about next steps or where studying a particular subject may lead.

We encourage you to ask questions, and if you need additional support, please do not hesitate to contact me, Mr Reid, Mrs Bonnett or Mrs Arnold (for SEND-related queries). Their contact details can be found on the next page of this booklet.

Mr Andrew Franks

Assistant Headteacher & Options Lead



Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre

CURRICULUM VISION



The curriculum at Highdown is knowledge-rich, challenging and designed in a manner that allows all students to become resilient and active learners. All students have wide access to a broad and balanced offer that emphasises foundational skills, fosters curiosity and ensures our learners are future-ready. Planned with coherence, mastery and inclusivity at its core, all learners at Highdown will be empowered to become independent and responsible young people, reaching their full potential and prepared for further education or employment as believers in lifelong learning.

Our Key Stage Four offer is set up to meet the needs of our students and help them maximise their success. The subjects available are designed to develop successful, confident and independent young people who are prepared for further and higher education and/or employment or apprenticeships.

STEP 1	15 JAN 2026	Student Assembly & Options Booklet
STEP 2	16 JAN 2026	Parent Presentation - Virtual
STEP 3	29 JAN 2026	NEW! Options Evening - Main Hall
STEP 4	05 FEB 2026	Learning Review Meetings - Virtual
STEP 5	09 FEB 2026	Options Form Opens
STEP 6	23 FEB 2026	Options Form Deadline
STEP 7	TERM FOUR	Senior Leader/Student Meeting
STEP 8	TERM FIVE	Subject Choices Confirmed

Key Contacts

Mr A Franks

Assistant Headteacher/Options Lead
afranks1@glfschools.org

Mrs S Bonnett

Head of Year 9
sbonnett1@glfschools.org

Mr J Reid

Deputy Headteacher (Curriculum)
jreid1@glfschools.org

Mrs J Arnold

SENCO
jarnold1@glfschools.org



Can Students Change Their Mind?

Students cannot change their options once courses have begun. Any changes made after the deadline (23rd Feb) increase the risk of students not receiving their first-choice subjects. For this reason, it is important to think carefully about choices at this stage.

The school has extensive experience in guiding students through this process and uses a wide range of data to support its recommendations. We encourage all students to embrace challenge and not be deterred by high aspirations. With this in mind, we will always guide students towards options that best support their success.

Core Curriculum

At Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre, all students follow a study programme that includes the core curriculum alongside their chosen subjects.

The core curriculum includes:

- GCSE English Language
- GCSE English Literature
- GCSE Mathematics
- GCSE Science (either Separate Sciences (Triple) or Combined Science)
- Non-GCSE Physical Education
- Non-GCSE PSHCE



Options & Facilitating Subjects

All students will have access to a range of option choices. Evidence shows that certain subjects enable young people to access a wider range of future educational and career opportunities as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. These subjects are known as facilitating subjects by Russell Group universities. As such, the majority of students at Highdown will be guided to take at least one of the following:

- History
- Geography
- A language (French, Spanish or Mandarin - language study must have been undertaken at Key Stage 3)

Students studying the Mandarin Excellence Programme are expected to continue their studies and take GCSE Mandarin.

Qualifications & Assessments

Highdown offers a range of subjects and qualifications. The majority of these are GCSEs, although some are Level 1/2 Technical Subjects.

GCSEs are graded 9-1 with Grade 5 being considered a strong pass and Grade 4 being a standard pass. A Grade 5 is equivalent to a high C/low B and Grade 9 would be a very high A* using the pre-2017 system.

Level 1/2 Technical subjects are equivalent to GCSEs, and focus on acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills through practical, work-related activities in a real-life context. Unlike GCSEs, assessment is mainly through portfolio-based assessment, which is externally moderated. They also have exams at the end of Year 11. Technical qualifications have a proven track record of supporting students into further education, apprenticeships and employment.



The Department for Education recognises the importance of applied education as it provides students invaluable opportunities to develop their potential. Indeed, they recognise up to three Technical Awards in school performance measures. Technical Awards are rigorous and challenging courses but how they are assessed will help ensure students are successful in these, enabling them to progress to post-16 education or training. Level 1/2 qualifications are graded using Distinction, Merit, Pass and Fail.

<https://www.careerpilot.org.uk/>





Choices

In September students will begin subjects which they will study for two years, leading to GCSE or equivalent qualifications. The choices they make now can have an effect on the routes/options that are open to them in the future in terms of education, training and employment. To give everyone the widest possible choice, we offer over twenty subjects in Years 10 and 11. It would be impossible to study this number of subjects all at once, so students have to make some choices.

Curriculum leaders have also made short presentations about the subjects that they offer to support students making their choices. These presentations can be found on the school website:

<https://www.highdown.reading.sch.uk/year-9-options>

In addition, Year 9 students are encouraged to attend an Options Evening on Tuesday 29 January where they will be able to speak with subject teachers for all Key Stage 4 option subjects.

Students need to choose subjects carefully, bearing in mind:

- which subjects they like
- which subjects they are likely to do well at
- the sort of job they would like to do in the future

- which subjects will help them achieve in Year 11 enabling them to progress to post-16 education or training

Advice & Guidance

Some subjects will be new to students and students interested in one of these courses should speak to the Curriculum Leader or one of the subject teachers to find out more before making any choices.

Students should talk about their choices with their family and can also ask older siblings/friends for advice. In school, students should talk to their subject teachers, who will give the best advice about each subject. Mentors (tutors) will give general advice, but if students are not sure how the system works, or which subjects combine together, Mr Franks, Mrs Bonnett, Mr Reid and Mrs Arnold are here to support.

Careers advice and resources are available via the school website: <https://www.highdown.reading.sch.uk/careers>

The CareerPilot website is very useful. Once on the website students should follow the link for young people: <https://www.careerpilot.org.uk/>

If you are considering future progression to A Levels or beyond, then consider using: <https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/> which can assist and guide students with their educational decisions.



Will Students Get the Subjects They Ask For?

Students are asked to provide a number of reserve choices. These should be carefully considered, as it is not always possible to offer every student their first-choice options due to our open options system and subject uptake. We are pleased to say that historically the overwhelming majority of students do receive their first-choice options; however, this cannot be guaranteed.

Additionally, some combinations of subjects cannot be studied together. These are highlighted on subject pages and listed below:

- GCSE Music and GCSE Music Technology cannot be studied together
- Only one of the following subjects may be chosen: GCSE Art, GCSE Art Graphics, GCSE Textiles
- GCSE PE and BTEC Sport cannot be taken together

If choosing to study a language, students must have studied it at Key Stage 3 or be a first-language speaker of that language. If you have any questions about a language choice, please speak directly with your language teacher.

These restrictions are in place to ensure breadth of study.

Students may also be required to take a reserve choice if a subject is over- or under-subscribed. If a subject is under-subscribed, it may be withdrawn from the offer. If a subject is over-subscribed, the following criteria will be used:

- Has the student met all option deadlines?
- Has the student ranked the subject highly in their preferences?
- Has the student shown engagement and positive behaviour in the subject?
- Has the student demonstrated interest beyond the classroom?

If it is necessary to use a reserve choice, or if there is another reason for changes to be made before September, we will discuss this with students directly. If students' options do not fit, or if there is some other reason why students should change them, we will talk with them to discuss their preferences.



CORE SUBJECTS



Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre

English Language

Curriculum Leader (Acting): Mrs S Lake slake1@glfschools.org
KS4 Lead: Miss E Bliss ebliss1@glfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8700**



Overview

GCSE English Language allows students to explore a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts. Students have the opportunity to develop as confident readers and writers. The AQA specification allows students to become confident communicators, develop their empathy and delve deep into their imagination.

Assessment

100% Examination

50% Paper 1: Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing:
1 hour 45 minutes

50% Paper 2: Writers' viewpoints and perspectives:
1 hour 45 minutes

Spoken Language Assessment is compulsory but does not count towards the final grade

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Levels in English Language and Literature or English Literature. Students need a Grade 5+ in English Language and Literature. A Grade 5+ can support accessing any extended writing subjects such as History or Sociology.

Degree Options

English Language
English Language and Communication
English and Media
English Literature
Linguistics
Creative Writing

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Law
Public Relations
Digital Marketer
Journalism
Editing
Marketing
Advertising
Teaching



English Literature

Curriculum Leader (Acting): Mrs S Lake slake1@glfschools.org
KS4 Lead: Miss E Bliss ebliss1@glfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8702**

Overview

GCSE English Literature allows students to develop an understanding of a range of literature texts across a range of different genres and periods. Through this course, students will develop their ability to articulate their opinions and ideas, as well as developing their empathy for those around them.

Assessment

100% Examination

40% Paper 1: Shakespeare and 19th Century Novel:
1 hour 45 minutes

60% Paper 2: Play, Poetry Anthology and Unseen Poetry:
1 hour 45 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Levels in English Language and Literature or English Literature. Students need a Grade 5+ in English Language and Literature. A Grade 5+ can support accessing any extended writing subjects such as History or Sociology.

Degree Options

English Literature
Classics
Cultural Studies
Law
English Language and Literature

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Law
Public Relations
Digital Marketer
Journalism
Editing
Marketing
Advertising
Teaching



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Maths

Curriculum Leader: Mr W Dineley wdineley1@gfhschools.org
KS4 Lead: Mr M Hutchinson mhutchinson1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8300**

Overview

Maths is for everyone. It is essential in developing students as problem solvers, critical thinkers and effective communicators. This qualification is designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in further study, future careers and as active citizens.

Our aim is for all students to experience success: whether that is achieving a good pass; taking on additional maths qualifications; or competing in national and international competitions.

Assessment

100% Examination

Foundation tier (grades 1 – 5)
Higher tier (grades 4 – 9)

33% - Paper 1 (non-calculator):
1 hour 30 minutes

33% - Paper 2 (calculator):
1 hour 30 minutes

33% - Paper 3 (calculator):
1 hour 30 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers a wide range of A Levels in Mathematics and related subjects:

A Level Mathematics (Students need a 7+ in Maths)

A Level Further Maths (Students need an 8+ in GCSE Maths)

Level 3 (Core) Mathematics (Students need a 4+ in Maths)

Degree Options

Mathematics
Applied Mathematics
Physics
Chemistry
Engineering
Computing
Economics
Medicine

Apprenticeship & Career Options

GCSE Maths will be required by almost all employers



Science

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Combined Science Trilogy: **8464**

Biology: **8461**

Chemistry: **8462**

Physics: **8463**

Curriculum Leader: Ms M Elliot melliott1@glfschools.org
KS4 Lead: Ms D Arrington darrington1@glfschools.org

Overview

The GCSE course is started by all students in Year 9. All students divide their time equally between the three disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics.

For examination in Year 11 we have two science routes:

1. GCSE Biology, GCSE Chemistry and GCSE Physics - students must take all three separate examinations.
2. GCSE combined science (trilogy) - students follow most of the same courses in biology, chemistry and physics but take shorter examinations leading to GCSE Combined Science. This is worth two GCSEs.

Both science routes allow access to A Level in any of the science disciplines.

Assessment

100% Examination

All students will sit 6 exam papers (2 for each science)

Combined Science (trilogy)
1 hour 15 minutes

Triple Science papers:
1 hour 45 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers a wide range of A Levels in the sciences:

Biology (Students need a grade 6-6+ in Science or 6+ in Biology and 5+ in Mathematics)

Chemistry (Students need a grade 6-6+ in science or 6+ in Chemistry and 5+ in Mathematics)

Physics (Students need a grade 6-6+ in Science or 6+ in Physics and 6+ in Mathematics)

Psychology (Students need a grade 5+ in English and Mathematics)

Degree Options

Forensic Science
Pharmacy
Environmental Science
Marine Biology
Aerospace
Engineering

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Laboratory Technician
Engineering Technician
Civil Engineering
Health Care
Dental Nurse
Pharmacy Technician
Optical Assistant
Environmental Technician



PSHCE CCC (Core)

Curriculum Leader: Mr M Hampson mhampson1@gfhschools.org

Overview

As part of your child's education at Highdown School we promote personal wellbeing and development through a comprehensive Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship and Economic (PSHCE) Education during Character, Culture and Citizenship (CCC) lessons. The PSHCE programme gives young people the knowledge, understanding, attitudes and practical skills to live safe, healthy, productive lives and meet their full potential.

The PSCHE programme is taught as a timetabled lesson throughout the school in every year group. All PSHCE teaching takes place in a safe learning environment and is underpinned by our school ethos and values.

What Will I Study?

- Addressing extremism and radicalisation
- Application processes, and skills for further education, employment and career progression
- Building for the future
- Communication in and out of relationships
- Communities, belonging and challenging extremism
- Families
- Financial decision making
- Healthy Relationships
- Mental health and ill health
- Personal values, assertive communication
- Responsible health choices
- The influence and impact of drugs, gangs, role models and the media



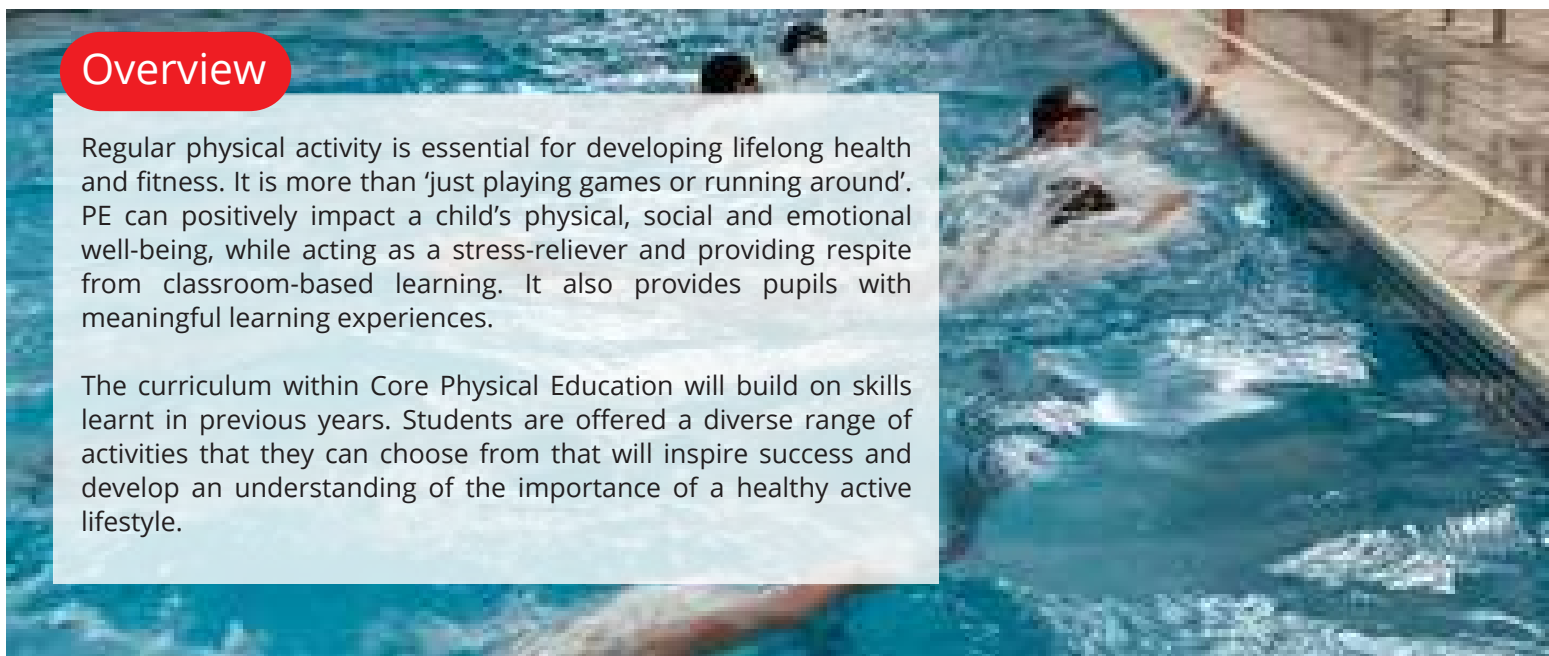
Physical Education/Games (Core)

Curriculum Leader: Miss V Clark vclark1@gfhschools.org

Overview

Regular physical activity is essential for developing lifelong health and fitness. It is more than 'just playing games or running around'. PE can positively impact a child's physical, social and emotional well-being, while acting as a stress-reliever and providing respite from classroom-based learning. It also provides pupils with meaningful learning experiences.

The curriculum within Core Physical Education will build on skills learnt in previous years. Students are offered a diverse range of activities that they can choose from that will inspire success and develop an understanding of the importance of a healthy active lifestyle.



What Will I Study?

Highdown offers an outstanding range of activities across the academic year. In September, students will choose their favoured sports in each block of work, building their own personalised timetable.

Sports on offer range from traditional team games such as rugby, hockey, netball and football, individual sports such as table tennis, badminton, fitness and trampolining, as well as the option to complete a nationally recognised award in Sports Leadership skills.



OPTIONAL SUBJECTS



Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre

Art

Curriculum Leader: Ms E Garner egarner1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8201**

Overview

Our approach to art will introduce you to a variety of themes, materials and techniques and will help build on those already gained in Key Stage 3. The course will provide you with the skills to communicate ideas and will develop your ability to investigate, analyse and experiment.

The course begins with a teacher-led project introducing a variety of materials and processes such as drawing, printmaking, painting, photography, mixed media and ceramics. As the course progresses, you will be able to follow a more individual programme. This will be developed through tutorials with your teacher and will be based around your strengths and interests. A variety of artists, designers and craftspeople will be studied. These will be both contemporary and from other times and cultures working within varied fields. In your GCSE you will study a variety of themes.

Assessment

60% NEA (Coursework)
40% Exam unit (10 Hour Exam)

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Art, Photography and Textiles. Students need a grade 4+ in Art, Art Graphics or Photography.
Portfolio work can also be assessed if you do not have a grade in the subject.

Degree Options

- Illustration
- Interactive Design
- Advertising and Marketing
- Print Design
- 3D Modelling and Animation
- Web Design
- Environmental Design
- Graphic Design
- Comic Art
- Costume Design Advertising
- Set Design
- Theatre Design

Apprenticeship & Career Options

- Community Arts Leader
- Editorial Photographer
- Exhibition Curator
- Photographic Technician
- Product Photographer
- Cultural Learning Officer
- Gallery Curator
- Photojournalist
- Picture Editor
- Designer
- Media Researcher



(Art) Graphics

Curriculum Leader: Ms E Garner egartner1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8203**

Overview

If you like to create artwork to a set brief and in a more two-dimensional way, you should consider this course. Students have the opportunity to use their own ideas and interests as part of their design work. They also use art skills such as layout, design and typography. You are taught constructed and freehand drawing, as well as rendering and presentation skills.

The course involves working with the design process, with a strong emphasis on creating your own original artwork from research into artists and designers, and experimenting with different materials and techniques.

Assessment

60% NEA (Coursework)
40% Exam unit (10 Hour Exam)

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Art, Photography and Textiles. Students need a grade 4+ in Art, Art Graphics or Photography.
Portfolio work can also be assessed if you do not have a grade in the subject.

Degree Options

- Illustration
- Interactive Design
- Advertising and Marketing
- Print Design
- 3D Modelling and Animation
- Web Design
- Environmental Design
- Graphic Design
- Comic Art
- Advertising
- Set Design
- Theatre Design
- Typography
- Brand Identity

Apprenticeship & Career Options

- Community Arts Leader
- Exhibition Curator
- Gallery Curator
- Media Researcher
- Photographic Technician
- Photojournalist
- Picture Editor
- Community Arts
- Cultural Learning Officer
- Designer



(Art) Photography

Curriculum Leader: Ms E Garner egarner1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8206**

Overview

Photography is an exciting and creative subject. The course requires students to be artistic, open-minded and well-organised individuals, which are crucial qualities for those who wish to pursue a career in Photography or the arts.

You will be introduced to a variety of modern and traditional techniques and processes, digital photography, lighting and Photoshop manipulation. You will study the work of other photographers, understand what makes for a good photograph and be able to create your own.

Assessment

60% NEA (Coursework)
40% Exam unit (10 Hour Exam)

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Art, Photography and Textiles. Students need a grade 4+ in Art, Art Graphics or Photography. Portfolio work can also be assessed if you do not have a grade in the subject.

Degree Options

- Commercial Photography
- Fashion Photography
- Photojournalism
- Forensic Photography
- Film Production
- Graphic Design
- Web Design
- Product Design
- Interior Design/Architecture
- Fashion

Apprenticeship & Career Options

- Community Arts Leader
- Exhibition Curator
- Gallery Curator
- Media Researcher
- Photographic Technician
- Photojournalist
- Picture Editor
- Community Arts
- Cultural Learning Officer
- Designer



(Art) Textiles

Curriculum Leader: Mrs C Lobo clobo1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8204**

Overview

Textile design focuses on a variety of different journeys and outcomes. Pieces can vary from having functional or non-functional purposes. You will look at weaving, knitting, stitching, dyeing fabrics, printing methods both digitally and through other manual media.

During the course, you will have the opportunity to explore art textiles, fashion design and illustration, costume design, constructed textiles, printed and dyed textiles, surface pattern, stitched and/or embellished textiles, soft furnishings and/or textiles for interiors, digital textiles & installed textiles. You will also look at a variety of different designers and artists throughout the course, linking your own ideas with the work of others.

Assessment

60% NEA (Coursework)
40% Exam unit (10 Hour Exam)

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Art, Photography and Textiles. Students need a grade 4+ in Textiles or Art. Portfolio work can also be assessed if you do not have a grade in the subject.

Degree Options

Graphic Design
Comic Art
Costume Design
Advertising
Set Design
Theatre Design

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Community Arts
Cultural Learning Officer
Fashion Designer
Retail Buyer
Merchandising



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Business Studies

Curriculum Leader: Mrs N Barnett nbarnett1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **603/0304/9**

Overview

The world of business changes day to day, moment to moment; it never stands still and it's exciting! A famous Chief Executive Officer once said, "If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near".

This engaging course will enable students to understand the business world, developing their knowledge over key areas; business in the real world, influences upon businesses, functional areas of operations, marketing, human resources and finance.

Assessment

100% Examination

Paper 1: Influences of Operations and Human Resources on Business Activity
1 hour 45 minutes

Paper 2: Influences of Marketing and Finance on Business Activity
1 hour 45 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Business Studies A Level is offered at Highdown. Students must get a Grade 4+ in Business Studies. If Business not studied at GCSE, 5+ in Maths.

Degree Options

Logistics Management
Marketing Management
New Media Marketing
Data Analyst
Business Analyst

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Accounting
Marketing
Payroll / Operations
Project Management
Banking



Highdown School and Sixth Form

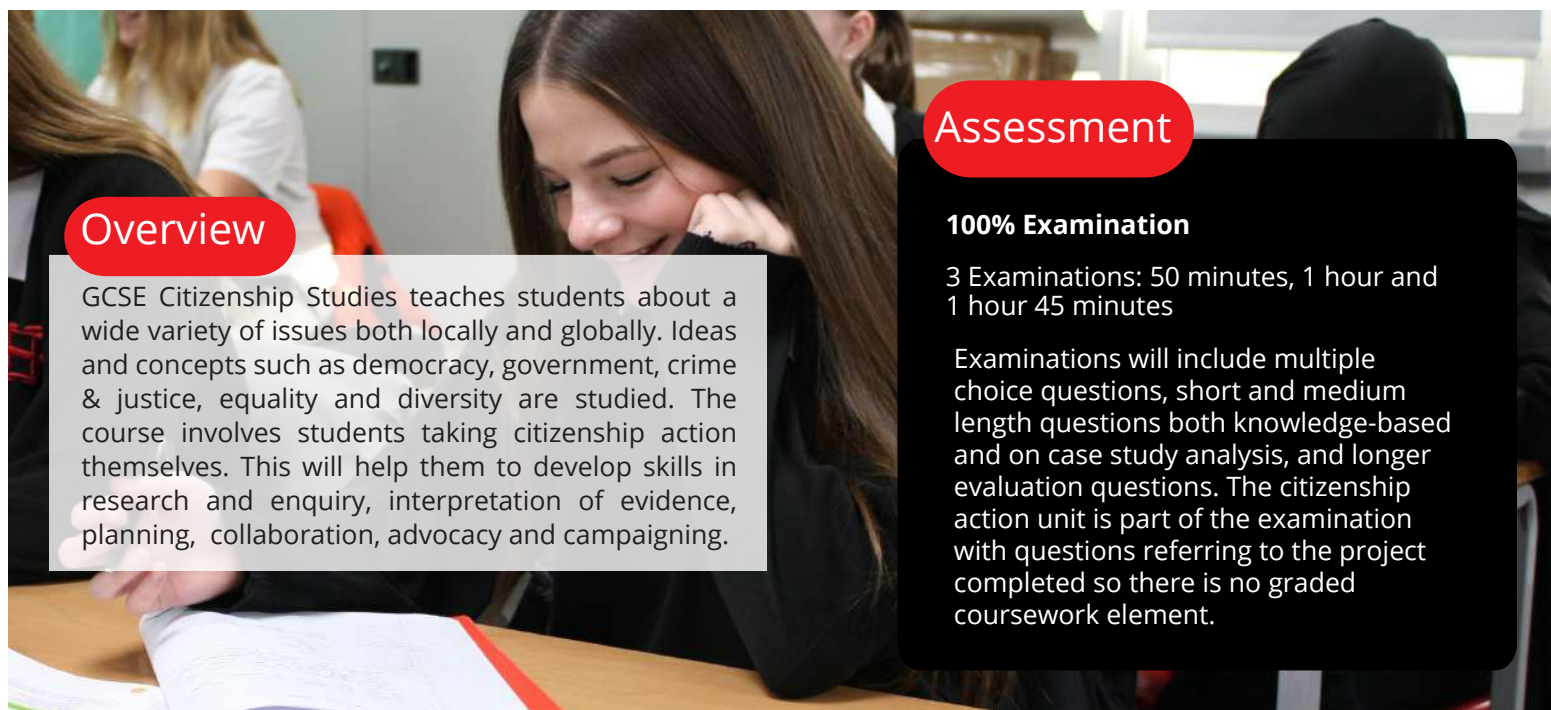
Citizenship Studies

Curriculum Leader: Mr M Hampson mhampson1@glfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **OCR**

Syllabus Reference: **J270**



Overview

GCSE Citizenship Studies teaches students about a wide variety of issues both locally and globally. Ideas and concepts such as democracy, government, crime & justice, equality and diversity are studied. The course involves students taking citizenship action themselves. This will help them to develop skills in research and enquiry, interpretation of evidence, planning, collaboration, advocacy and campaigning.

Assessment

100% Examination

3 Examinations: 50 minutes, 1 hour and 1 hour 45 minutes

Examinations will include multiple choice questions, short and medium length questions both knowledge-based and on case study analysis, and longer evaluation questions. The citizenship action unit is part of the examination with questions referring to the project completed so there is no graded coursework element.

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Philosophy. Students are required to meet the 6th form entry requirements of 5 GCSEs at grades 9-4, including 4+ in English and Maths. Highdown also offers a range of other supporting subjects, such as Politics or Sociology.

Degree Options

Sustainability and Global Citizenship
Politics
History
Geography
British Studies
Citizenship Studies
Philosophy

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Aid Worker
Teacher
Editorial Assistant
Religious Leader
Paralegal



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Computer Science

Curriculum Leader: Mr D Stephenson dstephenson1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **OCR**

Syllabus Reference: **8525**

Overview

GCSE Computer Science offers a dynamic introduction to the principles and practices that underpin modern digital systems. You will explore how computers work at a fundamental level, examining hardware, software, networks, cybersecurity, and the ethical considerations that shape the way technology is developed and used.

A major element of the course is practical programming. You will learn to design, write, test, and refine code to create applications and solve real-world problems. This hands-on work strengthens your computational thinking ability, enabling you to break down complex tasks, recognise patterns, develop algorithms, and apply logical reasoning.

By the end of the course, you will have developed a strong technical foundation and transferable problem-solving skills that are highly valued across many industries. Technology drives innovation in areas such as software engineering, game development, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, finance, scientific research, engineering, and medicine. Studying Computer Science equips you with the mindset and capabilities needed to thrive in these fields.

If you enjoy working with technology, tackling challenges, or understanding the systems that power the modern world, GCSE Computer Science will provide a rewarding and future-focused learning experience.

Assessment

100% Examination

**50% Paper 1
Computational Thinking and
Programming**

1 hour 45 minutes

**50% Paper 2
Computing Concepts**

1 hour 45 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Computer Science and Level 3 Digital Media, students require 6+ in computing and 5+ in maths.

Degree Options

Computer Science
Software Engineering
Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning
Data Science or Analytics
Digital Forensics
Cyber Security
Networking
Game Design and Development
The course also supports anyone looking to study engineering or the sciences.

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Cyber Security
Engineering
Networking
Systems IT
IT Support
Data Analytics



Creative iMedia

Curriculum Leader: Mr D Stephenson dstephenson1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **OCR**

Syllabus Reference: **J834**

Overview

GCSE Creative iMedia introduces you to the fast-moving world of digital media production and the creative processes behind it. You will learn how digital projects are researched, planned, designed and delivered, developing a clear understanding of how media products are crafted to meet the needs of real clients.

The course is highly practical. You will design and produce a variety of digital assets and interactive products such as graphics, animations, websites and game or media storyboards. Alongside these production skills, you will develop strong pre-production capabilities, including the creation of mood boards, scripts, visualisations and work plans - the essential tools used across the creative industries to guide successful project development.

Through hands-on assignments, you will build confidence with industry-standard software and gain the technical and organisational skills required to take a concept from initial idea to final product.

Creative iMedia is ideal if you enjoy combining creativity with technology. It provides an excellent foundation for further study and careers in areas such as graphic design, digital illustration, web design, animation, video production, marketing, and game concept development. If you are excited by design challenges and eager to understand how digital content is made, this course offers a compelling and future-focused pathway.

Assessment

40% Written Exam: Creative iMedia in the Media Industry

30% Non Exam Assessment: Visual identity and digital graphics

30% Coursework: Interactive Digital Media

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers a wide range of subjects covering Arts and Media at A Level

Degree Options

Information Technology
Creative Media Production
Media Studies
Media and Communication
Sports Media
Marketing

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Film and TV Production
Journalism
Digital Media
Graphic Design
Marketing
Game Design
Photography



Design & Technology

Curriculum Leader: Miss C Lobo clobo1@glfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8552**

Overview

This course will encourage you to design and make products with creativity using a range of materials and techniques. The advantage of this course is that you can study and make products using paper/card, timber, metals, plastics and electronics - the choice is yours!

You will become more aware of sustainability and the environmental impact of your designs, the impact of new and emerging technologies and materials and how this influences design and how energy is generated and stored.

The course provides a wide range of learning on topics which aid your understanding of modern design and technological advances. You will look into the functions of mechanical devices, how electronic systems provide functionality to products and processes and the use of programmable components to embed functionality into products.

Assessment

50% Examination
2 hours

50% Coursework

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers Art and Design at A Level. Students require a Grade 4+ in an Art subject. Portfolio work will be considered.

Degree Options

Product Design
Graphic Design
Design Engineering
Industrial Design
Textile Design

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Architect
Automotive Engineer
Ergonomist
Furniture Designer
Product Designer



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Dance

Subject Leader: Mrs P Hawkins phawkins1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8236**

Overview

Do you love movement, music and expressing yourself creatively? GCSE Dance is the perfect opportunity to combine physical skill with artistic imagination. This course is designed for students who want to explore dance performance, choreography and the appreciation of dance as an art form.

Why Choose GCSE Dance?

Creative Expression: Develop your own choreography and bring ideas to life.

Performance Skills: Learn technical and expressive qualities through solo and group dances.

Fitness & Well-being: Improve strength, flexibility and confidence.

Cultural Insight: Explore professional works and understand dance in different contexts.

Assessment

Component 1

60% Performance and Choreography Performance - Solo: 1 minute (two set phrases)

Choreography - Solo: 2-2.5minutes and Group: 3-3.5minutes
Internally marked and externally moderated by AQA

Component 2

40% Examination

Dance Appreciation - 1 hour 30 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Drama and Theatre. Students will need a 4+ in Drama GCSE. If Drama is not studied at GCSE, 5+ in English Language or Literature.

Degree Options

Dance
Theatre
Musical Theatre
Choreography
Education
Event Management

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Professional Dancer
Choreographer
Dance Teacher
Fitness Instructor
Event Co-ordinator
Arts Administration



Highdown School and Sixth Form

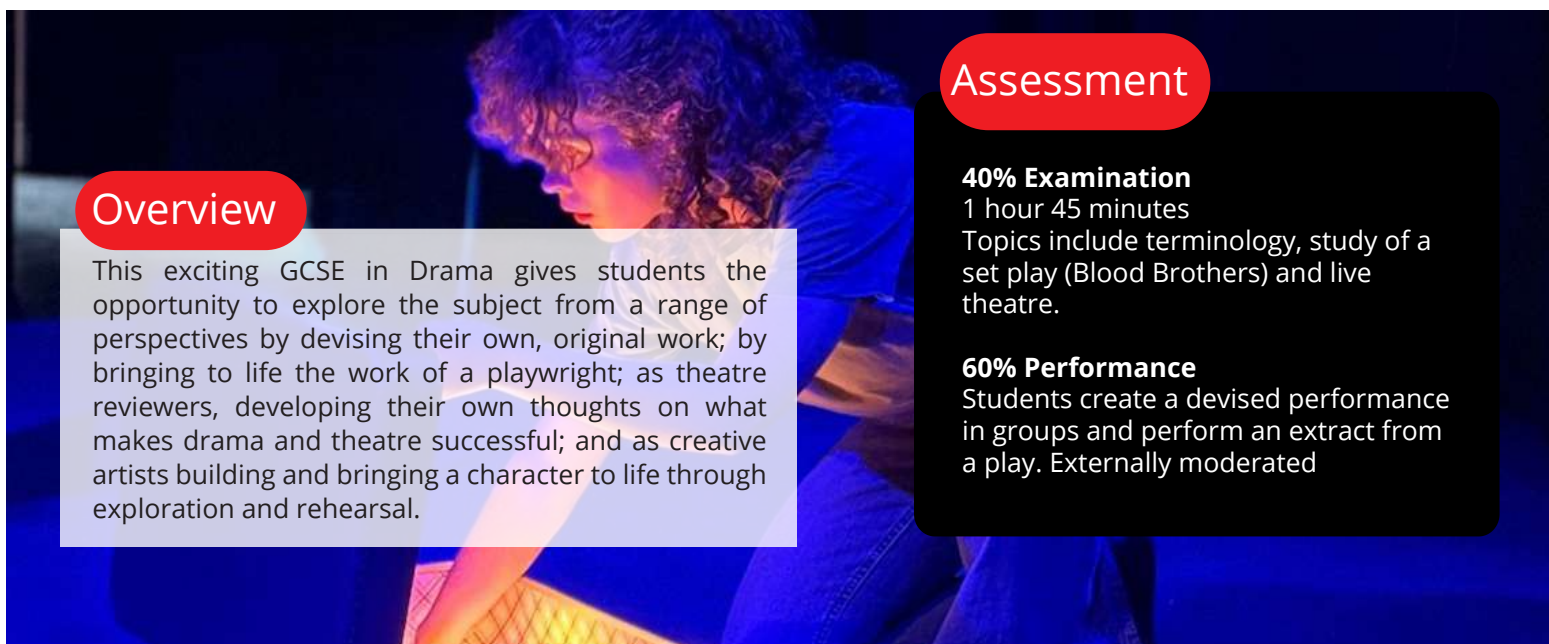
Drama

Curriculum Leader: Mrs S Lake slake1@glfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8261**



Overview

This exciting GCSE in Drama gives students the opportunity to explore the subject from a range of perspectives by devising their own, original work; by bringing to life the work of a playwright; as theatre reviewers, developing their own thoughts on what makes drama and theatre successful; and as creative artists building and bringing a character to life through exploration and rehearsal.

Assessment

40% Examination

1 hour 45 minutes

Topics include terminology, study of a set play (Blood Brothers) and live theatre.

60% Performance

Students create a devised performance in groups and perform an extract from a play. Externally moderated

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Drama and Theatre. Students will need a 4+ in Drama GCSE. If Drama is not studied at GCSE, 5+ in English Language or Literature.

Degree Options

Drama
Stage Management
Musical Theatre
Theatre Practice

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Film and TV
Teaching
Project/Events Management
Acting
Stage Management
Directing
Journalism
PR



Economics

Curriculum Leader: Mr R Schweitzer rschweitzer1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8136**

Overview

Few subjects are as dynamic as economics, with the news full of examples of economic principles learnt in the classroom operating in the real world. Through the study of how markets and economies work at both national and global levels you will see how current and historical events can be understood from an economic standpoint.

That understanding and the use of economic arguments will empower you to make informed decisions as active participants in society throughout your life.

Assessment

100% Examination

50% Paper 1 - How Markets Work
1 hour 45 minutes

50% Paper 2 - How the Economy Works
1 hour 45 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Economics A Level is offered at Highdown. Students must get a Grade 5 or above in both English and Maths GCSE. Economics A Level is complementary to other subjects such as Mathematics, Geography, Politics and Business.

Degree Options

Economics
International Relations
History
Mathematics
PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics)
Politics
Finance

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Stockbroker
Actuary
Business Analyst
Economist
Business Development Manager
Entrepreneur
Investment Manager
Accountant



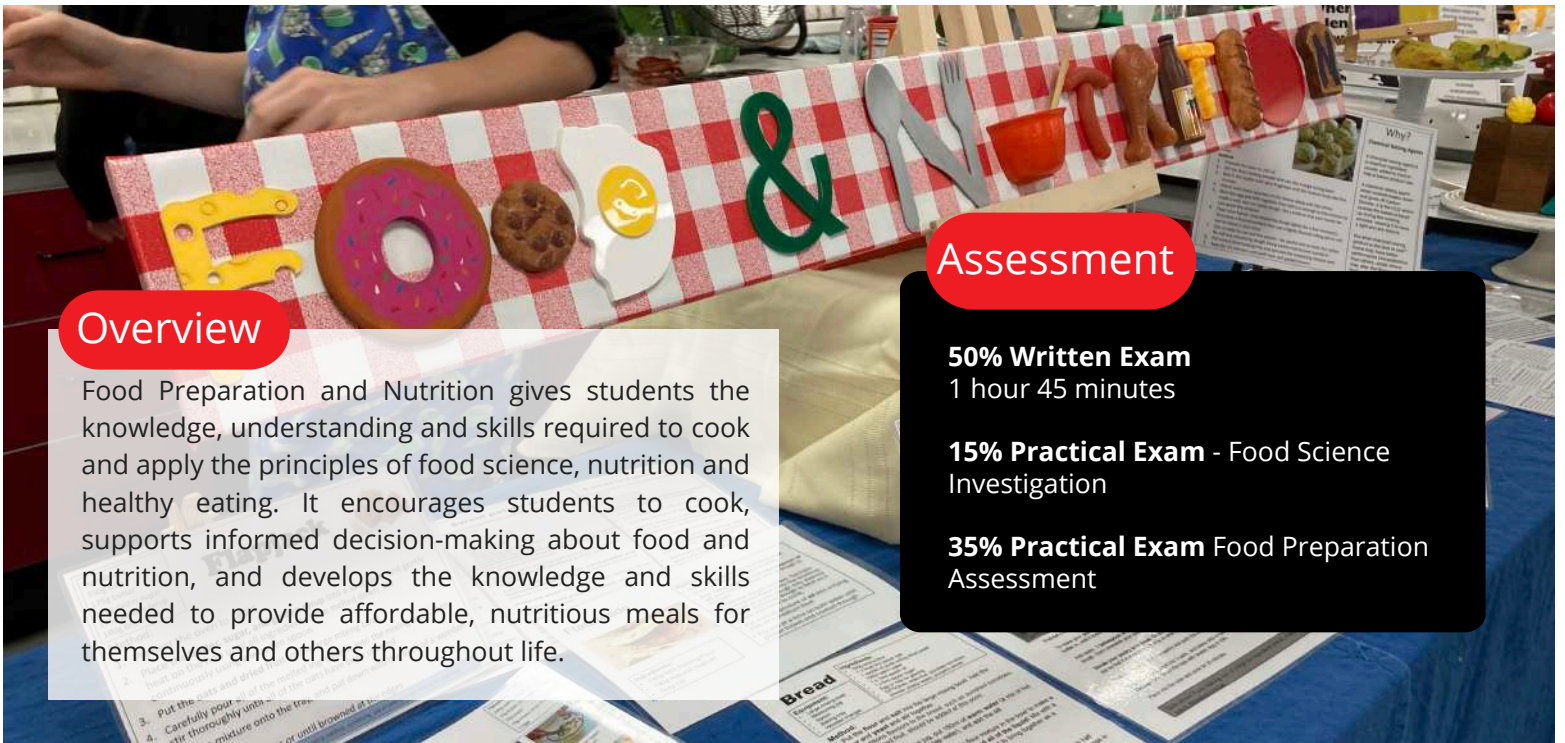
Qualification Level: GCSE

Food Preparation & Nutrition

Awarding Organisation: EDUQAS

Curriculum Leader: Miss C Lobo clobo1@gfhschools.org

Syllabus Reference: C560P1



Overview

Food Preparation and Nutrition gives students the knowledge, understanding and skills required to cook and apply the principles of food science, nutrition and healthy eating. It encourages students to cook, supports informed decision-making about food and nutrition, and develops the knowledge and skills needed to provide affordable, nutritious meals for themselves and others throughout life.

Assessment

50% Written Exam
1 hour 45 minutes

15% Practical Exam - Food Science Investigation

35% Practical Exam Food Preparation Assessment

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers studies in related subjects at A Level. A Level Biology, Sociology and Sport all include aspects of Food Preparation and Nutrition.

Degree Options

- Food Science
- Food and Nutrition
- Food Engineering
- Catering
- Culinary Studies

Apprenticeship & Career Options

- Agricultural Engineer
- Baker
- Butcher
- Catering Manager
- Chef
- Farmer
- Food Scientist
- Nutritional Therapist
- Food Writer



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Geography

Curriculum Leader: Mrs R Eaton reaton1@glfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8035**

Overview

By opting for geography you are showing an interest in the world in which we live. There is a strong emphasis on you as a global citizen, decision making and sustainability. The course is engaging and relevant to today's geographers – a qualification that enables students to explore the world, the issues it faces and their own place in it, and to help prepare them to succeed in their chosen pathway.

All students choosing GCSE Geography are required to undertake two fieldwork investigations, one human and one physical. Students will complete a river study and look into counter-urbanisation in the London rural-urban fringe commuter belt.

Geography is going places!

Assessment

100% Exam

Paper 1: Living with the Physical Environment, 35%

1 hour 30 minutes

Paper 2: Challenges in the Human Environment, 35%

1 hour 30 minutes

Paper 3: Geographical Applications, 30%

1 hour 30 minutes

Fieldwork is a compulsory element of the course including an investigation into downstream change on the River Wye & investigating the impacts of urban sprawl in Pangbourne.

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Geography. Students must have a Grade 5+ in Geography and 5+ in English.

Degree Options

Geography
Oceanography
Human Geography
Physical Geography

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Climate Scientist
Ecologist
Land Surveyor
Teacher



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Hair & Beauty

Curriculum Leader: Mrs K Jacobs [kjacob1@gfhschools.org](mailto:kjacobs1@gfhschools.org)

Overview

This qualification is designed to use the context of hairdressing and beauty therapy as a vehicle to support learners to develop broad and comprehensive understanding of the sector and related industries but, more importantly, of core academic knowledge and study skills that will support progression into post-16 and higher education. Specifically, the qualification will prepare students to progress onto qualifications related to the hair and beauty sector, such as the T Level in hair, beauty and aesthetics; however, learners may also progress on to broader areas of study. It is a vocational qualification equivalent to GCSE grades 9 -1. The content of the qualification is designed to engage learners through the context of hair and beauty due to its popularity and aspirational career pathways.

This qualification consists of three mandatory units

- UCO90 – Business and entrepreneurship in the hair and beauty sector
- UCO91 – Anatomy, physiology and cosmetic science
- UCO92 – Design in the hair and beauty sector

Assessment

40% Exam

1 hour 40 minutes
(Topics covered in UCO90 and 91)

60% Non-Exam Assessment

Approximately 20 hours

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

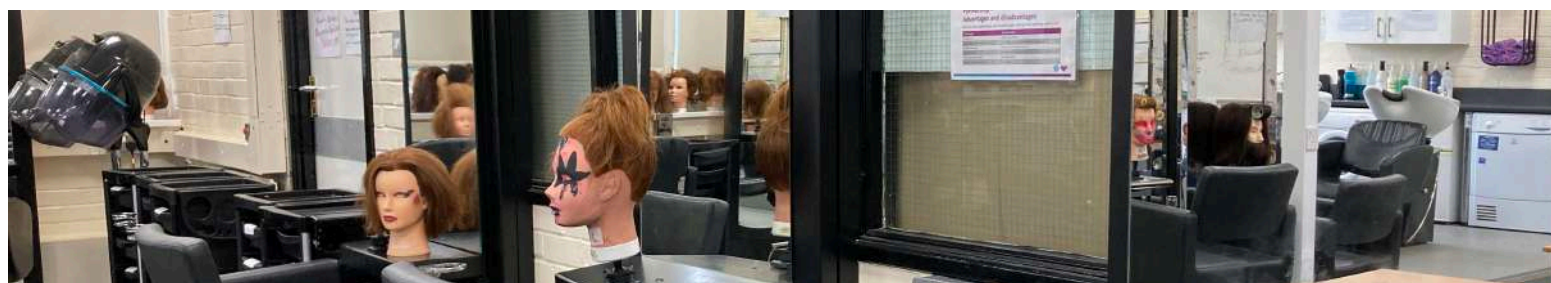
Highdown offers studies in related subjects at A Level. A Level Art and Design or Business.

Degree Options

Hair and Beauty Management
Cosmetology
Make-up and Fashion
Non-medical Aesthetic Therapies

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Hairdresser
Barber
Beauty Promotion
Media Make-up



History

Curriculum Leader: Mrs A Duncan aduncan1@glfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **Edexcel**

Overview

This is an exciting and varied course that provides students with an excellent understanding of the events that have shaped our country and world from the medieval period to the present day. This ranges from medieval medicine and Elizabethan exploration to the rise of Hitler in Germany and the nuclear arms race in the second half of the twentieth century. The study of history helps students to develop critical thinking skills as well as high levels of analysis and evaluation which are wanted by all employers and academic courses. If you want to better understand the world around you and make sense of who and where we are, GCSE History is for you!

Syllabus Reference:

P4 - Superpower Relations

B4 - Elizabethan England

1H10/11 - Medicine in Britain

1H10/31 - Weimar and Nazi Germany

Assessment

100% Exam

40% Paper 1

1 hour 45 minutes

30% Paper 2

1 hour 20 minutes

30% Paper 3

1 hour 15 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level History. Students must get a grade 5+ in History with Grade 5+ in English Language or Literature.

Degree Options

History
Journalism
Media
Politics
Archaeology

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Civil Service
Solicitor
Archivist
Museum Curator



Highdown School and Sixth Form

MFL - French

Curriculum Leader: Mrs L Guianvarch lguianvarch1@gfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8652**

Overview

French companies work in the Thames Valley and seek French speakers, while employers and universities increasingly demand a foreign language qualification. There are over 300 million French speakers globally; it is one of the three primary working languages of the European Union. The proximity of France with its rich culture enables students to experience life and travel in France.

The aim of the course is to enable students to develop:

- An understanding of French in a variety of contexts
- Knowledge of French vocabulary and structures
- Transferable language learning skills
- The ability to communicate effectively in French
- Knowledge of the rich culture of France

Assessment

25% Reading Exam
25% Listening Exam
25% Speaking Exam
25% Writing Exam

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

A Level French is offered at Highdown. Students must get a Grade 5 or higher in GCSE French (Higher Paper).

Degree Options

French
Translation
French Studies
Linguistics

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Airline Pilot
Journalist
Immigration Officer
Teacher
Translator



Students may only opt to study a language that they have previously studied at Key Stage 3.



Highdown School and Sixth Form

MFL - Mandarin

Curriculum Leader: Mrs L Guianvarch lguanvarch1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **Edexcel**

Syllabus Reference: **1CN0**

Overview

Over 1.3 billion people speak Mandarin including people in China, Singapore and Taiwan. China is a huge economic power and it is vital to be equipped for the future. Mandarin is a completely different language with its rich culture and the grammar is relatively easy to learn.

The aim of the course is to enable students to develop:

- An understanding of Chinese in a variety of contexts
- Knowledge of Chinese vocabulary and structures
- Transferable language learning skills
- The ability to communicate effectively in Chinese
- The awareness and understanding of countries and communities where Chinese is spoken

Assessment

25% Reading Exam
25% Listening Exam
25% Speaking Exam
25% Writing Exam

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Degree Options

Mandarin
Translation
French Studies
Linguistics

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Airline Pilot
Journalist
Immigration Officer
Teacher
Translator



Students may only opt to study a language that they have previously studied at Key Stage 3.



Highdown School and Sixth Form

MFL - Spanish

Curriculum Leader: Mrs L Guianvarch lguianvarch1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **Edexcel**

Syllabus Reference: **8692**

Overview

There are 430 million Spanish speakers worldwide and Spain is one of the UK's major trading partners. The value of trade between Spain and the UK is about £21 billion per year. In addition, Spain is the most likely country to be visited by UK tourists.

The aim of the course is to enable students to develop:

- An understanding of Spanish in a variety of contexts
- Knowledge of the Spanish vocabulary and structures
- Transferable language learning skills
- The ability to communicate effectively in Spanish

The main themes studied are:

- People and lifestyle
- Popular culture
- Communication and the world around us

Assessment

25% Reading Exam
25% Listening Exam
25% Speaking Exam
25% Writing Exam

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

A Level Spanish is offered at Highdown. Students must get a Grade 5+ in GCSE Spanish (Higher Paper).

Degree Options

Spanish
Translation
French Studies
Linguistics

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Airline Pilot
Journalist
Immigration Officer
Teacher
Translator



Students may only opt to study a language that they have previously studied at Key Stage 3.



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Music

Curriculum Leader: Mr H Santer hsanter1@glfschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **OCR**

Syllabus Reference: **J536**

Overview

You should choose music if you meet at least four of the following criteria:

- You have enjoyed music at Key Stage 3
- You play an instrument and/or sing
- You can read music
- You enjoy performing and composing
- You enjoy working with computers
- You want to study A Level music or music technology

The course is split into three main areas:

Performing: You will take part in solo and ensemble performances throughout the course.

Composing: You will have many opportunities to create your own composition work in a variety of musical styles.

Listening and Appraising: You will study a wide range of different music, from classical and jazz to pop and rock.

Assessment

40% Written Exam

30% Two performances, one of which must be part of an ensemble

30% Two composed pieces - one of which is directed by OCR

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Music. Students must achieve either GCSE Grade 5+ in Music and 5+ on an instrument/voice OR 5+ in Music Theory and 5+ on an instrument/voice.

Degree Options

Music
Music Technology
Film Music
Music Production
Creative Music

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Music Teacher
Sound Artist
Recording Artist
Advertising



Students may only opt to study music OR music technology - they cannot be studied together



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Music Technology

Curriculum Leader: Mr H Santer hsanter1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **OCR**

Syllabus Reference: **J536**

Overview

You should choose music technology if you meet at least four of the following criteria:

- You enjoy creating your own music tracks
- You have enjoyed music at Key Stage 3
- You want to make professional quality music recordings
- You enjoy working with computers
- You want to study A Level Music Technology
- You want to study A Level Music

Assessment

40% Written Exam

30% Two performances, one of which must be part of an ensemble

30% Two composed pieces - one of which is directed by OCR

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Music Technology. Students must achieve a Grade 4+ in Music/Music Technology (if studied) or portfolio of evidence.

Degree Options

Music
Music Technology
Film Music
Music Production
Creative Music

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Music Teacher
Sound Artist
Recording Artist
Advertising



Students may only opt to study music OR music technology - they cannot be studied together



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Physical Education

Curriculum Leader: Miss V Clark vclark1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **EDEXCEL**

Syllabus Reference: **1PE0**

Overview

GCSE PE allows students to receive a well-rounded and full introduction to the world of PE, sport and sport science by developing an understanding of how the mind and body work in relation to performance in physical activity.

Students will study Anatomy and Physiology, Sports Psychology, Health Fitness and Well-being, Physical Training, Socio-cultural influences and Movement Analysis. GCSE PE is for you if you regularly enjoy competitive sport and have a thirst for exploring the theory behind improving performance, as well as the benefits to health that regular participation can bring.

Assessment

36% Component 1 – Written exam: Fitness and Body Systems

1 hour and 30 minute

24% Component 2 – Written exam: Health and Performance

1 hour and 15 minute

30% Component 3 – Practical Performance

Internally marked and externally moderated practical in 3 sports (one team, one individual and one free choice)

10% Component 4 – Personal Exercise Programme

Internally marked and externally moderated 6-week training programme which is planned, performed and evaluated by students

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers Sport Level 3 BTEC. Students are required to meet the 6th form entry requirements of 5 GCSEs at grades 9-4, including 4+ in English and Maths.

Degree Options

Sport Coaching
Sport Management
Sports Therapy
Sports Psychology

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Physiotherapist
Sports Coach
PE Teacher
Sports Professional



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Religious Studies

Curriculum Leader: Mr M Hampson mhampson1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8062**

Overview

This GCSE course is an opportunity to develop your knowledge and understanding of some of the most important moral and social issues in our world. Learning of and from different faiths and world views (especially Christianity with a focus on Islam), it will cause you to think more about the different views people have on multiple issues and help you develop your own beliefs and ethical viewpoints. You will need to use your thinking skills, personal skills and your ability to listen and learn from other cultures to be successful.

Assessment

100% Written Exam

Two examinations
1 hour 45 minutes

Each exam is 50% of GCSE

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers A Level Philosophy. Students are required to meet the 6th form entry requirements of 5 GCSEs at grades 9-4, including 4+ in English and Maths. Highdown also offers a range of other supporting subjects, such as Politics or Sociology.

Degree Options

Religious Studies
Theology
Religious Literature
Sociology

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Teacher
Editorial Assistant
Religious Leader
Paralegal
Legal Executive
Solicitor



Highdown School and Sixth Form

BTEC SPORT

Curriculum Leader: Miss V Clark vclark1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **Level 1/2 Tech Award**

Awarding Organisation: **Pearson**

Syllabus Reference: **603/7068/3**

Overview

This Level 1/Level 2 Tech Award in Sport is ideal for students who would like to find out more about the sport industry; developing knowledge and associated practical skills that can be used when working in the sport sector.

You will develop communication, leadership, organisation and time management skills which are essential when primarily working with customers and supporting their individual needs in the sport industry.

You will explore types and provision of sport, examine different equipment and technology, understand the roles and responsibilities of officials, demonstrate ways to improve participants' sporting techniques as well as developing and understanding of the importance of fitness, fitness testing and the body.

Assessment

33%: Component 1 – Preparing Participants to Take Part in Sport and Physical Activity

An internal assessment made up of Pearson-set assignments that are completed independently

33%: Component 2 – Taking Part and Improving Other Participants Sporting Performance

An internal assessment made up of Pearson-set assignments that are completed independently

33%: Component 3 – Developing Fitness to Improve Other Participants Performance in Sport and Physical Activity

External Exam

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

Highdown offers Sport Level 3 BTEC – students will need a 4+ in Biology or 4-4 in Trilogy Science.

Degree Options

Sport Coaching
Sport Management
Sports Therapy
Sports Psychology

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Physiotherapist
Sports Coach
PE Teacher
Sports Professional



Highdown School and Sixth Form

Statistics

Subject Leader: Mr H Hutchinson mhutchinson1@gfhschools.org

Qualification Level: **GCSE**

Awarding Organisation: **AQA**

Syllabus Reference: **8382**

Overview

In a world swimming with data, an understanding of how that data is collected, used and interpreted is vital in empowering you to make informed decisions in both your private and professional lives in the future. Not only will you learn how to perform your own statistical investigations collecting and interpreting real world data yourself, you will also develop the tools and understanding to critique the statistics put forward by others.

Data is one of our most valuable commodities – can you afford not to understand it?

Assessment

100% Exam (Foundation or Higher)

50% Paper 1
1 hour 45 minutes

50% Paper 2
1 hour 45 minutes

Where Might This Qualification Take Me?

Post-16 Options at Highdown

- Mathematics A Level is available to students who obtain a Grade 7+ in their Mathematics GCSE
- Further Mathematics A Level is available to students who obtain a Grade 8 or higher in their Mathematics GCSE (must be taken alongside Mathematics A Level)
- Mathematical studies (Core Maths) is available to students who obtain a Level 4+ in their Mathematics GCSE
- Statistics GCSE would also be useful for anyone interested in Psychology A Level

Degree Options

Statistics
Mathematics
Finance
Actuarial Science

Apprenticeship & Career Options

Statistician
Sports Statistician
Research Scientist
Software Developer



Highdown School and Sixth Form