

Religious Studies

Examination Board: OCR

Qualification: A level

Teacher Contact: Miss Bird

Entry Requirements: Grade 5 in both English Language and Literature and a grade 6 in Religious Studies.

What will I study?

The A level course involves study in two areas:

Philosophy of Religion

In Philosophy of Religion we explore the ideas of great Western thinkers from the time of Plato to the present day. We consider difficult questions such as: Does suffering undermine the idea of a good God? Was Marx right to say that religion is an opiate? Which Richard will you support: Dawkins or Swinburne? Do you think that science explains everything about the world, or do poetry and art have something to contribute to human knowledge?

Religious Ethics

In Ethics we ask what it means to say something is 'good' or 'bad,' and if we can ever make useful judgements on issues such as war, abortion and euthanasia. We study the ethical theories of the great philosophers, Aristotle, Kant, Bentham and Mill, alongside gaining a greater understanding of classical Judeo-Christian ethics. In the second year we ask fundamental questions about freedom; do we have free will? Are we determined by an outside force? Has what will happen to us in life already been decided?

Developments in Religious Thought

We systematically study Christianity; this will include the exploration of religious beliefs, values, teachings and practices that shape religious identity, as well as sources of wisdom and authority. Also central are the ways in which religious traditions have developed over time, and religious responses to challenges and significant contemporary social issues.

How will I be assessed?

The course is assessed entirely by examination. There are three written papers each year, Philosophy of Religion, Religious Ethics and Christianity. All exams are 2 hours long.

Am I suited to this course?

Above all you need to be a person who constantly asks why and who is interested in the answers that other people give, even if you do not agree with them. Studying Religious Studies at A level gives you a deep insight into the world's major religions, allowing you to make useful contributions to debate on current affairs and ethical issues. The course does not assume religious belief and will suit people of no religious faith or someone from a faith background. It will develop individuals who can think independently, and have the skills to empathise with opposing viewpoints. Studying Philosophy and Ethics allows you to develop excellent critical-thinking skills and gain the essential essay-writing skills needed to study successfully at university.

What other subjects does it complement?

Philosophy and Ethics complements the study of History, Psychology and English. However, it is also valuable for students studying Mathematics and the Sciences. Many of the philosophers we study were contemporaries of the people who wrote the mathematical and scientific theories you will study.

Where can it lead?

An A level in Religious Studies is excellent preparation for a university degree in Philosophy or Theology. It is a highly regarded discipline at the top 10 universities, and is considered hugely beneficial when applying to study law, politics or medicine.