

## Religious Studies AS and A level (OCR)

### What is the Religious Studies Department like?

We are a small (but growing!) department, housed in spacious, well equipped classrooms. The tutors are enthusiastic about their subject and are keen to encourage thoughtful engagement with the issues studied as well as accurate scholarship. We welcome students of all religious faiths as well as those who have none. There are typically around 40 to 50 students in Religious Studies across the two year groups, and over the past years, RS students have achieved well above College average, with 80% gaining A-B grades for their AS level in 2008.

The Religious Studies course focuses on Religious Ethics and Christian Theology, the latter with an emphasis on modern developments in theology. Teaching uses a variety of approaches designed to suit different abilities and learning styles. We try hard to help any student with his or her own learning difficulties such as dyslexia and to stretch those with high academic ability.

### What is the course about?

The course covers two major themes which begin in Year 1 and are continued in the second year.

#### Unit 1: Religious Ethics AS

(a) Ethical theory. We study basic ethical concepts and four different ways of making moral decisions, theories that have been proposed over the history of moral philosophy:

- Utilitarianism: we must bring about as much happiness as possible
- Natural Law: human nature is a guide to morality
- Kantian Ethics: we must do our duty in any given situation
- Religious Ethics: how can religion be a guide to morality?

(b) Applied Ethics. Here we apply the ethical theories studied to a variety of moral issues:

- Abortion & the right to a child
- Euthanasia
- Genetic engineering and embryo research
- War & peace

#### Unit 2: Developments in Christian Theology

(a) Foundations of Christian Theology. We investigate some of the fundamental questions in theology:

- God and creation
- Knowledge of God
- Human nature
- The person of Christ
- Interpretation of the bible

(b) Liberation Theology. This is a theological movement which arose as a response to poverty and social injustice in Latin America in the 1960s.

- Biblical teaching on justice, poverty and violence
- Is God on the side of the poor and oppressed
- Are we allowed to use violence to address an unjust situation?
- What is 'sin' in a social context?
- What are the links between Marxism and liberation theology?

**In Year 2, Unit 3** explores further issues in ethics, while in **Unit 4** we study Feminist theology and Christianity's response to people of different faiths.

## **What sort of work will I be doing?**

In lessons, activities include lectures, videos, studying with the help of flexible learning units, games, small group and individual work. There will be opportunities for you to give short presentations and lead discussions.

A variety of work is set during the course, and work will differ from topic to topic. You need to be prepared to read and study set texts and extend your reading by making use of the many resources available in the Learning Resources Centre. There are short tests as well as substantial essays requiring some research. As the course progresses, you are expected to develop a self-disciplined approach to work and take responsibility for organising your studies.

## **How will I be assessed?**

At AS level, there are two 90-minute exams, one for each unit of study. In each exam you will need to answer two structured questions from a choice of four. The A2 exams are also 90 minutes each, and there will be four essay questions of which you need to answer two. Although the first AS module may be taken in January, we expect most students to sit their first exams in June of the first year.

## **What qualifications are recommended?**

The minimum expectation is five GCSE subjects at grade C or above, including English Language.

Because there are many different Religious Education courses at secondary school, a GCSE in RE may be helpful, but is not essential, and if you have one, there may not be any overlap between what you did for GCSE RS and what we study at A level. More important than a GCSE is an interest in religious and social issues and recognition of their impact on our lives, as well as openness to new ideas and to thinking in new ways about religious issues. If, in addition to that, you are willing to work hard and contribute to lively lessons, we would love to see you!

## **What are the progression routes with this qualification?**

Religious Studies combines well with most other A levels. Because you acquire important thinking skills as well as subject knowledge, an A level in RS is an excellent preparation for any degree course. Theology and Religious Studies are available at most British universities, and graduates enter a wide variety of careers including law, banking, the civil service and teaching.

## **What skills will I develop during this course?**

Religious Studies develops skills of communication, evaluation and analysis. You will learn to interpret religious texts as well as articulate your views and critically analyse an argument. These are skills which will be useful for any further education course and a good preparation for work.

## **What Religious Studies students have said about the course:**

“It’s nothing like GCSE; it has much more depth.”

“Don’t do it if you don’t like discussion and if you don’t like making decisions for yourself.”

“There’s not as much religious stuff as at GCSE.”

“It’s not using your own opinions – you have to justify what you say.”

“You learn about great philosophers and theologians.”

“ADVICE: Make clear notes, and read more than you have to.”

“I would recommend this subject, because it is well structured, challenging, and you have a lot of help and support from the teachers.”