

Religious Studies – GCSE Curriculum Overview (Years 10–11)

Curriculum Intent

GCSE Religious Studies builds on students' Key Stage 3 learning by developing confident, well-informed understanding of Christianity and Islam alongside the ability to evaluate contemporary ethical issues. Students learn to explain beliefs and practices using accurate terminology and religious sources, and to apply this knowledge to real-world themes such as relationships, the value of life, crime and punishment, and conflict. The course is sequenced to secure core religious knowledge first, then to deepen understanding through application, debate and exam-style evaluation, enabling students to construct balanced arguments and reach well-justified conclusions.

Structure of the GCSE Course

GCSE Religious Studies is taught as a coherent two-year programme in which knowledge is revisited and strengthened over time to support retention, confidence and depth.

Across the course, students study:

- **Themes (ethical issues):** relationships and families; religion and life; religion, crime and punishment; religion, peace and conflict
 - **Christianity:** beliefs and teachings; practices and lived religion
 - **Islam:** beliefs and teachings; practices and lived religion
 - **Skills and exam practice:** interpretation of sources, written argument, evaluation of viewpoints and timed examination responses
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Year 10 – Building Secure Foundations

Year 10 establishes the expectations of GCSE Religious Studies and develops secure understanding of both thematic and religious content. Students are taught to describe beliefs accurately, explain religious responses using sources of authority and evaluate contrasting viewpoints in a structured and coherent manner.

Students begin with **Relationships and Families**, exploring questions surrounding sexuality, marriage, family life and gender equality. They examine differing Christian perspectives and consider how religious teachings influence moral decision-making on issues such as contraception, divorce and discrimination. This unit introduces the structure of extended evaluative writing and reinforces the importance of balanced argument.

Students then study **Religion and Life**, focusing on beliefs about creation, stewardship and the sanctity of life. Students explore how religious belief shapes responses to environmental responsibility, the treatment of animals, abortion and euthanasia. This strengthens the ability to apply belief to contemporary ethical debates with clarity and evidence.

Alongside the themes, students build depth of religious knowledge through **Islam: Beliefs and Teachings**. They examine key concepts such as tawhid, prophethood, angels, life after death and authority, alongside Sunni and Shi'a perspectives. This provides a secure theological foundation that supports later thematic application and prepares students for the study of Islam Practices in Year 11.

Year 10 concludes with **Christian Practices**, developing understanding of worship, prayer, sacraments, pilgrimage, festivals and the role of the Church in the local and global community. Students explore how belief is expressed in action, strengthening their ability to link doctrine with lived experience.

Throughout Year 10, students complete timed practice questions and structured assessments, gradually building confidence in exam technique, command words and extended written evaluation.

Year 11 – Application, Depth and Examination Preparation

Year 11 builds on the foundation of Year 10 by deepening knowledge, strengthening retrieval and refining exam performance. Learning increasingly emphasises synoptic thinking, drawing on Christianity and Islam to address thematic issues with precision and balance.

Students begin with **Religion, Crime and Punishment**, applying ethical reasoning and religious teachings to questions about justice, forgiveness, prison systems and the death penalty. They explore the aims of punishment and evaluate how belief influences responses to crime and the law, developing more mature and nuanced evaluation.

Students then study **Islam Practices**, exploring how faith is lived through the Five Pillars, festivals, prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage. Students examine similarities and differences within Islam and consider how practice reinforces identity, community and submission to God. This deepens their ability to apply Islamic teaching accurately within thematic debates.

Students also complete **Peace and Conflict**, examining religious responses to war, violence, protest and reconciliation. They explore concepts such as Just War Theory, pacifism and peacemaking, evaluating how belief shapes both personal conscience and political action. This unit consolidates students' ability to analyse complex and sensitive issues using religious teachings to support balanced conclusions.

Spring Term, Year 11 – Consolidation and Examination Preparation

In the Spring term of Year 11, curriculum time is deliberately structured for consolidation and examination readiness. Students revisit key Christian and Islamic beliefs and practices to strengthen precision and recall before revisiting the four themes in a synoptic and applied manner.

During this period, students complete regular timed exam responses, refine their use of command words and practise building developed evaluation that includes contrasting viewpoints and supported judgements. Structured revision, model answers and retrieval activities ensure students enter the examination period with secure knowledge, clear strategies and confidence in their ability to succeed.

Assessment and Progression

Assessment is embedded throughout the course through timed exam questions, structured end-of-unit assessments and regular knowledge retrieval. Students are assessed on accurate religious knowledge, use of key terminology, explanation supported by sources of authority and evaluative writing that considers multiple perspectives before reaching a justified conclusion.

By the end of Year 11, students are able to apply Christian and Islamic beliefs and practices to contemporary ethical issues with clarity and confidence. The course develops analytical thinking, balanced reasoning and extended writing skills that support progression to A Level Religious Studies and other essay-based subjects, as well as informed engagement with the wider world.