



NEWSTEAD WOOD SCHOOL

"creating opportunities for success"

8 May 2026

Dear Parent/Carer,

Religion, Philosophy and Ethics at Newstead Wood School

We are writing in response to some recent questions regarding the inclusion of GCSE Religious Studies (also referred to as Religious, Philosophy & Ethics – RPE) as part of the core GCSE curriculum at Newstead.

We would like to clarify that while Religious Studies is not necessarily compulsory as an examined subject in schools, it is compulsory to be taught as part of the wider curriculum in line with government guidance. As an academically selective and highly aspirational school, we have made the clear decision that, since this content must be taught to all students, it is both appropriate and beneficial for every student to gain a formal GCSE qualification which recognises and accredits that learning.

GCSE Religious Studies forms an integral part of the holistic, challenging and diverse curriculum we champion at Newstead and of which we are extremely proud. It is an academically rigorous subject, highly regarded by universities, and one that develops critical thinking, evaluative reasoning, and understanding how to formulate structured arguments - skills that support success across the curriculum and beyond.

Within our AQA GCSE Religious Studies course, students study Christianity and Islam alongside four Themes (Religion & Life, Existence of God, Peace & Conflict and Crime & Punishment). These religions have been selected because they are the two largest religions practised in the UK, and the decision reflects the professional judgement and subject expertise of our teaching staff. This focus enables students to develop a secure and meaningful understanding of belief, practice, and influence within contemporary British society, while exploring key philosophical and ethical issues relevant to modern life.

It is important to emphasise that Religious Studies at Newstead is not about promoting religious belief. Rather, it supports students in understanding the diversity that exists within Britain today, developing respect for different perspectives, and thinking critically about moral, philosophical, and ethical questions. The subject actively fosters tolerance of all faiths and none, fully aligned with British values. Please be assured that we learn *about* religion as opposed to *from* religion to ensure that all students, regardless of their own personal faith can engage fully in the curriculum and achieve highly.

Our confidence in Religious Studies as a core GCSE is reinforced by the exceptional academic outcomes our students achieve. Historically, 64% of students have achieved a Grade 9, and 92% achieve a Grade 7–9, demonstrating both the high level of challenge within the subject and the success of our approach.

Our position on Religious Studies is communicated clearly and consistently. It is set out on our school website, explained during Open Events, and reiterated at Year 9 Options Evening. Students applying to Newstead do

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so with the understanding that GCSE Religious Studies is part of our core curriculum, in the same way as other compulsory subjects.

While we value open and respectful communication with parents and carers, decisions regarding the curriculum are ultimately made by educational professionals, informed by statutory requirements, academic evidence, and our school ethos. Teachers for all subjects select topics based upon expertise and professional reasoning e.g. texts in English, units in History, plays in Drama at both GCSE and A Level. This is carefully mapped across the curriculum and key stages to ensure breadth, depth, and quality of outcomes. These are teacher and leadership-led decisions in the best interests of the students.

We are confident that RPE's place as a core subject serves the best interests of our students and reflects the high-quality education Newstead stands for as well as playing a significant role in promoting British values, particularly the principle of tolerance and mutual respect for those of all faiths and none and thus helping prepare our own Newstead community to engage thoughtfully within wider British society.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Norman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Mr P Norman
Headteacher