



# Thomas Mills

High School & Sixth Form

## **CORE COURSES FOR YEAR 9**

INFORMATION PACK  
FOR  
2026 - 2027

COURSE CONTENT IS CURRENT AT THE TIME OF PUBLICATION.  
COURSE CONTENT MAY CHANGE PRIOR TO THE  
COMMENCEMENT OF COURSES

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# **YEAR 9 CORE PROGRAMME 2026**

All pupils will follow a core GCSE programme comprising:

- English Language GCSE
- English Literature GCSE
- Mathematics GCSE
  
- Separate Sciences in Biology, Chemistry and Physics

Or

- Double Award Combined Science

All pupils will also study Non-Exam Physical Education and Religious Studies.

In addition, all pupils will follow a personal development programme that includes Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education, Careers Education and Guidance alongside the statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education.

As part of their Personal Development, pupils are encouraged to take part in clubs, music, theatre and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

## **Optional Subjects**

All pupils will have to initially choose to study for a GCSE in one Modern Foreign Language (French, German, or Spanish).

They will also have to initially choose one humanity (History, Geography or GCSE Religious Studies)

Pupils are encouraged to keep breadth in their choices to include at least one Art and/or Design Subject.

At the end of Year 9, Pupils will choose four Options Subjects to continue with until Year 11.

Course details for these options subjects are in the in the options choice's booklet.

# GCSE Grading System

The GCSE grading system runs from 9 - 1, with a grade 9 being the highest grade.

The table below shows an approximate comparison of the new grades to the old system. The grades are not directly equivalent, however, a new grade 7 is comparable with the bottom of an old grade A.

The majority of pupils should achieve a Grade 5 or above in all their GCSEs, especially in these Core Subjects.

New GCSE Grades	Old GCSE Grad
9	A*
8	A
7	
6	B
5	
4	C
3	D
2	E
	F
1	G

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE & ENGLISH LITERATURE**

Examining Board: AQA

At Thomas Mills High School all pupils will study separate courses in English Language and English Literature.

## **GCSE English Language**

- The English Language GCSE will encourage pupils to read a greater range of high quality, challenging literature and non-fiction texts from a range of genres and types (from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries).
- Reading and writing will be equally weighted in the English Language GCSE.
- The English Language GCSE will have a greater focus on making sure that pupils are able to write clearly and accurately, in good Standard English. There will be an increased emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar including the use of vocabulary.
- Speaking and Listening will be assessed through endorsement. There will be a bigger emphasis on teaching pupils to become more confident in formal speaking.

## **GCSE English Literature**

- The English Literature GCSE will encourage pupils to read a wide range of classic literature fluently with the assessment of:
  - A 19<sup>th</sup> century novel
  - A Shakespeare play
  - A selection of poetry since 1789 based on a central theme.
  - British fiction or drama from 1914 onwards
- There will be increased assessment of unseen texts.
- The quality of writing in the response to texts will be assessed.
- Both GCSEs will be assessed at the end of the course in 2021 by examination. A grading scale of 1-9 will be applied with 9 being the top level. Tiers of papers for different level of entry will not exist.

# MATHEMATICS

Examining Board: AQA

- The subject content is split into three groups:
  - content that all pupils should master (this is the biggest group)
  - content that should be taught but higher achieving pupils should master
  - content that will be taught only to higher achieving pupils and mastered by the highest achievers (those likely to go on to A-level study in maths)
- The GCSE will have more focus on making sure that every pupil masters the fundamentals of maths. These have been defined by the DfE as areas such as calculation, ratio and proportion.
- The assessment objectives place more emphasis on reasoning and problem solving.
- Grading will be on a nine-point scale, with 9 being the highest available grade.
- The tiering structure will remain the same, with an overlap between the tiers at grades 4 and 5. This means that the Foundation tier will cover grades 1 to 5 and the Higher tier will cover grades 4 to 9 (grade 4 is now considered a standard pass and grade 5 is considered a good pass grade).

Both content and skills cover areas of the subject that we would all want young people to study. However, the additions mean that there will need to be more assessment time and greater commitment from pupils.

# SEPARATE SCIENCE AND COMBINED SCIENCE

**Exam Board:** OCR

**Specification:** GCSE (9-1) Gateway Science Suite:

GCSE Combined Science A (J250)  
GCSE Biology A (J247) Chemistry A (J248) Physics A (J249)

**Introduction:** All pupils follow a common GCSE programme in year 9. At the start of year 10, they are guided onto either the Separate Science or Combined Science course, with final decisions confirmed in year 11. Both routes allow pupils to progress to A level Science, though those aiming for A level study are best prepared by following the higher tier papers.

**Aims:** Science is all around us and helps us understand the universe, the world and everyday life. Our GCSE courses are designed to link theory with practice, developing outstanding young scientists in Biology, Chemistry and Physics. The Gateway Combined Science A qualification contains a reduced proportion of the content outlined for Biology A, Chemistry A and Physics A.

**Content:**

	Y9		Y10		Y11	
	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6
Biology	B1: Cell level systems	B2: Scaling up	B3: Organism level systems	B4: Community level systems	B5: Genes, inheritance and selection	B6: Global challenges
Chemistry	C1: Particles C2: Elements, compounds and mixtures	C4: Predicting and identifying reactions and products	C3: Chemical reactions	C5: Monitoring and controlling chemical reactions	C6: challenges Global	
Physics	P1: Matter	P2: Forces	P3: Electricity P4: Magnetism and magnetic field	P5: Waves in matter P6: Radioactive decay – waves and particles	P7: Energy	P8: Global challenges

**Examinations:** The GCSE Science courses follow a linear structure, with all assessments taking place through final examinations at the end of Year 11.

- Combined Science: 6 exams in total (2 per subject), each worth 16.7%
- Separate Sciences: 2 exams per subject, each worth 50%

However, although there is the same number of examinations for Combined Science and Separate Sciences, as there is more content in the latter. Consequently, the examinations for Separate Sciences are Longer.

Grades follow the 9-1 scale, with 9 being the highest. The scheme of assessment consists of two tiers:

- **Foundation tier:** Assesses grades 1 - 5.
- **Higher tier:** Assesses grades 4 - 9.

**Practical requirements:** GCSE Science courses require pupils to carry out practical activities embedded throughout the teaching topics. Practical work is fundamental to scientific study and prepares pupils for their written examinations.

**Interest:** If you find yourself asking questions like 'How does that work?' or 'Why does my body do that?' then Science is for you. Our aim at Thomas Mills is to develop your interest and enthusiasm for Science while preparing you for a future in an ever-evolving world of science and technology.

# **PHYSICAL EDUCATION (NON EXAM)**

**Content:** The core Physical Education course is designed to allow individuals the opportunity to develop their understanding and ability to perform a range of roles, in a variety of activities.

## **Activities:**

- Athletics
- Fitness Training
- Hockey
- Football
- Netball
- Trampolining
- Rugby
- Cricket
- Rounders
- Table Tennis
- Sports Leadership
- Tennis
- Badminton
- Basketball
- Dance
- Softball

**Skills:** Individual performance skills will be developed, as well as cooperative, leadership skills and evaluation of performance.

**Interest:** The Physical Education staff are keen to make the course as varied and enjoyable as possible. The emphasis will be on participation and pupils taking responsibility for their own and others development.

# PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Content:** Our programme is based on the PSHE Association scheme (Department for Education approved) and the linked scheme provided by Hodder Education - PSHE Education (KS3 & KS4). It covers all of the statutory requirements for Relationships and Sex Education and Careers education. However, it is far more than just the statutory requirements and covers a wide range of social, moral and cultural topics.

The Personal Development curriculum is closely aligned with the Core Religious Studies curriculum and the pastoral programme of assemblies and tutorial work.

Outline topics in each of Years 7 - 10 are as follows:

- Year 7:** Life changes, Relationships, Health, First Aid and Values
- Year 8:** Drugs (including smoking & alcohol), Sexual Health and Emotional Wellbeing
- Year 9:** Relationships, Parenting skills, Drug Awareness and Keeping Healthy.
- Year 10:** Emotional Wellbeing, Sexual Health, Values and Equality, Government, Consumerism and The Law.
- Year 11:** Healthy Choices, Safety, Relationships and Next Steps (education).

In addition - Tutorial work includes activities on careers and next-steps in education, the news and current affairs and other topics.

However, this is a flexible and adjustable scheme designed to accommodate topical events and important issues in the local and national communities as they arise (examples include the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (bereavement) and the inquest into the death of Molly Russell (online safety)).

**Skills:** Topic areas aim to foster responsible and informed attitudes and behaviour in young adults; and to develop skills that will equip people for their future working lives.

# **RELIGIOUS STUDIES (NON-EXAM)**

**Content:** All pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 will study this course. All of the topics focus on analysis, diversity and respecting individual difference among world views:  
- Years 9 and 11 are on rotation with PD.

## **YEAR 9**

### **What is God like?**

This topic explores some of the key characteristics attributed to God from a variety of world views but also look at the issues that might arise from these. Pupils will also explore free will and determinism as well as predestination.

### **Judaism**

They explore the key beliefs and practices of the religion including the significance of holy books and festivals. They will also explore what it means to be a Jew in the modern world and the history of the faith.

### **Authority and Power**

These topics gives the pupils the opportunity to learn about roles models linked to the protected characterises and consider the changes that they have made to world. They will look at content linked to race, disability, feminism, religion, LGBTQ+ and freedom of speech.

## **YEAR 10**

### **Miracles**

This topic explores the varying definitions of miracles, as well as examples (modern and Biblical) and arguments for and against.

The scheme is taught through key questions to ensure focus but also develop pupil exploration. The course is taught in an active and engaging way to help enthuse pupils.

### **Arguments Against Religion**

Here pupils get the chance to look at and compare a range of psychological and sociological arguments against religion.

Theorists include:

Marx, Freud and Durkhiem.

### **Islam**

Pupils will look at origins of the faith and what it means to be a Muslim today in the UK, as well as the diversity of belief in Islam as world view. The differences between Sunni and Shi'a will be explored.

### **Greek Scholars**

This provides a clear introduction to some of the scholars that are studied at AS level. Plato's and Aristotle's views of the soul and reality are compared. The pupils also get an opportunity to ask and answer a range of philosophical questions.

### **Religion and Ethics**

Pupils will explore a wide range of modern ethical issues including genetic engineering, cloning, saviour siblings, abortion and euthanasia. There will also be the opportunity to consider where different morals come from and explore the pupil's own moral code.

## **YEAR 11**

**This is also part of the PSHE programme of study.**

### **LGBTQ+**

This looks the history of LGBT rights and the changes in law. It gives pupils an insight into the range of religious views associated with the topic and gives lots of opportunities for discussion. It also delves in how LGBTQ+ issues are portrayed in the media.

### **Paganism, Zoroastrianism and Baha'i**

The topics aims to give the pupils a taste of these lesser-known religions and compare and contrast their beliefs. Focus is on key concepts and practices as well as festivals and the way of life lived by these people.

### **Ethics in the Modern World**

Here pupils explore a range of issues linking to keeping them safe. These include gambling and drug addiction, cyber bullying, crime and punishment and cosmetic surgery. Pupils are given the opportunity to explore their own ethical views and the importance of them having a voice.