

Frequently asked questions

Year 9 Pathways 2026



THE
NORWOOD
SCHOOL

How many GCSE's can my child take? The vast majority of students will take 9 subjects. A smaller number will take 8. The Government stipulates that no one will be allowed to take less than 8. Native speakers can take an additional community language GCSE.

Can my child take any GCSEs early? No – all the courses that we run are planned to be delivered over two years. The amount of content and the depth to which students must work requires the full two year course to enable them to reach the highest grades and to prepare them sufficiently for their exams.

Can my child do an additional GCSE in their own time? No – not in school, please see above. All courses will require content that will need to be delivered and taught by subject specialists, some with specific requirements, for example speaking and listening assessments in MFL, a team activity in PE or a group ensemble performance in Music. Staff and students will not have the capacity to commit to additional time out of class to deliver or study additional GCSE's. It is far better to get excellent grades in 9 subjects than average grades in 10 or 11.

Are GCSEs getting more difficult? There is recognition from all quarters, teachers, students and parents, that there has been a concerted effort to increase the level of challenge faced by students taking exams in Year 11. The Government has sought to make all exams a more 'level playing field' – by removing coursework, changing the assessment criteria and awarding marks from 1 – 9. They have revised the vocational courses on offer. The government has also reduced the number of vocational courses and subjects that are now 'approved' and can count towards the best 8 that each child will be judged on.

Will it put my child at a disadvantage if they are only taking 9 subjects compared to someone in another school who might be taking 10? NO certainly not – think of it in terms of quality NOT quantity. The top universities are making offers based on the predicted grades of Upper Sixth Students combined with their personal statement, references and sometimes an entrance test or interview. They do not specify which GCSEs – apart from good passes in English and Maths – that students will require. Languages (French and Spanish) are on the Russell Group's list of facilitating subjects, meaning they're valued and help keep many degree paths open, but aren't mandatory everywhere.

Can my child change their choices once they have made them? Yes – up and until the deadline on Friday 13th March 2026 Their last submission will be the one that is taken into account. Students cannot change subjects once the courses have started in September 2026.

Can my child take more than one Visual Arts subject?

No. There are limitations with the particular combinations that they can take – for example – Art, Textiles and Graphics have the same 'entry code' and we know that managing two CW heavy courses and exams is a challenge even for our most talented artists.

Can my child take more than one Performing Arts Subject? Yes – if they want to—but we would recommend students choose a spread of subjects from a range of faculties. You will not be allowed to take more than two vocational options. Ask specialist staff if you are at all unsure.

Are Dance and Acting BTECs or GCSEs? We will offer Dance and Acting vocational BTECS in Key Stage 4. The BTEC Awards are a new approved vocational courses—with the equivalent of one GCSE. Both the Dance and Drama courses that we will offer will enable students to move seamlessly into specialist Performing Arts Provision in the Sixth Form and onto University to study a range of degrees.

Do the vocational courses count as GCSE equivalents? Yes – we are only offering a small number of vocational awards but these are all from the Government approved list of revised subjects. They are all equivalent to a GCSE and will all have an externally set written exam as part of the final element of the course.

Does my child have to take Double Science? Yes – all Norwood school students will do double award science – the most able can opt for triple – or ‘Separate Sciences’. The Government requires all students to take Science at Key Stage 4. The double award GCSE Science will mean that your child will be awarded two GCSEs in Science. Recent Science Test results and class performance will determine who is placed in Separate Science.

Are GCSE Citizenship and RS/Philosophy ‘English Baccalaureate’ subjects? No—not at the moment, both are highly regarded GCSE subjects but they do not qualify as subjects that count towards the English Baccalaureate. To achieve the Baccalaureate at Norwood, students will need to gain strong grades in English, Maths, Science, History OR Geography and French OR Spanish.

Do I have to take a subject at GCSE to take it at A Level? Not necessarily – some subjects, for example A Levels in Languages, will require you to have reached a particular level and have gained a particular understanding of the language to progress onto studying it in the Sixth Form. Similarly, in Music. It is highly recommended that if you want to take A Levels in a Science, you undertake GCSE Separate Science but able pupils can move onto Science A Levels if they manage to achieve strong grades at GCSE Double Award Science and English and Maths. If a student can show that they have developed the analytical, research and enquiry skills in Geography or Citizenship for example they could be considered for an A Level in History if they have also gained excellent results in English GCSE. In the Visual Arts, if students have displayed a creative ability in art then they can opt for A Levels in Photography or Textiles for example and in Performing Arts, you could still be considered for Level 3 Acting if you have not taken a GCSE in Drama.

In essence – although you need to consider your choices at this stage – you are highly unlikely to make a choice that will restrict you in anyway as you move on up through the school to employment, the best Universities or an apprenticeship.

Are some GCSE Groups set?

All GCSE classes are taught as mixed ability but, for example more able linguists studying GCSE in French and Spanish will be entered for the higher paper – whilst others will do the foundation paper. Students are selected on this year’s results for a place in Separate Science.

How many GCSE's does my child need to get into the Sixth Form? They will need at least 6 GCSEs grade 5 or above including English and Maths. Entry requirements may differ from subject to subject at A Level. In our experience we know that students who want to study Maths A Level for example, will need to perform to grade 7 or above in GCSE Maths in order to successfully access the content at A Level.

Why does my child have to take either a Humanities or a MFL subject? The government has decided what kinds of subjects they will allow us to include in the fifth 'bucket' of the 9 subjects that students take. Only sciences, computer science, MFL and humanities subjects are allowed to count in the 'buckets 5'. So yes, your child will need to take either a language or a humanities class. They are encouraged to take both if they wish to.

Does my child HAVE to take a creative subject? We are very proud to be able to offer a wide range of creative options and as part of our specialism, we recommend that all students take at least one creative subject. If however, this really does not suit your skill set then no, they do not.

Can my child take GCSE Music if they have not been having instrumental lessons? It is not recommended – but students can be guided towards GCSE Music if they are inherently musical, are enthusiastic, have a natural aptitude for music but have not necessarily had the long term experience of playing an instrument. Talk to Mr Francis.

Does my child have to continue with the subjects that they have been awarded a Bursary in? We would expect that a child would continue to take the subject that they have been awarded a bursary in. Bursary provision continues into Key Stage 4. The extensive extracurricular provision and enrichment that has been put in place for Bursary students since Year 7 means that those children will have a wealth of experience, inspiration and techniques that will most definitely compliment their continuing development and success in their specialist area.

Can my child take more than one language? Keen linguists will take their current language. Students can take an additional community language—this will not be a taught option—talk to Ms Olano and her team who will help advise you.

Does my child have to take a language? We will recommend that our most able take both a language and History or Geography so that they also achieve the English Baccalaureate. We believe that learning a language is a strong foundation for a successful future and will encourage as many students as possible to continue to learn either French or Spanish.

Can my child take a GCSE in Classical Civilisation? We will probably be working with our partners at Streatham and Clapham High School again to offer a taster session in Classical Civilisation. If your child is interested, the weekly sessions run after school at Streatham and Clapham High School - we will share more information nearer the time.