

GCSE Courses Information Booklet

For September 2026 Entry



This booklet is designed to give you information on the GCSE and iGCSE courses offered at The Purcell School for study at Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11). If you have any further questions, please speak to Mr Long, the appropriate Head of Department or subject teacher who will be able to give you more information.

Please also note that not all courses may run each year: the School may have to adjust the curriculum choices according to demand.

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

Foreword

Music lies at the centre of your work, with a multitude of exciting opportunities for you to deepen your performing skills and to gain a wider understanding of repertoire. Music in the classroom is endorsed by taking an iGCSE in Music at the end of Year 10. This early iGCSE enables you to gain valuable and confidence-boosting experience of exams, helping you to prepare for Year 11. In Year 11 classroom music, you will develop your understanding of outreach education projects, composition, music technology as well as strengthening crucial skills in aural.

Most Purcell School students take a total of seven or eight GCSEs / iGCSEs, fewer subjects than most students take at mainstream schools. This allows you time to focus effectively on your performance studies in music. Just as importantly, it allows you to focus on consistent quality in your GCSE and iGCSE results. You will be expected to achieve results which complement the quality of your work in music. Purcell School students do very well at (i)GCSE: for example, in summer 2023, year 11 students gained top grades (A*, A, 9, 8 and 7) in 61% of the exams taken. 93% of results were A* - B or 9 - 5. In the school's history, students have successfully gained places at highly regarded universities, to study either Music or other academic disciplines, with a relatively small portfolio of excellent results: quality over quantity.

The curriculum in Year 10 and 11 includes three obligatory subjects additional to Music: English Language, Maths and Science (Dual Award). In total your core curriculum will facilitate five (i)GCSE passes. You will therefore have to choose two or three additional subjects from this list: English Literature, French, German, History, Art and Drama.

Choose two or three GCSE options from the blocks below. You should choose no more than one subject from each GCSE option block.

GCSE Option Block A		GCSE Option Block B		GCSE Option Block C		GCSE Option Block D	
English Literature		History		Art		English Literature	
French		Drama				German	
English as an Additional Language (EAL) should be chosen by any student who is not fluent in English, as an alternative to one of their GCSEs.							

We would expect most students who have English as their first language to study at least one modern foreign language but French and German cannot be taken without a minimum of one year's formal study prior to starting the GCSE course. You should pick subjects you know you would enjoy or can imagine enjoying and in which you would succeed in achieving a good grade. Bear in mind that some subjects have a large coursework component; others have more terminal exams. We want you to be happy with the idea of study for its own sake – no GCSE on its own is going to get you a job, but a good set of grades at GCSE will help to open doors and will look impressive when you start to make applications for conservatoire, university or other pathways.

We want your experience studying GCSEs and iGCSEs to be inspiring. As a musician, you will find that these classroom experiences provide a context in which your creative instincts and performing skills will grow and flourish. We expect you to commit to the very best results. Our hope is that whatever subjects you choose, you will find subjects that inspire you and help you to develop as both a musician and a person.

Michael Long
Director of Teaching and Learning
m.long@purcell-school.org

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE	Art and Design	AQA
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If you enjoy being creative, want to increase your practical skills and improve your analytical, communication and research abilities, Art and Design is a great choice. The skills you gain make it a great complement to other subjects. Art and Design is a way of seeing things and making sense of the world around you.

Fine art explores ideas, conveys experiences or responds to a theme or issue of personal significance. The areas of study are very broad and our GCSE course provides students with the opportunity to work in a range of different media and processes in two and three dimensions. Lessons are taught so students get the opportunity to learn to work in new ways and improve their existing skills. Included in this course will be a chance to work within; drawing, printmaking (lino, etching, mono and screen printing etc.), painting (acrylic, oil and watercolour), sculpture (casting, clay, wire sculpting etc.) and photography & digital editing. Such flexibility allows for more freedom of expression, encourages creative thinking and problem solving.

What skills will you learn?

Alongside improving your practical expertise, you'll learn how to:

- develop, refine and record your ideas;
- present a personal response that realises your intentions;
- improve your creative skills through the effective and safe use of media, materials, techniques, processes and technologies;
- successfully use visual language and the formal elements e.g. colour, line, form, shape, tone, texture; • use drawing skills for different needs and purposes.

The teaching throughout the course aims to increase the confidence of pupils in the critical, practical and theoretical study of art, and design.

The course is divided into the following components:

Component 1: Portfolio of Work 60% of the overall grade. (Year 10 & Autumn term year 11) Students are required to submit a portfolio that comprises a sustained project and a selection of further work which represents their course of study.

Unit 2: Externally Set Task 40% of the overall grade (Year 11 Spring & Summer terms). Students respond to their chosen starting point, leading to 10 hours of sustained focused study under exam conditions.

The following materials are issued and billed at cost: GCSE Art Pack (brushes, pencils, presentation portfolio, paints etc.) to enable pupils to work within school and at home), approx. cost: £43.

Visits to galleries and museums are an integral part of the programme of study for pupils to see existing work first hand, make notes and drawings. The cost of trips will be charged. It would be beneficial for pupils to have access to a digital camera, to use for photographing reference and source materials for projects.

Additional Information [AQA](#) | [GCSE](#) | [Art and Design](#) | [Specification at a glance](#)

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE	Drama	Eduqas
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Do you want to:

- develop your interest in drama and theatre?
- work imaginatively and creatively as part of a group?
- become competent in a range of practical, creative and performance skills?
- go to the theatre?

You need to be:

- committed to group work!
- imaginative and disciplined in your approach to lessons.
- willing to contribute physically and vocally to all lessons

Component 1: Devising Theatre (non-examination assessment)

40% of the qualification (60 marks)

This component is all about creating a new piece of theatre from scratch. You will explore a range of stimuli provided by the exam board and aim to create a performance as a group.

This component is **internally assessed** and **externally moderated**.

There are **three** parts to the assessment:

1. a **performance (realisation)** of your piece of devised theatre
2. a **portfolio** of supporting evidence
3. an **evaluation** of the final performance

Component 2: Performing from a Text (non-examination assessment)

20% of the qualification (60 marks)

This component is all about assessing your performance skills. You will select a piece of text that has been written and professionally published, and look at two key extracts. You'll then adapt those extracts into **one** performance which you perform to a visiting examiner in Year 11.

There are two parts to this assessment:

1. a single **performance** using parts of both extracts studied
2. a brief written account of your **artistic intentions** for the performance (150 words)

Component 3: Interpreting Theatre (written examination: 1 hour 30 minutes)

40% of the qualification (60 marks)

This component is your written exam and takes place at the end of Year 11. It comprises two parts: one section on a play text that we will study in class, and one section on a piece of live theatre that you've seen and will review.

Section A: *Bringing Texts to Life*

- This section consists of three multiple-part questions (short and extended responses) based on an unseen extract from the chosen performance text and one question based around the entire text
- Students will be provided with a blank copy of the text in the examination.

Section B: *Live Theatre Evaluation*

- This section consists of two questions requiring students to analyse and evaluate a live theatre performance they have seen.
- Students will choose one question to answer, either on design elements or performance elements.

More Information can be found on the exam board website: [GCSE Drama | Eduqas](#)



GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE	English Literature	AQA
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GCSE English Literature:

The course enables students to read, interpret and evaluate texts through the study of literature in English. Students develop an understanding of literal meaning, relevant contexts and of the deeper themes or attitudes that may be expressed. Through their studies, they learn to recognise and appreciate the ways in which writers use English to achieve a range of effects, and will be able to present an informed, personal response to the material they have studied.

The course also encourages the exploration of wider and universal issues, promoting students' better understanding of themselves and of the world around them.

The specification is fully co-teachable with GCSE English Language. Students who study both will greatly benefit from the transferable skills learnt across the two subjects.

	Paper 1	Paper 2
Name:	Shakespeare and the 19th-Century Novel Modern Texts and Poetry	Modern Texts and Poetry
	<p>Section A Shakespeare: students will answer one question on Macbeth.</p> <p>Section B 19th Century novel: students will answer one question on The Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde</p>	<p>Section A Modern Drama: students will answer one question on An Inspector Calls</p> <p>Section B Poetry Anthology: students will compare two poems from their anthology of studied poems.</p> <p>Section C Unseen Poetry: students will explore two unseen poems</p>
Weighting:	40%	60%

Additional Information

[Specification](#)

[Past Papers & Mark Schemes](#)

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE	French <i>and</i> German	Pearson Edexcel
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If you enjoy communicating with other people, finding out about how language works and learning about different countries and cultures, studying GCSE French and/or German is an excellent choice. **PLEASE NOTE: You need to have studied the relevant language(s) at Key Stage 3 or equivalent in order to join year 10. If you are uncertain as to whether your current knowledge is sufficient for the GCSE course, please get in touch with Mr Matthews (r.matthews@purcell-school.org) and he can provide further information.**

The examination course is varied, requiring various skills. For example, you will develop your ability to communicate in speech and writing, and to understand a range of authentic spoken and written material, including adapted literary texts. You will also develop your knowledge and understanding of grammar, and a greater awareness of various aspects of the culture of French/German speaking countries.

The examination course is based on six themes:

- My personal world
- Lifestyle and wellbeing
- My neighbourhood
- Media and technology
- Studying and my future
- Travel and tourism

All this will be tested by a range of tasks including, for example, comprehension questions in both English and the target language, role play, translation from English into the target language, writing in both a formal and informal register.

The GCSE exam gives equal importance to all four language skills, all examined in May / June at the end of Year 11. There is no coursework component. The 4 units can be taken at either Foundation or Higher Tier (no mixing of Tiers allowed); the expectation is that most students will aim for Higher Tier, the timings of which are:

- Unit 1 - Listening 1 hour
- Unit 2 - Speaking 10-12 mins + 15 mins preparation
- Unit 3 - Reading 1 hour
- Unit 4 - Writing 1 hour 20 mins

Additional Information

GCSE French: [Pearson Edexcel GCSE French \(2024\)](#)

GCSE German: [Pearson Edexcel GCSE German \(2024\)](#)

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

IGCSE	History	Pearson Edexcel
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Why study History GCSE?

- develop and extend your knowledge and understanding of specified key events, periods and societies in history; and of the wide diversity of human experience
- engage in historical enquiry to develop as an independent learner and as a critical and reflective thinker
- develop the ability to ask relevant questions about the past, to investigate issues critically and to make valid historical claims by using a range of sources in their historical context
- develop an awareness that different people, events and developments have been accorded historical significance and how and why different interpretations have been constructed about them
- learn how to organise and communicate knowledge and understanding in different ways and reach substantiated conclusions.

Paper 1: Depth Studies - Paper code 4HI1/01

Two 'depth studies' -

- Germany: development of dictatorship, 1918–45
- A world divided: superpower relations, 1943–72

Assessment -

Students are assessed through an examination based on their selected depth studies.

Students answer two questions, one on each of the depth studies they have studied.

There are 60 marks available in total.

The examination lasts 1 hour 30 minutes.

Paper 2: Investigation and Breadth Studies - Paper code 4HI1/02

One Investigation and One Breadth study –

- The USA, 1918-1941
- Changes in medicine c1848-c1948

Assessment -

Students are assessed through an examination based on their historical investigation and breadth study in change.

Students answer two questions, one question on their historical investigation and one question on their breadth study in change.

There are 60 marks available in total.

The examination

1 hour 30 minutes.

Additional Information

[Specification](#)

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE	English Language - Compulsory Subject	AQA
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The English Language GCSE gives students the opportunity to use the skills they have developed in the subject over the course of key stage three.

What does the course involve?

GCSE in English Language is a two-year course covering three compulsory units:

- Explorations in creative reading and writing;
- Writers' viewpoints and perspectives; and
- Non-exam assessment: Spoken Language.

Students will draw upon a range of texts as reading stimuli and engage with creative as well as real and relevant contexts. Students will have opportunities to develop higher-order reading and critical thinking skills that encourage genuine enquiry into different topics and themes. This specification will ensure that students can read fluently and write effectively. Students will be able to demonstrate a confident control of Standard English and write grammatically correct sentences, deploying figurative language and analysing texts.

Assessment

English Language will be assessed by examination only.

Paper 1: Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing

- Section A: Reading - one literature fiction text
- Section B: Writing - descriptive or narrative writing
- Assessment Method: Written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes (50% of the GCSE).

Paper 2: Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives

- Section A: Reading - one non-fiction text and one literary non-fiction text
- Section B: Writing - writing to present a viewpoint
- Assessment Method: Written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes (50% of GCSE)

Additional Information:

[Specification](#)

[Past Papers & Mark Schemes](#)

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE	Mathematics - Compulsory Subject	Pearson Edexcel
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The linear course of GCSE Mathematics is covered over a three-year period, starting in year 9. The course is assessed at the end of year 11 with the following examinations:

Tier	Type	Content Weighting	Method of Assessment
Foundation / Higher	Non-calculator 1.5 hrs	Statistics and probability, Number and Algebra, 33.33% Geometry & Measure	External marking
Foundation / Higher	Calculator 1.5 hrs	Statistics and probability, Number and Algebra, 33.33% Geometry & Measure	External marking
Foundation / Higher	Calculator 1.5 hrs	Problem solving questions 33.33%	External marking
Tier	Grades Available		
Foundation	1 - 5		
Higher	4 - 9		

There is no coursework or controlled assessments to be completed. However, students will be tested on the quality of their written communication within their final examinations.

The three exams are 1.5 hours for both Foundation and Higher tiers. Candidates achieving a mark below the minimum for the award of the lowest grade in each tier will be ungraded. These tiers of entry allow a full and balanced opportunity for candidates at all levels of attainment to show what they know, understand and can do. We mainly enter pupils for the Higher Tier but some pupils will be entered for Foundation Tier where suitable. The tier of entry is finalised after the mock examinations in January of year 11.

GCSE classes are split into three sets based on their end-of-year 9 summer grade. This allows students to progress at a pace suitable for their ability and allows a tailored programme of study to build confidence and key skills before moving on to higher grade topics. Set changes are available at the end of every term and are based on the results of the latest mock assessments together with approval from the Head of Department.

Teaching is also supported by an online learning programme from the Edexcel exam board and the 'mymaths' learning platform. This allows students to have direct access to the scheme of work and video tutorials which is extremely useful in encouraging independent learning skills and supporting private study and revision.

Additional Information

[Edexcel GCSE Mathematics \(2015\) | Pearson qualifications](#)

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE	Music - Compulsory Subject	AQA
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This course is completed at the end of year 10

The AQA GCSE Music specification comprises three components: performance, composition and understanding (listening and analysis).

Component 1: Understanding Music

(40% of the qualification)

All work completed for this component is linked to four areas of study:

1. Western classical tradition 1650–1910
2. Popular music
3. Traditional music
4. Western classical tradition since 1910.

You will complete a broad study of key musical styles associated with the areas of study, and learn how to use technical vocabulary and contextual knowledge to inform your understanding of both familiar and unfamiliar music.

Study Pieces

During the course, you will complete a detailed study of two study pieces:

Area of Study 1: Beethoven: *Symphony No.1*, Movement 1: Adagio molto – Allegro con brio

and one of the following:

Area of Study 2: Queen: • *Bohemian Rhapsody* • *The Seven Seas of Rhye* • *Love of my Life*

Area of Study 4: Bartók: *Hungarian Pictures*, Movements I, II, IV and V

Overview of assessment: One listening and appraising exam at the end of the course (1 hour 30 minutes).

Component 2: Performing Music

(30% of the qualification)

You will perform as a soloist and as part of an ensemble:

Solo performance: One short piece, where you will play on your own or with an accompanist/backing track.

Ensemble performance. One short piece where you will play with at least one other instrument/voice.

The total playing time should be between 5 and 10 minutes, where the ensemble performance must be at least 1 minute.

Overview of assessment: two recordings (solo and ensemble) and scores or lead sheets for both performances.

Component 3: Composing Music

(30% of the qualification)

You will compose two pieces:

Composition 1: A response to an externally set brief.

Composition 2: Written in a style of the candidate's choice.

Overview of assessment: For each composition you must submit a recording; a programme note; a score or lead sheet or aural guide.

Additional Information

[AQA GCSE Music \(8271\)](#)

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE	Combined Science: Trilogy - Compulsory Subject	AQA
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This linear course enables students to complete an in-depth study of the three sciences and to attain two GCSEs at the end. There are six papers: two biology, two chemistry and two physics all taught by specialist teachers. Each of the papers will assess knowledge and understanding from distinct topic areas. The GCSE course will start during the last term in year 9 and will be examined at the end of year 11.

Biology paper 1:

Biology topics 1–4: Cell Biology; Organisation; Infection and response; and Bioenergetics.

Written exam: 1 hour 15 minutes - Foundation and Higher Tier: 70 marks (16.7% of GCSE)

Biology paper 2:

Biology topics 5–7: Homeostasis and response; Inheritance, variation and evolution; and Ecology. Written exam: 1 hour 15 minutes - Foundation and Higher Tier: 70 marks (16.7% of GCSE)

Chemistry paper 1:

Chemistry topics 8–12: Atomic structure and the periodic table; Bonding, structure, and the properties of matter; Quantitative chemistry; Chemical changes; and Energy Changes.

Written exam: 1 hour 15 minutes - Foundation and Higher Tier: 70 marks (16.7% of GCSE)

Chemistry paper 2:

Chemistry topics 13–17: The rate and extent of chemical change; Organic chemistry; Chemical analysis; Chemistry of the atmosphere; and Using Resources.

Written exam: 1 hour 15 minutes - Foundation and Higher Tier: 70 marks (16.7% of GCSE)

Physics paper 1:

Physics topics 18–21: Energy; Electricity; Particle model of matter; and Atomic Structure.

Written exam: 1 hour 15 minutes - Foundation and Higher Tier: 70 marks (16.7% of GCSE)

Physics paper 2:

Physics topics 22–24: Forces; Waves; and Magnetism and electromagnetism.

Written exam: 1 hour 15 minutes - Foundation and Higher Tier: 70 marks (16.7% of GCSE)

There is no coursework or controlled assessments to be completed. However, students will have to complete 21 required practicals throughout the course which they can be examined on in the written papers. These practicals allow the students to develop both scientific practical and analytical skills.

GCSE classes are split into two sets based on the end-of-year 9 summer grades across all three sciences. This allows students to progress at a pace suitable to their needs, allowing them to build their confidence in the three subjects. Set changes are available throughout the course and are based on the results of the latest assessments across the three sciences.

Separate science could be an option for students who would like to broaden their knowledge of biology, chemistry and physics further. This would involve much more independent study and extended exams. A decision can be made during Y10 once the first few chapters are completed.

Additional Information

[AQA | GCSE | Combined Science: Trilogy | Specification at a glance](#)

GCSE OPTIONS BOOKLET FOR SEPT. 2026

GCSE CHOICES OPTIONS FORM

Student name: _____

All Year 10 students at The Purcell School study the following compulsory subjects:

- Music (one-year course, with IGCSE taken at the end of Year 10)
- Mathematics
- English Language
- Science Trilogy (Dual award giving two GCSE grades)

In addition, you should choose either two or three other subjects to study at GCSE / IGCSE level. This will give you seven or eight GCSEs / IGCSEs in total, which will be sufficient for future study at conservatoire or university, whether in the UK or abroad, provided you achieve good grades. Quality is more important than quantity. We do not recommend you study fewer than seven or more than eight subjects. We would expect most students whose first language is English to take at least one modern foreign language (French, German).

Please note that the more subjects you study, the less time will be available for individual practice, so you need to think carefully about the balance you are looking to achieve between your academic and musical studies. Remember that you will also be having instrumental tuition, timetabled rehearsals, PSHEE and PE.

To enable us to start designing next year's timetable, please complete this form and return it to Mr Long, Director of Teaching and Learning, as soon as possible. Any choices made now will be provisional – you will probably still be able to change your choices later, but you may be restricted by the timetable. If you would like to change your choices after handing in this form, you will need to tell Mr Long as soon as possible.

Choose two or three GCSE options from the blocks below.

You should choose no more than one subject from each GCSE option block.

GCSE Option Block A		GCSE Option Block B		GCSE Option Block C		GCSE Option Block D	
English		History					
Literature			Art			English Literature	
French		Drama					
			Media Studies			German	

English as an Additional Language (EAL) should be chosen by any pupil who is not fluent in English, as an alternative to one of their GCSEs.	
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Student's signature:

Date:

Parent's signature:

Date:

Please return to Mr Long once completed
 With by hand or email: m.long@purcell-school.org