What is Religious Education?
Religion has always been with us. Throughout history, it has expressed the deepest questions human beings can ask, and it has taken a central place in the lives of virtually all civilisations and cultures. As we think all the way back to the dawn of human consciousness, we find religion everywhere we turn.

This may be true of the past, but what about the present - and the future? In recent times, critics have suggested that religion is on the way out. Technology and science have changed our view of the world radically, leading some to say that we’ve entered a new stage of human existence, without religion. Soon, they argue, it will truly be a thing of the past.

In our day and age, rumours of religion’s demise seem very premature - and perhaps there’s no grain of truth in them at all. Religion persists and is often on the rise, even as scientific and non-religious perspectives have become prominent. We still find religion everywhere, on television, in film, in popular music, in our towns and neighbourhoods.

"On the Origin of Species, uh, with... oh God," as Richard Dawkins said last week on BBC Radio Four’s Today programme when challenged by the Rev Giles Fraser to give the full title of Charles Darwin’s famous book

That the unofficial pope of Western atheism should expostulate about God in moments when life is a struggle does not of course mean that deep down atheists believe in God after all. But it does illustrate how deeply ingrained religion is in the UK’s culture.  

**BBC Magazine 22 February 2012**

We discover religion at the centre of global issues and cultural conflict. We see religion in the lives of the people we know and love, and in ourselves, as we live out and wrestle with our own religious faith. Why does religion continue to thrive? There are many reasons, but one thing is certain: religious traditions are adaptable in important ways. For many, contemporary religion even has room for scepticism, science, and the secular, which allows it to keep going strong in our rapidly changing world.

Overall, religion is powerful and persistent, and it shows no signs of disappearing. It provokes heartfelt commitment, eloquent expression, forthright action, and intense debate. For both practitioners and observers - for everyone who wants to be informed about the world around them - religion is an intensely curious phenomenon that calls out for better understanding.

With this in mind, the Religious Education department would like to welcome you to the study of religions in a genuine spirit of friendship and a desire to help you grasp the historic, artistic and spiritual significance of our global religious heritage. The history, culture and beliefs of religions have shaped the world’s cultures and civilisations and have yielded wonderful masterpieces of architecture, sculpture and music. It is impossible to appreciate this cultural beauty without considering the
social and religious context in which they were produced, the liturgical, devotional and educational function they were intended to perform and the language and message that is used.

Above all else, it is necessary to be open and sensitive to the human yearning for the infinite, to the paths taken by the individual and the community to draw closer to God, to the mystery of Love, which is transcendent and at the same time revealed and at work in religious history.

For those who wish to hear it, the religions of the world speak a language full of sensibility, imagination, intelligence and feelings. They stir memories, open up horizons of hope and offer a glimpse of the splendour of Truth and of Good. Whether this is a reflection of God on earth, we leave that decision to you. The information, suggestions and guidelines contained in our studies are designed to help you listen to this language and to enable it to reverberate in your heart.

Skills you will develop
Apart from developing an expert level of subject knowledge, RE helps you develop the general skills all humanities use such as independent study, critical enquiry and reflection, investigation and hypothesis testing and the analysis and evaluation of arguments and source materials: but far more than that we offer you the chance to try the view of different thinkers and believers.

We offer you the chance to develop empathy and imagination in an academic context and to help you adopt the view of others. This is a unique skill and one which can really offer you an advantage in any profession you choose.

Recently our students have praised the subject’s ability to help them:
- Cut through waffle
- To spot errors in reasoning
- To make a point with clarity and precision
- To analyse complex issues and arguments
- To think independently and creatively (thinking outside the box)
- To build a strong and rigorous case
- Develop a strong, wide and accurate vocabulary.

One other area we feel is totally unique to RE is the need for you to work out what you think. The material we study does challenge each of us on a deep level both intellectually and morally; and over our studies, you will find your voice and values changing developing. There is much more to this subject than the mastery of facts and skills – there is the opportunity for you to have the courage and confidence to develop your own voice.

Opportunities for trips and further study
We have a very well stocked selection of resources, both books and electronic, in the department and an excellent section in the Learning Resource Centre. We also try to run a trip to an academic conference in London once a year to hear leading theologians present their ideas. The department is always seeking new ways to make learning more interesting and engaging!

Students are encouraged to subscribe to philosophy magazines, enter essay competitions and engage in relevant SABS presentations.

Higher Education opportunities
Beyond the obvious courses such as Philosophy or Theology, RE is an excellent gateway into law, journalism and many social sciences. Recently Old Brentwoods have gone from our department to study subjects as diverse as Chinese, divinity, war studies, law and criminology at some of Britain’s leading universities. We also often find that students who go on to excel at law at university find their success is due to the critical and analytical skills developed during their time studying RE.

Careers for Religious Studies graduates
Degrees related to philosophy and theology degrees leave open many careers pathways including the law, the civil service, general management, banking, marketing, accountancy and the commercial sector. Employers continue to value the literary, analytical and linguistic skills which our students develop.
**Content**

World Religions comprises a systematic, critical, yet sensitive study of the variety of beliefs, values and practices encountered in religions around the world. A rigorous attempt is made to maintain objectivity in the analysis and evaluation of religions. This requires, at the very least, an authentic attempt to understand the beliefs, values and practices of the religion being studied by using language and concepts drawn from that religious tradition. The concern is not just with what the followers of a faith believe and do, but also with an understanding of why they do so, through an appreciation of the form of life and world outlook that they constitute.

**Internal Assessment**

An investigative study, 25% of final grade, which provides opportunities for individual research of an aspect of the religious experience, practice or belief of a group and/or individual adherents. Any religion can be the focus of the study. 1500–1800 words' written analysis with structured format based on an investigative study.

**External Assessment**

**Paper 1.** 1hr15min, 30% of final grade. An introductory unit, exploring five of the nine living world religions that form the basis of the syllabus. We will be studying Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism.

**Paper 2.** 1hr30min, 45% of final grade. An in-depth study of two religions chosen from six world religions. This part of the syllabus is guided by themes, key concepts and key questions. We expect to be mainly working on Buddhism and Christianity.

**Entry Requirements**

An A grade at GCSE (RE) is expected, but we take each candidate on their merits. You must be willing to approach lessons with an open, inquiring and critical mind.

**Course Specific Objectives**

Within Group 3, Individuals and Societies, the aims of the World Religions course are to:

- Enable the student to recognize that the content and methodologies of the subject are contestable and that their study requires the toleration of uncertainty
- Promote an inquiring, analytical and empathetic approach to the study of religion
- Develop an informed understanding of the diversity of world religions
- Foster a respectful awareness of the significance of the beliefs and practices for the faith member
- Develop an understanding of how religion affects people's lives
- Encourage a global appreciation of the issues surrounding religious and spiritual beliefs, controversies and movements in the world today
- Promote responsible and informed international citizenship.

**How the course is taught**

The World Religions course is normally taught by one subject teacher. A heavy emphasis is placed on student participation, presentation, research and independent learning. The Learning Resource Centre is well resourced for all courses. Further learning resources are available through the RE Department Virtual Learning Environment. Students are supervised through the process of completing their Internal Assessment.

As part of the course, World Religions students visit various religious places of worship, such as a Hindu mandir, an Orthodox church, a mosque, to give an insight into religion as lived.

**Expectations/Homework**

Subject teachers set tasks according to an agreed work programme which helps students to manage their time. All students are expected to engage fully in lessons, keep up to date and to read and research widely in order to support their independent learning. IB students are expected to be resourceful and committed to intellectual enquiry.

**The Extended Essay**

Extended Essays in World Religions provide students with the opportunity to undertake an in-depth investigation into a limited topic within the field of World Religions. The study should integrate disciplined research that is informed by scholarly methods with original and imaginative analysis, interpretation, and critical evaluation of the results of that research. Extended Essays must address the beliefs, values and practices of religious traditions and show a genuine understanding of the religion from the standpoint of its adherents. The result of writing an essay in World Religions should be, among other things, improved intercultural understanding. The essay must be completed within 4000 words. Up to five hours of staff supervision are available to assist with the planning, research and execution of the Extended Essay.

**Preparatory Work**

It is recommended that all students read an introductory text to familiarise themselves with the main themes before they embark on the course.
A Level Religious Studies

Content
The department will be following the Edexcel Course in Religious Studies which has three modules:

- The Philosophy of Religion
- Religious ethics
- Buddhism theology

Students will sit all three modules simultaneously and will see how their learning in one influences their knowledge in the other two.

This gives you an excellent introduction to many challenging and complex theories in Philosophy of Religion, Theology and Ethics, which will stretch and test you. You will learn how to write concisely and succinctly, to argue intelligently and to evaluate evidence in building up a powerful case for or against a key topic. This course will really develop your ability to make connections and observe subtle but powerful shades of difference between thinkers.

All modules are exam assessed and there is no coursework. Each of the three modules is assessed in a 2-hour exam at the end of the Upper Sixth.

Entry Requirements
An A grade at GCSE (RE) would be expected, but we take each candidate on their merits. You must be willing to approach lessons with an open, inquiring and critical mind.

Course Specific Objectives
The aims of the Edexcel GCE in Religious Studies is to encourage students to:

- develop their interest in a rigorous study of religion and belief and relate it to the wider world
- develop knowledge and understanding appropriate to a specialist study of religion
- develop an understanding and appreciation of religious thought and its contribution to individuals
- adopt an enquiring, critical and reflective approach to the study of religion
- reflect on and develop their own values, opinions and attitudes in the light of their study.

How the course is taught
Each course is normally taught by two subject teachers. A heavy emphasis is placed on student participation, presentation, research and independent learning. The School Library is well resourced for all courses. Further learning resources are available through the RE Department Virtual Learning Environment.

Expectations/Homework
Subject teachers set tasks according to an agreed work programme which helps students to manage their time. All students are expected to engage fully in lessons, keep up to date and to read and research widely in order to support their independent learning.

Preparatory Work
It is recommended that all students read an introductory text to familiarise themselves with the periods of study before they embark upon the course. Further advice will be given about appropriate reading.

Professor Grayling’s many books cover a huge range of philosophical topics, methods and personalities and his current interest is in identifying the roles religion plays in public life and questioning, whether it is a force for good or not. What do you think?