



## Welcome to our newsletter April 2026

### Curriculum – Focus on Religious Studies

A-level Religious Studies invites students to explore some of the biggest questions shaping belief, values and identity in Britain and beyond. The course is split into three main areas, each encouraging debate, critical thinking and real-world application.

Philosophy of Religion looks at classic and modern arguments about God, knowledge and reality. Students examine ideas from thinkers such as Plato and Aquinas alongside challenges from science and secular philosophy. Topics like the problem of evil, religious experience and the relationship between faith and reason connect directly to current conversations about scientific progress, artificial intelligence and whether belief still has a place in an increasingly secular UK.

Religion and Ethics focuses on how moral decisions are made. Using ethical theories such as utilitarianism and natural law, students explore issues including abortion, euthanasia, war, environmental responsibility and sexual ethics. These debates mirror contemporary concerns seen in news headlines: climate change activism, conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, and ongoing disputes about human rights, gender and personal freedom.

Developments in Religious Thought allows students to study Buddhism. Students study key Buddhist beliefs and practices, including the life of the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and the Three Marks of Existence. They explore meditation, ethics, and the role of the Sangha, as well as how Buddhism responds to modern issues such as consumerism, mental health and environmental concern. The course encourages critical evaluation of how ancient teachings apply in contemporary society.

Overall, A-level Religious Studies equips students with skills to analyse evidence, challenge assumptions and engage thoughtfully with the moral and spiritual questions influencing today's society. It's a course designed not just for exams, but for informed citizenship in a complex world.

# What are our students studying this term in Religious Studies?

In Philosophy with Mrs Arrowsmith, this term we're looking at the Inductive arguments for the existence of God. The cosmological argument claims that the universe requires a first cause or necessary being, usually identified as God, because everything that begins to exist has a cause. The teleological argument (argument from design) suggests that the order, purpose and complexity of the universe indicate an intelligent designer, drawing on ideas such as Aquinas' Fifth Way or fine-tuning. Challenges to the teleological argument include Darwin's theory of evolution, which explains apparent design without God, and critics like Hume, who argued that order does not necessarily imply a perfect, divine designer.

Mr Clarke is looking at Buddhist practices that shape religious identity, such as meditation, refuge and the role and importance of giving. In Buddhism, meditation is central to spiritual development, helping practitioners cultivate mindfulness (*sati*), concentration and wisdom. Practices such as *samatha* and *vipassana* aim to reduce suffering by transforming the mind. Taking refuge means committing to the Three Refuges: the Buddha as teacher, the Dharma (his teachings), and the Sangha (the community), providing guidance and support on the path to enlightenment. The role of giving (*dāna*) is vital in ethical practice, encouraging generosity, compassion and non-attachment, while also supporting the monastic community and creating positive karma.

## Upcoming Sixth Form Religious Studies Events

At the end of this term, all of year 12 will be taking part in a whole day event entitled "God and the Big Bang". This will offer students an engaging and thought-provoking exploration of the relationship between science, religion and big questions about existence. Through a series of interactive workshops, run by religious scientists from Newcastle, Northumbria and Durham Universities, you will be encouraged to think critically rather than being told what to believe. The day focuses on topics such as the origins of the universe, the Big Bang theory, and different religious and philosophical responses to scientific explanations of creation.

You will have the opportunity to work collaboratively, discussing evidence from cosmology alongside religious interpretations from Christianity and other worldviews. All the activities are designed to develop skills in evaluation, debate and reasoning, helping you see how science and faith can be understood as addressing different types of questions.



# Religious Studies in the wider community

Our work in the wider school community is a key strength of what we do. Each week, Chloe and Jason work closely with 7XC, building strong relationships while supporting learning. Explaining complex ideas to younger students doesn't just help 7XC—it deepens Chloe and Jason's own understanding. Stripping A-level concepts back to Year 7 level requires real clarity and confidence; to teach it simply, you truly have to understand it well. This process develops communication skills, subject mastery and confidence. Just as importantly, Chloe and Jason have become firm favourites with 7XC, who look forward to their weekly visits with enthusiasm.

We are really looking forward to visiting Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey near Hexham in the autumn term. The trip will give students the opportunity to experience monastic life first-hand, deepen their understanding of Buddhist practice, and reflect in a calm and inspiring setting beyond the classroom.

Biscuit Wednesday might not have any wider impact—but it definitely lifts our spirits! It's a simple tradition that brings a moment of enjoyment. Sometimes small things matter most, and Biscuit Wednesday makes us happy—so it's absolutely worth celebrating. 🍪



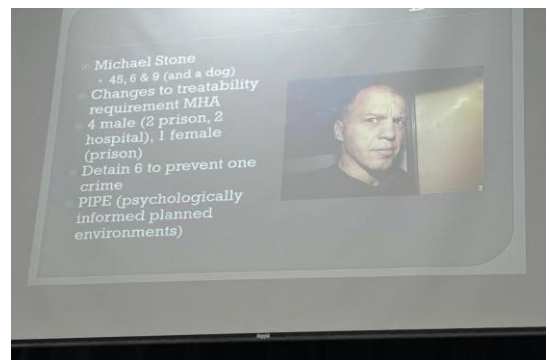
## Y13 Music performance

Tom Quinn and Reece Armstrong, our fantastic Y13 music students recently completed their final performance in front of a live audience this month. They showed their musical talents and creativity in performing a range of show tunes and popular music. It was wonderful to see the support from Toby Cowan Pickard and Hope Crozier in Y12, who spend hours supporting their preparations.



## Visit by Dr W Forensic Psychiatrist

Y12 and Y13 psychology and sociology students were lucky to be invited to a talk by Dr Wieczorek a local forensic psychiatrist who works with a wide range of patients within Tees, Esk and Wear NHS. Students learnt about the history and development of forensic psychiatry from the legal background to the reality of working with patients in prison and hospital. The presentation explained how the criminal justice system works to ensure appropriate care is given to people within its remit and that the criminal justice system safeguards the wellbeing of the population as a whole.



# Update from our New Sixth Form Student Leadership Team

The student leadership team are currently focusing on improving communication between students and staff to ensure that student voice is being heard across the Sixth Form. The way we are currently aiming to do this is encouraging tutor rep meetings where we listen to ideas and concerns, and where students can express their opinions. We are also focusing on providing academic support to students by looking into other university visit opportunities and support for students undergoing exams.



# Work Experience at QE Hospital, Gateshead

On my work experience at the QE with the NHS, I was fortunate enough to witness a multitude of surgeries. I was primarily in the Peter Smith Surgery Centre, but I was also placed in paediatrics for an afternoon. During my time in the surgery centre, I was present for 9 surgeries. This included C sections, colorectal surgeries, a half hip replacement, and breast surgeries to remove cancers. During one of the colorectal surgeries, a Davinci Machine was used to remove a section of colon containing cancer. The machine then also connected both loose ends of the colon using sutures. Seeing the Davinci Machine in person was an incredible experience and is something I've always found fascinating. The fact that we have been able to create such an intricate machine able to perform surgeries on such a small and precise scale is something I find incredible. Another of the colorectal surgeries was to resolve a hernia, which involved placing a mesh between the abdominal wall and stretching it together again. It was a long procedure that I was unable to see through until the end, however knowing what was going to happen and how was exceedingly interesting. My favourite part of the experience would probably have to be the 2 C sections I saw. There's something indescribable seeing a new life be brought into the world, knowing that we all began life in the same place. I am very grateful to have been lucky enough to have such an incredible work experience, and it has cemented in my mind that a medical career is the career for me.

Emirhan Erkal

During my work experience at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Gateshead with the Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust, I was fortunate enough to spend time in a wide variety of departments. These included Paediatrics, A&E, Rheumatology, Gastroenterology, Colorectal Surgery, Lower Limb Surgery, Gynaecology/Oncology Surgery, General Surgery, and Anaesthetics. Being able to experience such a diverse range of specialties allowed me to confirm that cardiothoracic surgery is the area of medicine that interests me most.

Every department was incredibly engaging, and each offered a unique insight into patient care and hospital life. Some of my favourite experiences were in Rheumatology, where I was able to speak with patients about joint issues and observe examinations for abnormalities, and in Paediatrics, where I was given the opportunity to examine a patient's throat for signs of swelling or discolouration. I also particularly enjoyed Gastroenterology, where I observed the removal of polyps during endoscopic procedures.

The highlight of my placement, however, was being able to observe surgeries. During my time at the hospital, I was fortunate enough to watch eight operations, with the hip replacements being especially memorable. The experience was very different from how surgery is often portrayed in the media; rather than dramatic or chaotic, the operating theatre was calm, precise, and highly coordinated. I was fascinated by how seamlessly the surgical team worked together, and seeing such teamwork and professionalism firsthand was incredibly inspiring.

Overall, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to undertake this work experience. It has strengthened my passion for medicine and further reinforced my ambition to pursue a future career in the field.

Sam Lawrence

# Personal Development in the sixth form

This half-term, our Year 12 students have begun their post-18 preparation journey, focusing on university awareness, study skills, and the early stages of the UCAS application process.

All Year 12 students attended a visit to Northumbria University, where they took part in a campus tour. This provided valuable insight into university facilities, student life, and the overall higher education environment, helping students start to visualise their next steps.

Students have also formally begun their UCAS journey. They have set up their UCAS Hub accounts and started exploring potential courses, entry requirements, and destinations. This marks an important first step in making informed decisions about post-18 pathways. Students have also completed or begun their UCAS registration, ensuring they are fully prepared to continue building their applications over the coming months. Guidance has been provided on how to use the platform effectively and what to expect as they move forward with personal statements and applications.

Finally, to support academic success and with Y12 assessments on the horizon, students took part in a virtual revision skills session delivered by Northumbria University. This session introduced effective revision techniques, time management strategies, and approaches to independent learning: key skills as students progress through Year 12 and prepare for assessments.



# New and improved registration

This half-term, we have refreshed and strengthened our tutor time programme to further support students' personal development, independence, and wider skills beyond the classroom.

Alongside our existing structure of silent revision and our weekly quiz, we have introduced two new weekly sessions designed to build confidence, encourage student voice, and prepare students for life beyond sixth form:

Our new Teach the Tutor sessions provide students with the opportunity to take the lead in their learning. Students research and deliver short presentations or discussions to their tutor group on topics of interest ranging from current affairs to personal interests and future aspirations. This initiative encourages confidence, communication skills, and independent thinking, while also promoting a collaborative and engaging tutor group environment. We have had some excellent sessions so far, including how to understand the offside rule, origami paper aeroplanes and learning about the Yoruba culture and language!

Each Wednesday, Y12 and Y13 students now take part in Adulting 101, a dedicated session focused on developing essential life skills. Topics include budgeting, managing time, employability skills, wellbeing, and navigating life beyond school. These sessions are designed to equip students with the practical knowledge and confidence needed for independent living, whether they move on to university, apprenticeships, or employment.

Together, these additions reflect our ongoing commitment to delivering a well-rounded Personal Development programme that supports both academic success and personal growth.

