



# Birchwood High School

*your dreams, your future, our challenge*

## YEAR 9 FOUNDATION YEAR

Year 8 to 9 Option Booklet



## **WELCOME FROM MR GILBANK**

I'm very pleased to welcome you to the next stage of your child's journey at Birchwood High School.

As your child prepares to move into Year 9, they will begin their foundation year — an exciting opportunity to explore subjects they enjoy and have a genuine interest in, ahead of making their final GCSE choices in May 2026. This important stage of the options process encourages students to start thinking more deeply about their strengths, passions, and aspirations.

Throughout this process, we will provide plenty of support and guidance to ensure every student feels well-prepared. One piece of advice we often share is to encourage students to choose subjects they genuinely enjoy and are curious about — these are often the areas where they will feel most motivated and confident to succeed.

We look forward to working closely with you and your child over the coming months and supporting them as they begin this exciting new chapter.

Kind regards,

Mr C Gilbank

*Deputy Principal*

## **YEAR 9 FOUNDATION YEAR**

As your child prepares to enter Year 9, they will begin an important stage in their education known as the Foundation Year. This year forms a key part of the wider options process, which is designed to give students the opportunity to start shaping a curriculum that reflects their individual interests, strengths, and aspirations.

During the Foundation Year, students are able to choose a number of subjects they are particularly interested in and enjoy. These subject choices are intended to give them a taste of potential GCSE options, allowing them to explore these areas in greater depth before making final decisions at the end of Year 9.

Alongside these chosen subjects, all students will continue to study a set of core subjects, such as English, Mathematics, and Science, which remain essential to every student's education and future progression. These subjects provide a strong academic foundation and ensure a balanced curriculum.

It is important to note that the choices made for Year 9 are not final GCSE decisions. Instead, they represent the first step in a gradual process that helps students gain the experience and information they need to make informed, confident choices when the time comes to select their GCSE subjects formally.

We encourage parents and carers to discuss these options with their child, to help them reflect on what they enjoy, where their strengths lie, and what might support their future ambitions.

## UNDERSTANDING YEAR 9 OPTIONS

In Year 9, all students will continue to study a group of core subjects, which are essential for your child's overall education and development. These subjects provide a strong foundation for all future learning and include:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Core PE
- PSHCE (Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education)

Alongside your core subjects, you will also be able to choose **six additional option subjects** to study throughout your foundation year.

These options are designed to give you a chance to explore subjects you are passionate about, build new skills, and prepare for making your final GCSE decisions in Year 9. It's important to remember that:

- These are not your final GCSE choices.
- You will not study full GCSE content in Year 9, but you will experience subjects in more depth to help you decide what's right for you.

### Your Six Option Choices Must Include:

- At least two subjects from the Ebacc subject list
- At least two subjects from the Creative subject list

This ensures that your curriculum remains broad and balanced, while still giving you room to explore your personal interests.

## THE OPTIONS SUITES

| EBACC SUBJECT LIST   | CREATIVE SUBJECT LIST   |
|--|---|
| French<br>German<br>Spanish<br>History<br>Geography<br>Religious Studies<br>Computer Studies | Art<br>Music<br>Drama<br>Dance<br>Product Design<br>Food Technology<br>Computer Studies |

*Note: Computer Studies appears in both lists and can count toward either category.*

## **TIMELINE AND NEXT STEPS**

Students will use an online platform called Applica+ to select their Foundation Year options.

In the next week, students will receive their Applica+ login details and a link to access the Year 8 Options Form. These will be sent to their Birchwood student email accounts.

Students should complete the form by selecting six option subjects. At least two of these must come from the Ebacc subject list and at least two must come from the Creative subject list.

Parents will also receive an email containing their own login details. Please note that you will only be able to view and confirm your child's subject choices once your child has submitted their application form. As soon as your child completes and submits their form, an automated email will be sent to you inviting you to log in and confirm their selections.

**The deadline for submitting choices is Friday 23 May.**

## **COURSE INFORMATION:**

In school, students have been shown presentations that explain the content and details of each options subject. The information contained on the following pages will give you an idea of this information too.

We have encouraged students to direct any specific questions about a subject to a teacher from that faculty.

# EBACC SUBJECTS



## FRENCH, GERMAN AND SPANISH

Year 9 languages courses develop key skills in Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. They each cover content including:

- Free time including online activities and streaming.
- Family, relationships and role models
- School including expressing your opinions about rules, teachers & future ambitions.

Regular practice of vocabulary is a necessity.

If chosen to continue into GCSE, future trips to include French/ German Christmas Markets and a residential to Madrid.

## GEOGRAPHY

Year 9 develops skills such as data collection, presentation and analysis. Content includes:

- Coasts
- Brazil
- Bishop's Stortford Expansion
- UK Global Connections

## HISTORY

Year 9 develops skills such as critical thinking, analysing evidence, making informed decisions and developing perspective.

Content includes:

- Migration to Britain
- The impact of WW2 on British lives
- How far life has improved in Britain after 1900.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Year 9 develops skills such as effective verbal and written communication, analysis and evaluation of arguments and source interpretation.

Content includes:

- How should humans make moral decisions?
- What is religion?
- Do we have a duty to promote human rights?
- Is religion a force for change?

## COMPUTER SCIENCE

Year 9 students study both ICT and Computer Science. It is a mixture of theory and practical. Contents includes:

- Python Programming
- The components that make up a PC and how they all work together
- Network
- Software including OS and utilizing softwares
- Interface design



# CREATIVE SUBJECTS





## DANCE

Content includes:

- Set phrases (solos in contemporary dance style)
- Duet or trio based on a theme and style of your choice
- Creation of choreography based on a stimulus

Opportunities to also include theatre trips, teaching primary school students, becoming a Dance ambassador and having your own dance kit.

## DRAMA

Content includes:

- Gender stereotypes (scripted)
- Blackout (scripted)
- I don't like Mondays (devised)
- Working from a stimulus (devised)

There are also opportunities to be a Drama Ambassador which includes helping run the Year 7 and 8 Drama Club. Additionally, trips to watch performances in London and local theatres.

## MUSIC

Year 9 music gives you the opportunity to be the best all-round musicians you can be. Building on skills, knowledge and understanding of listening, composing and performing.

Content includes:

- Practical music – performing music of your choice of instrument or voice
- Developing an understanding of Music ICT and how to compose and create music in different styles
- Improve listening skills and vocab by studying a range of musical styles.

## ART

Content includes:

- Still life drawing and acrylic painting on canvas
- Landscape watercolour painting
- Landmarks paper cut and lino printing
- 3D sculpture techniques

Opportunities to also include visit to a gallery/ museum and participating in practical workshops and end of year exhibition

## PRODUCT DESIGN

Year 9 Product Design is a course which focuses on the design and manufacture of modern products as well as understanding principles that go into their creation. Students will develop and use creativity and imagination to design and make prototypes that solve relevant, real-life problems, considering their own and others' needs, wants and values.

- Working with timbers, metals, polymers, textiles and papers & board.
- Creating several products
- Exploring a range of designing techniques from freehand sketching and CAD.
- Developing research and analysis skills

## FOOD TECHNOLOGY

There will be a number of practical tasks throughout the year that help students to understand:

- Hygiene and safety / Nutrition / Diet and good health
- Knife safety – knife safety / precision of knife cuts
- Cleaning down / weighing and measuring / using ovens and equipment safely and hygienically
- Sauce making / batters / cake methods / whipping cream / ragu / setting gelatinization
- Filleting fish / deboning chicken
- Making bread / pasta / pastry from scratch
- Improving pace / organisation / following a recipe and timeline

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Are these my final GCSE subject choices?**

No — the subjects you choose for Year 9 are not your final GCSE options. The foundation year is designed to give you the chance to explore different subjects in more depth before making your formal GCSE selections at the end of Year 9.

### **Will I be learning GCSE content in Year 9?**

Not yet. Year 9 is about building skills, knowledge, and confidence in a range of subjects. You won't begin formal GCSE content until Year 10.

### **Why do I have to choose subjects from both the Ebacc and Creative subject lists?**

We want to make sure all students experience a broad and balanced curriculum. By choosing at least two subjects from each suite, you'll keep your options open and discover what you truly enjoy.

### **What if I change my mind about a subject during Year 9?**

That's completely okay. One of the main purposes of the foundation year is to help you *test out* subjects before making your final GCSE decisions. We'll guide you through the next round of choices in Year 9, and you won't be locked into anything yet.

### **Can I choose the same subject more than once if it appears in both suites?**

Some subjects (like Computer Studies) appear in both subject lists, but you can only select it once. You'll still need to make sure you meet the requirement of choosing at least two subjects from each suite.

### **What support is available to help me make my choices?**

You'll receive guidance through assemblies, subject taster sessions, and one-to-one conversations with your form tutor and teachers. Parents' Evening and reports are also great tools to help inform your decisions. If you need further help, feel free to speak with Mrs Hinski, Mr Gilbank, or your form tutor.

### **When do I have to submit my option choices?**

All option forms must be completed and submitted by Friday, 23 May. Meeting this deadline is important for planning the curriculum and ensuring a smooth start to Year 9.



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