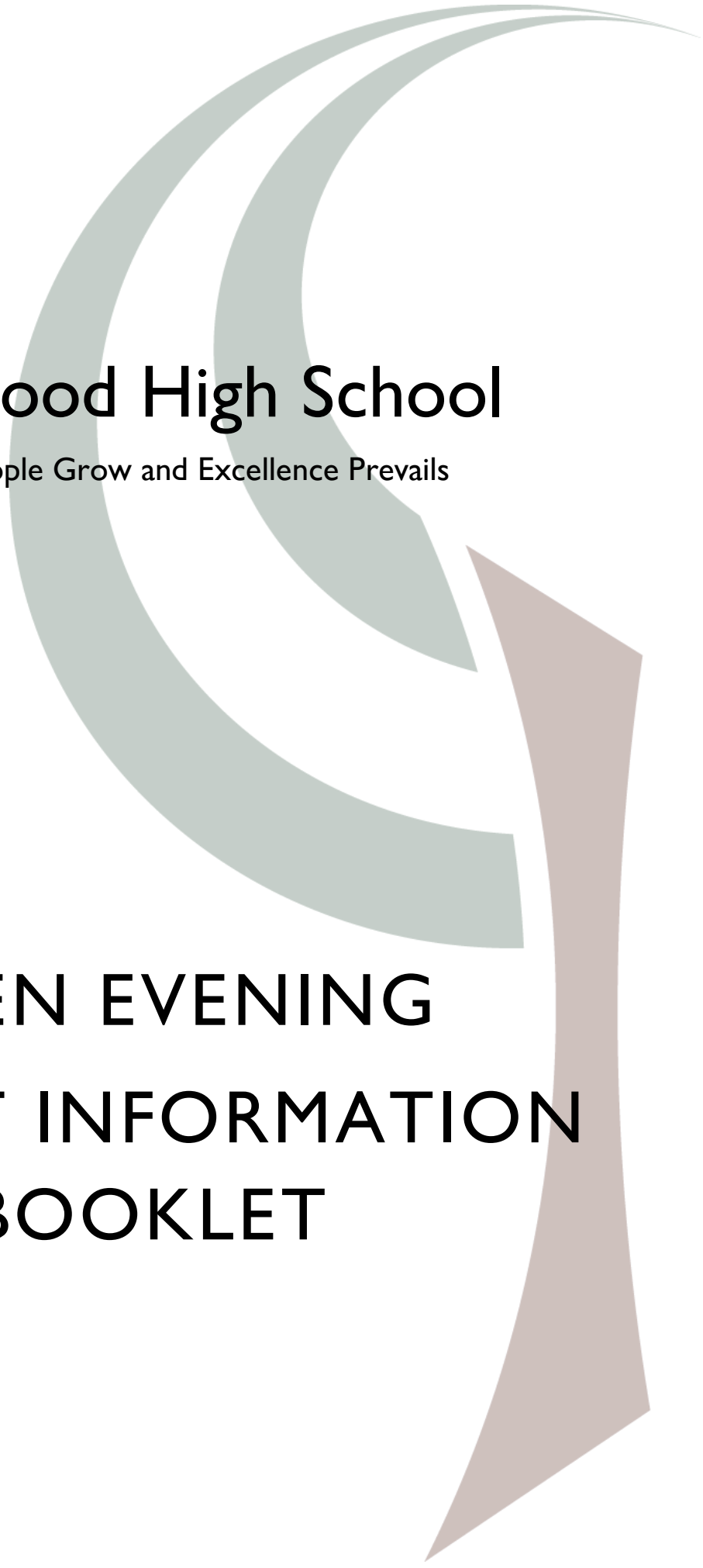




Birchwood High School

Where People Grow and Excellence Prevails

OPEN EVENING PARENT INFORMATION BOOKLET



WELCOME TO BIRCHWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Dear Parents and Carers,

It is a pleasure to introduce Birchwood High School. As you explore and learn more about Birchwood, I am sure you will agree that this school is incredibly special and offers something unique to every student who joins us.

You are at a key turning point in your child's education. The choice of the kind of school in which your child spends the next seven years of their education is a key one. You are fortunate to live in an area where there is a genuine choice and a strong variety of schools to choose from.

Birchwood is a comprehensive school. We believe that all students, regardless of their ability or starting points in life, should have the opportunity to develop academically, socially, and emotionally in a caring environment. I believe that Birchwood is well placed to support your child through the transition from childhood to adulthood.

As a school community we focus on the provision of three key areas in a child's development:

- High-quality teaching and learning which leads to strong outcomes for students.
- A caring environment where your child is looked after and supported as they navigate their teenage years.
- The provision of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities which help them develop skills and experiences that they will need in later life.

The aim of these approaches is to ensure that your child thrives in their time with us and are able to access the right post 18 opportunity. Year after year 100% of Birchwood students enter education, training, or employment. This is an excellent outcome, which many comprehensive schools do not achieve.

The school was last inspected by Ofsted in 2025 where the inspection report recognised the strong provision which students receive here at Birchwood:

“Pupils at Birchwood High School know they are valued for who they are.”

“Pupils, including those in the sixth form, achieve well in public examinations.”

“Most learning happens in a calm, focused environment.”

“Teachers have deep subject knowledge.”

“Pupils make well-informed, successful choices about their next steps.”

With regards to admissions, our criteria are simple and transparent – we will offer 240 places to children who have a brother or sister attending the school and/or who live in and around the Bishop’s Stortford area. Unlike other local schools, we do not believe in aptitude tests. Our mantra is that all children, regardless of background and ability, are important to us.

We look forward to welcoming you to Birchwood High School.

your dreams, your future, our challenge.

Sam Griffin
Principal

VALUES AND ETHOS

At Birchwood High School, we have great pride in being an inclusive school, with an all-ability ethos that respects and responds to our students and our local community. By ensuring that we “welcome all, support all and encourage all”, we believe that we create a learning environment with high aspirations for students’ academic progress and their personal growth, so that they move on from Birchwood prepared for their next steps and their place in the world as happy and successful young adults.

We have high expectations of the young people in our school and every student, and their family should share these high expectations for their education. To this end, our aim is to provide a carefully considered and expertly taught curriculum to support excellent academic progress, that works together with robust pastoral support and extracurricular opportunities to ensure students’ personal growth and wellbeing.

At Birchwood, we have a shared sense of identity and belonging, rooted in five key values:

- **Kindness** – We act with kindness in all that we do, showing care, compassion, empathy and understanding for ourselves and others.
- **Belonging** – We build an inclusive supportive community where every individual feels valued, safe and proud to be part of Birchwood.
- **Respect** – We treat everyone with dignity and integrity, value difference, build strong relationships, and do the right thing, even when it is difficult.
- **Resilience** – We show courage, perseverance and emotional strength, learning from setbacks and remaining committed to our goals.

- **Aspiration** – We aim high, embrace challenge and pursue excellence through curiosity, ambition and a love of learning, preparing ourselves for the future.

We are rightly proud of our inclusive and comprehensive ethos, where **every** student can thrive and succeed and expect each member of our community to share in our values by showing mutual respect and tolerance.

THE SCHOOL DAY

Our school site is open from 8.00am each day. Students are expected to be on site from 8:35am as the scheduled school day begins with registration at 8:40am. Lunch is from 12.20pm to 1.15pm and school ends at 3.15pm.

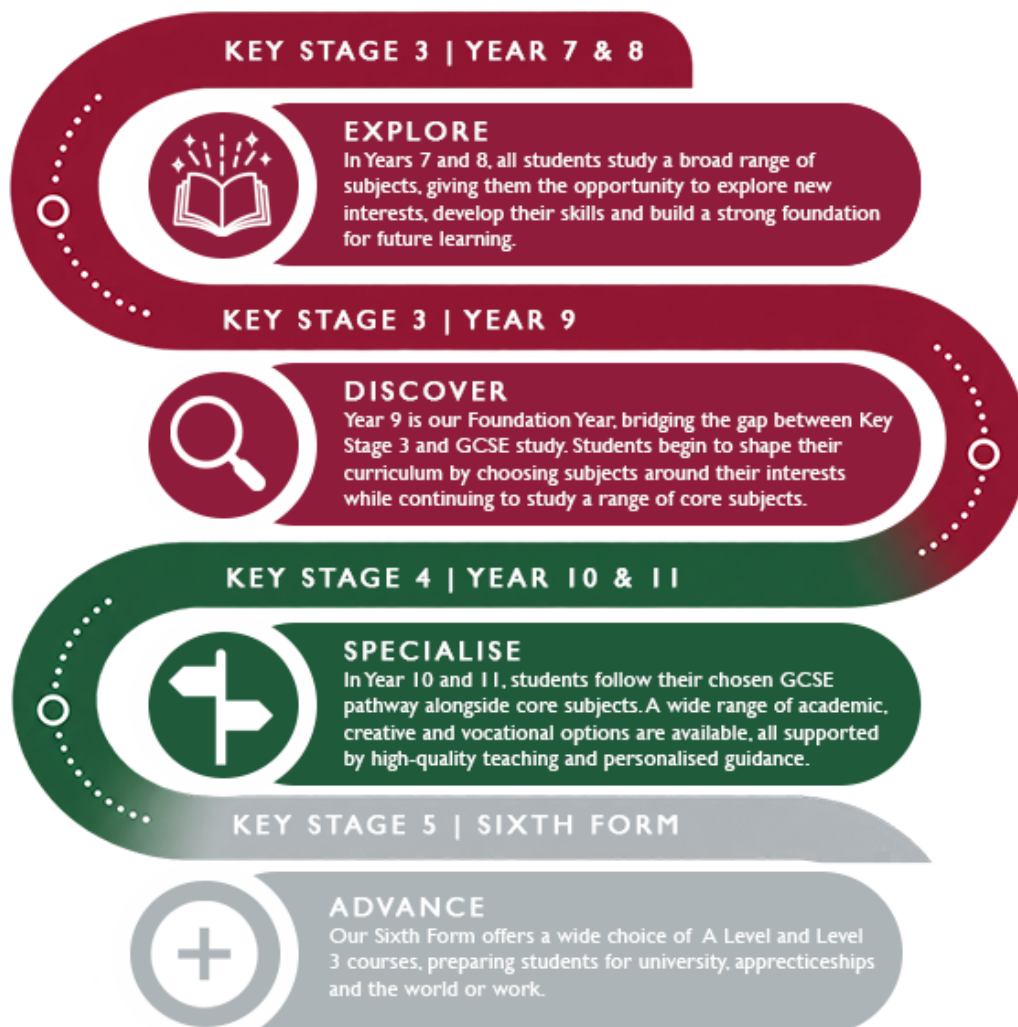
Each day consists of 5 x 1-hour lessons, providing a 25-hour teaching week. In addition, there is a 20-minute period in the morning, which is used for assemblies and tutorial time. After school clubs generally run no later than 4:15pm.

SCHOOL DAY	TIME	DETAIL
From	8:00am	Students are welcome on site and can make use of the facilities including the Café.
Movement time	8:35am	
Form Time	8:40-9:00am	Formal start of the school day. This is spent in form time or assembly.
Period 1	9:00-9:55am	
Movement time	9:55-10:00am	
Period 2	10:00-11:00am	
Break	11:00-11:20am	Morning break.
Period 3	11:20-12:20pm	
Lunch	12:20-1:10pm	All Café entrances 1 (Hot Food) / 2 (Pasta) / 3 (Sandwich Hut) to be used.
Movement time	1:10pm-1:15pm	
Period 4	1:15-2:10pm	
Movement time	2:10-2:15pm	
Period 5	2:15-3:15pm	Afternoon registration will be taken in this lesson.
	3:15pm	Formal end of the school day.
After school	3:15-4:15pm	Extra-curricular Clubs.

THE CURRICULUM

At Birchwood, we are proud to offer a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum that allows every student to thrive academically and personally. Our curriculum is designed to foster the needs, abilities, and talents of all our students, with inclusive classrooms creating the conditions for students to become independent and curious learners.

In Key Stage 3, our students are given the opportunity to explore a wide variety of subjects as part of the national curriculum: English, Maths, Science, Humanities (History, Geography and RE), Expressive Arts (Art, Drama and Music), Technology, Modern Foreign Languages (French, German and Spanish), PSHE and PE. In Key Stage 4, they refine the number of subjects they study before selecting their final choices to study at GCSE level in Year 10 and 11.



SUBJECT	KEY STAGE 3		KEY STAGE 4
	Year 7 & 8	Year 9	Year 10 & 11
English	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory
Mathematics	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory
Science	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory
Art	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
Business Studies	Not available	Optional	Optional
RS	Compulsory	Optional	Optional as GCSE subject, although key elements continue to be delivered via PSHCE
Computer Science	Not available	Optional	Optional
Design & Technology	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
Drama	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
Dance	Not available	Optional	Optional
Food	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
French	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
German	Optional	Optional	Optional
Geography	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
History	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
ICT	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
Media / Film Studies	Not available	Optional	Optional
Music	Compulsory	Optional	Optional
PE	Compulsory	(Core) Compulsory (GCSE) Optional	(Core) Compulsory (GCSE) Optional
PSHCE	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory
Spanish	Optional	Optional	Optional
Statistics	Not available	Optional	Optional

The curriculum maps for each of our facilities can be found on our website

PSHCE (Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship & Economic Education)

Many aspects of PSHCE are cross-curricular and embedded throughout our wider school experience. Our distinct PSHCE programme helps students understand themselves, develop empathy for others, and prepare to take an active role in society as informed, responsible adults.

At Birchwood High School, PSHCE reflects our belief that *the right thing is the kind thing*. Students are encouraged to consider how their actions affect others and to choose kindness in their relationships, decision-making and participation in school life.

Throughout the year, students explore six key themes that build progressively:

- Being Me in My World – developing identity, self-esteem, rights and responsibilities, and a sense of belonging.
- Celebrating Difference – understanding and respecting diversity, preventing bullying, and recognising the impact of prejudice.
- Dreams and Goals – exploring aspirations, resilience, teamwork, and planning for the future
- Healthy Me – making informed choices about physical, and mental health, managing risk, and staying safe online and offline.
- Relationships – building positive friendships, family and peer relationships, and learning about healthy boundaries and consent.
- Changing Me – understanding emotional and physical changes during adolescence, including age-appropriate sexual health education.

The biology of human reproduction is taught in Science lessons, while PSHCE lessons focus on the wider social, moral and ethical aspects of sexual health and relationships in age-appropriate ways. Lessons use distancing techniques such as scenarios and case studies, and students can ask questions anonymously through question boxes to ensure safe exploration of these topics.

Our programme also develops essential life skills: managing money, preparing for the world of work, celebrating diversity, and building resilience. In doing so, it helps every student leave Birchwood High School ready to face the challenges of modern life and rooted in the values that will guide them through it.

LITERACY

At Birchwood High School, we believe that strong literacy skills are the foundation for success across every subject. Our whole-school approach to literacy is designed to help students become confident readers, articulate speakers, and capable writers. We use a range of strategies to embed and promote literacy across the curriculum:

Library Induction and Access: All students take part in library induction sessions, where our dedicated librarian leads engaging activities that encourage exploration of different genres and teach students how to use academic cataloguing systems effectively.

Form Tutor Reading: Regular reading sessions during tutor time promote reading for pleasure and expose students to a wide variety of texts. These sessions also model fluent, expressive reading, helping to build students' confidence and comprehension.

Paired Reading Scheme: This targeted initiative provides one-to-one reading support to help students develop fluency, improve comprehension, and gain confidence in their reading abilities.

Echo Reading: In these structured one-to-one sessions, students mirror the fluent reading of a skilled adult. This technique helps students improve their pronunciation, expression, and pacing, while also developing comprehension through discussion and questioning.

Writing Mastery: A key component of our Key Stage 3 curriculum, Writing Mastery explicitly teaches grammar, punctuation, and sentence construction. This structured approach ensures all students build strong foundations in written communication.

Reading for Pleasure and Critical Reading: Our Key Stage 3 English curriculum includes dedicated lessons focused on reading whole novels and developing critical reading skills. These sessions encourage deep comprehension, analytical thinking, and engagement with more complex texts.

We also value the vital role that families play in supporting literacy. Parents and carers can help nurture a love of reading and language at home by:

- Reading aloud with your child and discussing what you've read together
- Exploring new vocabulary in context
- Talking about characters, themes, and ideas in your child's reading
- Encouraging regular visits to the library
- Demonstrating your own enjoyment of reading



HOME LEARNING

Birchwood places a strong emphasis on home learning, and all curriculum areas take active steps to ensure our policy is operating efficiently for all students across the ability and age range.

Home learning tasks vary and may include investigations, research, reading, drawing, essay-writing, project work and revision.

The 'expected' time to be spent on home learning rises from about one hour a day in Year 7 to over two hours per day, although this may vary over the school year e.g. exam periods in Year 11.

Submission dates are made clear by the subject teacher, with sanctions issued if home learning is not completed.

At Birchwood, all home learning will be set via Microsoft Teams. Your child will be able to see their current home learning assignments in Teams in both the Assessment section and on the Teams class thread.

Birchwood offers opportunities for students to complete home learning on site before and after school every day.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

At Birchwood High School, we offer a diverse range of extracurricular clubs that aim to enhance your child's overall learning experience. We have recently changed the school day to enable our extracurricular offer to grow through lunch clubs and to allow house competitions to increase in number. This will enable opportunities for all to compete in areas that are unique and diverse. Opportunities for students to explore their interests, develop new skills, and foster meaningful connections with peers is a hugely important part of what it means to be a Birchwood student; they enable students to boost their self-confidence, improve time management skills, and most importantly instil a lifelong love for learning.

The extracurricular timetable for the Autumn term can be found on our website.



Duke Of Edinburgh Award:

- We run the award with Year 10 students. This allows students to complete their Bronze Award without affecting their GCSE studies. The award starts in October, and students attend bi-weekly meetings on Fridays to carry out the training needed for the expedition. Students are expected to complete the volunteering, physical and skills sections in their own time.

Music

- A programme of extracurricular ensembles and choirs runs weekly at Birchwood High School. They build on the experiences of individual music lessons and/or classroom music teaching. Our clubs offer the chance to gain experience, performing alongside other musicians of a similar ability and there really is something for everyone; a place to hone your skills of ensemble musicianship and make friendships.

Students are encouraged to take part in our yearly concert programme, including Autumn and Spring Chamber Concerts and a Summer Prom.

Sport

- We have a proud tradition of sporting excellence at Birchwood. Our students compete locally and nationally in a wide variety of sports. We have a regular roster of fixtures for football, rugby, hockey, netball, cricket, basketball and athletics. Students also learn many other sports, both in PE lessons and in our after-school extracurricular clubs.

Take a look at our Facebook page to see how our school teams have done in their recent fixtures.

Equality Groups:

Fusion: Fusion celebrates difference and diversity in our learning community. The group provides a regular space for students to meet their peers and create a supportive network within school, ensuring that an attitude of acceptance and respect for all remains a central part of life at Birchwood.

Mosaic: Mosaic is Birchwood's new student-led multicultural group, created to help raise awareness of different cultures, heritages, experiences, and identities.

Edge, Environmental Group: EDGE holds meetings and workshops once per half-term in the library to work on ways in which we can make Birchwood more eco-friendly. We also meet more regularly in B16 to discuss what our next projects could be. Recently we have received 60 trees from the Woodland Trust to plant on site in order to try and reduce the carbon in the air around our school.

SEND PROVISION

At Birchwood High School we believe that all our students should have access to a broad and balanced education. Our aim is to ensure that all students are educated in a safe environment throughout their time at school, and we do everything we can to ensure that all have a positive experience on a day-to-day basis.

Our SEND Provision aims to:

- Ensure that all students meet their individual expected progress in learning.
- Ensure that all students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have their needs identified in order to support academic progression and continued wellbeing.
- Ensure all students can access a balanced curriculum, differentiated where appropriate.
- Ensure that all students with SEND are able to fully access the curriculum by providing extra support or additional resources, thereby removing barriers to learning.

The school caters for the needs of a number of students with disabilities. Further information may be obtained from our school's Special Educational Needs Policy and SEN Information Report. Parents of students with particularly complex needs are recommended to contact a member of the Personalised Learning Team to discuss provision and opportunities.

SCHOOL MEALS

We are proud to announce Birchwood High School was awarded 'Healthy School' status and gained five stars in the latest Environmental Health inspection. Our aim is to provide fresh, high-quality food, delivered and prepared on a daily basis, using local suppliers.

We recognise the importance of implementing the Government's School Food Plan for school lunches in order to provide vital steps in fighting child obesity. Together with lessons in Science, Food Technology and PE, we aim to encourage our students to lead healthy lifestyles.

The Catering Department provides a wide choice of meals, including vegetarian options. Visit the Birchwood School website for further details, allergen information and price lists.



KEEPING YOU INFORMED

We know how important it is for parents and carers to feel informed and connected to their child's school life. Throughout the year, we'll keep you updated on your child's progress through interim reports and Parents' Information Evenings, while Arbor allows you to see house points awarded for positive work, effort and behaviour, as well as any behaviour or concern notes.

We love to celebrate when students are doing particularly well and will also contact you directly to share successes. Equally, if we have any concerns about your child's progress or wellbeing, we'll make sure you are kept informed so that we can work together to support them.

Letters

All school letters and communications are sent home via email. These will also be added to the school's website, under the header 'News, Letters & Social Media'.

Newsletters

Each week, we share our parent newsletter, The Birchwood Bulletin. This is filled with real-time updates, event notifications, and key information.

Social Media:

We recommend following us on social media for everyday updates:

<https://www.facebook.com/birchwoodhighschool/>

<https://www.instagram.com/birchwoodbishopsstortford/>

<https://www.instagram.com/birchwood6thform/>

Reports

Subject teachers report on student progress a minimum of twice a year. This is viewable online via the Arbor app.

Tutor's Report

The Tutor's Report summarises the students' overall behaviour and achievements at the end of the school year. If you have any concerns during the year, please don't hesitate to contact the school using admin@birchwoodhigh.org.uk

MOBILE PHONES & ELECTRONIC DEVICES

In line with current government guidance, any student who brings a mobile phone to school will be required to place it in their own locking pouch at the start of the school day. The pouch will remain in the student's possession throughout the school day; however, it will stay securely locked until 3:15pm. Pouches can only be opened using designated unlocking points located at the front of the school site.

This approach ensures that mobile phones are stored safely, reduces the risk of loss, damage or misuse, and supports a calm, focused learning environment for all students. While students remain responsible for bringing their phone to school, once on site it must be secured in the pouch and kept locked until dismissal.

HOUSE SYSTEM

The House System has grown to become an integral part of the student experience at Birchwood High School. The system is built upon our key principles of "encouraging all, supporting all and welcoming all" and strives to provide all students with a diverse range of opportunities and experiences that foster a sense of community and competitive spirit. Students earn house points throughout the year for academic and pastoral achievements.

Each tutor group is placed into one of the four houses. There are two forms per house in every year group. The four houses pay tribute to both the history of the school and the local area and have their very own mascot.



Dane (Green): Dane House takes its name from local historical figure Margaret Dane and her husband William. Upon her death in 1579, Margaret left £5 per year to fund a school in Bishop's Stortford. Before it merged with Hadham Hall in 1991, Birchwood High School's site was the location of the eponymous Margaret Dane School.

Hadham (Red): A nod to the school's past, Hadham House is named after the previous Hadham Hall School which merged with Margaret Dane School in 1991 to create the current Birchwood High School.

Waytemore (Yellow): Dating back to the Anglo-Saxon period, Waytemore Castle and its ruins have been ever-present in Bishop's Stortford landscape for over one thousand years.

Stort (Blue): Another nod to the history and landscape of Bishops' Stortford, Stort House is named after the River Stort that runs through the town.

POLICIES:

All policy documents mentioned in this information booklet have been developed by the teachers, the Governing Body and by consultation with parents. Birchwood's key statutory policies are publicly available on the school website.

SIXTH FORM

At Birchwood High School we are proud of our large and successful sixth form. The majority of our Year 11 students decided to continue their post 16 studies at Birchwood's Sixth Form. We have approximately 250 sixth form students on roll and offer 36 different courses with 75% of our students achieving grades A*-C. Our average grade for students studying vocational qualifications such as BTEC's is Distinction and is equivalent to an A grade at A level.

Year 12 and 13 sees the culmination of all the hard work that our students have put in from Year 7 and we see the blossoming of inquisitive, curious, and focused young people. We develop new leaders prepared to take on the next step, whether that be to University, Apprenticeships, or into the world of work.



CAREERS ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

All students in Years 7 to 13 receive careers information, advice and guidance as part of their curriculum programme from teachers, careers advisors, mentors and visiting speakers.

The school subscribes to the Unifrog platform, which gives students up to date careers information at their fingertips and helps students to research, compare and apply to the post 16 or post 18 option of their choice. Careers information can also be found in the library.

During Key Stage 4 all students receive a 1:1 meeting with an impartial career guidance professional. Students who progress to our Sixth Form receive a further 1:1 meeting in Key Stage 5.

In Key Stage 3 students are introduced to experiences of the workplace while students in Years 10 and 12 undertake a full week of work experience.

In the Sixth Form we offer a comprehensive programme of support to help students make informed Post 18 choices and prepare for life beyond Birchwood.

All Sixth Form students at Birchwood who wish to go to university receive personal guidance with UCAS applications and related student finance. Students who choose an apprenticeship or employment route are given personal support with application forms, CVs and interviews.

GCSE RESULTS

Birchwood was proud to announce a year of progress and success in our GCSE results, showcasing the dedication and perseverance of our Year 11 students. They achieved strong outcomes at all levels and improved year-on-year across all faculties. Over 65% of all our students achieved a grade 4 or better in both English and Maths.

Students celebrated their achievements and were proud of having gained entry to their chosen post 16 courses. For the majority of our students that meant joining the Sixth Form here at Birchwood. However, many chose to attend specialist further educational provisions, other local schools and colleges.

More details on our provisional 2026 GCSE results data is available on our website. Please note that all results data is provisional until confirmed by the DfE in November.

A LEVEL RESULTS

Birchwood High School celebrated another successful set of results for those who have been studying A level and BTEC courses this year. 70% of students achieved A* - C at A Level and our BTEC qualifications average grade was Distinction for the fourth year in a row, which is equivalent to an A grade at A Level. This is even more impressive when comparing to other local schools in the Bishop Stortford area, we have the lowest entrance criteria to access Level 3 courses, and our outcomes placing us in the top 35% of schools nationally for value added. This basically means that the vast majority of students that join the sixth form will achieve their minimum expected grade or higher.

All students who were planning on going to university were able to do so with 98% being accepted into their first choice. Birchwood is also one of the leading schools in Hertfordshire for students moving from Sixth Form into exciting apprenticeship opportunities, many of which are with businesses in Bishop's Stortford.



Principal: Mr S Griffin

Birchwood High School, Parsonage Lane
Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 5BD

Telephone: 01279 655936

Email: admin@birchwoodhigh.org.uk