

Wycombe High School Key Stage 4

Information Booklet for Parents



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Introduction

This booklet is designed to give you an insight into your daughter's Key Stage 4 experience and the demands (and opportunities) it will bring. Experience and evidence demonstrate that when schools and parents work in partnership, the more successful and happy a student will be. GCSEs are extremely important; excellent grades will open doors. The opposite is also true. The top universities are, as a matter of course, now requiring at least 5 A* grades at GCSE as well as excellent A Level grades. Oxbridge and competitive courses such as medicine, veterinary science, dentistry and law are demanding up to 8 A* GCSEs as well as excellent A Level grades. We do not share this information to place undue pressure on your daughter or you; we share it to ensure you and she can make informed decisions. Your daughter is at a selective school; a high attaining one. She has huge potential; we simply want her to achieve that potential whatever it may be. We will support the very able and those experiencing difficulties in equal measure. Indeed we recognise that all of us can experience difficulties for a range of reasons at any stage of our lives. We value our students' personal, social and emotional development as much, if not more than her academic development and work hard to ensure the academic side of school is balanced with 'fun' and strong pastoral support. We also have high expectations in terms of behaviour and effort. We hope this booklet will help you understand what your daughter's Key Stage 4 experience looks like and how you can support her.

Timetable

We operate a two week timetable cycle of fifty periods, each one hour long. Your daughter has a physical printout of this and a record of it in her planner. A typical Key Stage 4 student will be expected to have up to 10 hours of Home Learning a week. Home Learning timetables have been issued to ensure that work set is spread out over the fortnight (a copy of Home Learning timetables can be found on the Parent Page of Moodle – see a later section on how to access this – <http://whs.moodledo.co.uk/>).

Private study facilities are available in the Wainwright Learning Centre after school until 6.00 pm if your daughter wishes to complete Home Learning at school. The Wainwright Learning Centre is also open before school from 8.00 am.

Lessons apart, there is a great deal to occupy your daughter. There is a programme of assemblies that are held in Houses or Year Groups, led by staff or students. Tutor-time is held daily. There is also an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities; with approximately 100 clubs and societies on offer each term. Additionally many Key Stage 4 students volunteer for positions of responsibility.

Core Curriculum

During Years 9, 10 and 11 students will study courses leading to the following qualifications:

- GCSE English Language
- GCSE English Literature
- GCSE Mathematics [and possibly Additional Maths]
- GCSEs in Biology, Chemistry and Physics
[or GCSE Science and GCSE Additional Science for some students]
- GCSE Citizenship [short course in Years 10-11 only]

In addition, your daughter's timetable will include:

- Physical Education lessons (two hours per week)
- PSHEE (focus days)
- And – in Year 9 only – Enrichment Courses in five of the following subjects:

• Art	• History
• Dance	• Music
• Food Technology	• Religious Studies
• French	• Textiles
• Geography	• Drama
• Graphic Products	• Second Language – Latin, Spanish, or German

GCSE Options

In addition to the Core Curriculum above, your daughter has chosen some optional GCSEs. As you are aware, students study two of their choices as early GCSEs in Years 9 – 10: they will take the exams at the end of Year 10. Students will study their other two choices as late GCSEs in Years 10 – 11, with the final exam being taken at the end of Year 11.

Choosing options is an exciting but sometimes daunting prospect for students and parents alike. We ensure that students and parents have an opportunity to have the options fully explained in both Year 8 and again in Year 9.

Key Stage 4 Examinations

An inevitable part of secondary school life is examinations. Your daughter will have many external examinations to sit by the end of Year 11. The main bulk of external examinations are in the Summer terms of Year 10 and 11. Additionally, there are Science modules in the early part of the Spring Term in Year 10. Full details are given to students and parents in advance of all examinations. To help students prepare for examinations we hold internal examinations in school in the summer term of Year 10 and also mock examinations in the January of Year 11. These examinations are conducted in our examination venues and all usual examination rules apply. We expect students to take all internal examinations seriously. They are ideal practice for learning how to revise over an extended period of time for multiple subjects and how to apply oneself in the pressure of an examination venue. Additionally students receive the benefit of gaining feedback on examination questions from staff. In exceptional circumstances, mock examinations have been used as evidence of a student's capability when she has not been able to sit a Year 11 summer external paper.

Controlled Assessment Tasks (CATs)

Most subjects have replaced coursework with CATs. These are assessments that students have time to prepare for but they are more tightly monitored than coursework. Students complete the task in lessons and are supervised. We create a calendar for the CATs to help spread the number of CATs that any one student is doing at a time. As you can appreciate being absent from school during a scheduled CATs puts pressure on staff and students to find alternative times for these to be completed. Additionally, it means that your daughter may end up having multiple CATs to complete at any one time. The CATs account for a different proportion of the total marks in different subjects.

Reports

Year 9 and 10 students have a half term report at the following times: October, December, February, April and a full report in the Summer term. Year 11 students have a half term report at the following times: October, December, February, April and a full report at the end of the Spring Term.

With each report there is an explanation of what the grades mean so that you can have a full picture to your daughter's: current level of working, progress towards her targets and commitment to her learning.

PSHEE

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education at Wycombe High School is mainly delivered through carefully constructed Focus Days. The programme is designed to be age-relevant, progressive, inclusive, informative and enjoyable. During these days a student follows a programme of sessions that may involve outside speakers, interactive activities and discussions. Broadly speaking sessions cover: Health and Safety, Relationships, Careers, Financial Capability, Study and Thinking Skills. Linked to this programme is our Enterprise Capability programme. Your daughter will have up to five days off timetable per year for these activities. Typically three of these are Focus Days for PSHE and two are Enterprise Days, the latter may involve participating in off-site activities.

Careers and Further Education

As your daughter moves through Key Stage 4 she will have further choices and decisions to make that will impact her future options with both her future career path and any Further Education that she may wish to embark on. We are fortunate in having a designated Pathways Advisor who is based in the Miller Block. She works with individual students in Key Stage 4 on issues such as career guidance and university application. Additionally, it is most important that your daughter understands that to keep as many doors as possible she needs to strive to achieve her potential.

Educational Visits

We offer a wide range of educational visits, in the UK and abroad, designed to support, extend and enrich the learning experience of our students. Many of the visits at Key Stage 4 are subject specific. Visits planned for the forthcoming academic year include: the Year 9 Ski Trip; the Battlefields Visit for History students; the French Homestay; the Spanish Visit and the Music Tour.

Extra-Curricular activities

There are a variety of extra-curricular activities which your daughter has the opportunity to be involved in from Ultimate Frisbee to Cheerleading to Chamber Choir to the debate society. The full list of these activities has previously been sent out via ParentMail. They can also be found on the school's website. <http://www.whs.bucks.sch.uk/parents-governors/letters-to-parents> . Taking part in such activities can open many opportunities, help build your daughter's confidence and will make her feel welcome as a member of our wider community at school.

Student leadership and responsibility opportunities

Along with the array of extra-curricular activities available to your daughters at school, there are also a number of leadership responsibilities that are also available. These responsibilities are planned to ensure that there are different opportunities as your daughter progresses through the school. The opportunities available to your daughter include:

Year 9 - Form Prefect, Environment Prefect, Charity Prefect, Development Ambassador.

Year 10 - Leaders – where they hold responsibilities within a department; all Year 10 students are a 'big sister' to a Year 7 student in their own tutor group; towards the end of Year 10 the opportunity arises to be a Student Ambassador or a Junior Prefect.

Year 11 - Form Captain, being a member of the Thorpe Park or Prom Committee, continuing being a Junior Prefect or Student Ambassador.

Work Experience

Work experience will not now happen in Year 10 as has to date, been the norm. We are currently investigating the best alternatives. This is likely to involve work experience being scheduled after GCSEs, either at the end of Year 11 or at some point in Year 12. This change will extend the number of meaningful places on offer: some placements for example are restricted to over 16 year olds. It will also enable our students to link the work experience to their post-A Level aspirations (university or work). Mrs Hayward, our Careers Pathways Adviser, will continue to provide a valuable support service and we have no doubt the change will be a positive one.

Support

We have a variety of mechanisms in place to help support your daughter through the inevitable ups and downs of GCSE study, these include:

Pastoral Care

Tutor groups are small and organised on a 'vertical' basis, with students from Year 7 through to Year 13. Each form is part of a House: we have six Houses. Tutor groups meet daily, where tutors will carry out pastoral work on an individual basis, or run a whole tutor group session. Additionally each student meets with her tutor for a 1-1 Personal Tutoring session, outside of tutor time, once every half term.

We recognise that occasionally some students find themselves encountering difficulties. We will do whatever we reasonably can to provide your daughter with the information and support she will need to find appropriate advice to help solve any issues. Each student has a Form Tutor, a Student Manager and a Head of House, who she can approach. We have a successful record in supporting students with personal, emotional and social concerns.

Academic Support

Similarly students can find themselves needing academic support. We have a variety of processes in place to ensure that a student is supported when the need arises.

- If your daughter needs support or further explanation encourage her to ask her teacher: teachers are always willing to help out. An issue addressed early will prevent future problems.
- Subject drop-in or support clubs at lunchtime; these are advertised in the Student Bulletin and in lessons. In many instances students are 'directed' to attend by their teachers. If your daughter is required to attend, most probably because her progress or commitment in her half term grade report is low, the subject teacher will inform you directly and ensure you are informed. However self-referral is strongly encouraged; one session at a subject drop-in club can clear up a misunderstanding or resolve a confidence issue.
- Access to Form Tutors who your daughter sees on a daily basis: within tutor time she will also be able to talk with students in the older years who have recently been through this particular academic journey.
- 1-1 tuition sessions with a Sixth Former, during lunchtime, in a specific subject – the Sixth Formers are called 'ACAs'. Experience and data highlight the success of this scheme, with significant improvements in students' grades. Students enjoy working with other students and the conversations and explanations can often feel more accessible to them.
- Mentoring programmes for students identified as experiencing some general academic difficulty and who would benefit from some mentoring; difficulties can arise for many different reasons and our experience and data demonstrates that mentoring can improve students grades by up to one whole GCSE grade
- 'Listening Scheme' for invited Gifted and Talented students to extend their learning experience.

Parent Support

We often are asked how parents can best support their daughters through this somewhat daunting and critical stage in their education. It is our aim at WHS to work in partnership with parents to ensure that our students feel supported both at home and school. It obviously helps if students hear the same message from both school and home. Here are some suggestions in how parents can help.

- Ensure your daughter understands the message about how important her GCSE grades are.
- Assure her the school and you are there to support; reiterate where she can get help at school.
- Encourage her to get involved in extra-curricular activities: they ensure balance.
- Give her responsibility at home (chores etc); increased responsibility outside of school will help her to manage the increasing independence required academically.
- Talk with your daughter – and listen.
- Check home learning is complete.
- Check planners every weekend.
- Help with time management – especially with meeting deadlines.
- Have a suitable place for them to study at home.
- Monitor how much time they spend on Facebook, phone, and socialising!
- Make sure they have a healthy work-life balance, eat and sleep well.
- Remember that **all their** subjects are important.
- Encourage them to talk to us.
- Support the school.
- Encourage them to take responsibility for their own behaviour including wearing the correct uniform.
- Encourage attendance and punctuality; poor attendance results in lower grades. Please note that we do not authorise holidays in term time.
- Ignore the media – their studies are very demanding and require hard work and commitment!
- Have realistic expectations and don't be afraid to set boundaries; not every student will be allowed to stay up to midnight or socialise midweek, no matter how convincing your daughter sounds on these points.
- Be firm and fair.
- Praise, praise, praise!

Contacting the school

As students progress through the school, we increasingly encourage them to try and seek support and advice themselves. However, we understand that there are times when you need to make contact. The most efficient way to contact school is via their Student Manager (as per the e-mail that you were sent at the start of term). To remind you this is as follows:

Austen and Parks	Mrs Killinger	killinger@whs.bucks.sch.uk
Bronte and Pankhurst	Mrs Paskins	apaskins@whs.bucks.sch.uk
Curie and Nightingale	Mrs Venables	svenables@whs.bucks.sch.uk

Depending on the query she may reply herself, or forward the e-mail to the member of staff best placed to deal with your enquiry. Form tutors are copied into all correspondence.

Please state your daughter's name, tutor group and learning group, for example, Jane Smith, Nightingale 9, 10A in any correspondence. If you have an urgent enquiry please telephone the Student Manager, via the main school telephone number (01494 523961), and she will help address your concern.

Uniform

Our uniform policy is on our website: <http://www.whs.bucks.sch.uk/parents-governors/uniform>. Please be aware that only a medium-sized plain dark rucksack may be used as a school bag and only flat and low heeled school shoes may be worn. Our uniform and dress codes set the tone for our community and provide the scaffolding for high standards in every aspect of school life. It takes a lot of energy and time to monitor uniform and we are diligent; this is only achievable if we are supported by parents. I would be grateful for your ongoing support in ensuring that your daughter fully complies with our expectations. Uniform infringements do result in a variety of sanctions including detentions, loss of privileges and potentially exclusion. Recognising that students need to be treated differently at different stages, the uniform rules become less strict as our students move through the year groups; for example in Year 11 the students, once a month, wear their own clothes in preparation for Sixth Form. And of course in the Sixth Form we do not have a uniform. In this sense our uniform rules are already very liberal compared to many schools.

Moodle – Wycombe High School’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

The principal purpose of our Moodle VLE is to provide an online support for teaching and learning for all our students and students from some of our partner schools. Those who do not have good access to the Internet from home can use the VLE in our Learning Centre from 8.00 am until 6.00 pm. Some pages or ‘courses’ provide open access to anyone on the internet and are widely used by schools in many parts of the world, including Hong Kong, Portugal, Poland, Australia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Ireland and many other parts of the UK. However, most of the content is hidden from the eyes of the public and only accessible to particular classes of students and their specific teachers.

Within these private courses our students will find a range of resources and activities. Students can download worksheets and presentations; they can view video clips and slideshows; they can watch animations that explain concepts and they can download podcasts and MP3 files to help them with music and languages. There are many links to carefully selected web-pages to help our students find some of the resources they need for their studies. As well as these multimedia resources, there is a wide range of interactive activities. This includes discussion forums, questionnaires, voting polls, quizzes, glossaries, games, puzzles and wikis. These are all used to enhance and enrich the subjects we teach and to encourage students to take their learning well beyond the classroom.

With Moodle, our students can also hand in drafts or finished work online and their teachers can mark the work, grade it and provide detailed feedback. If students have problems with their work, or if they are unwell, they can keep in touch with their teachers and school friends using a secure, monitored messaging system that is closed to anyone outside the school community. Our daily student bulletin is also available on Moodle.

Moodle for Parents

In the parents section of Moodle, you will have access to copies of our monthly publication High Flyer and some of the letters for parents. You will also be able to access the school calendar and our daily Student Bulletin. To find the ‘Parents’ page on Moodle, firstly use a search engine to find ‘Wycombe High School Moodle’ or go directly to <http://whs.moodleo.co.uk/>.

1. Click on the ‘Moodle for Parents’ icon (penguin picture) on the homepage.
2. Type in the enrolment login key (this year the login key is **Fortiter2012**).
3. Click ‘enrol me on this course’.