

Religious Studies and Philosophy Department

Introduction

The Religious Studies and Philosophy (RSP) Department offers pupils the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of the six principal religious traditions in the world and key themes in moral philosophy and the philosophy of religion. Religious beliefs and practices are studied within an academic context and pupils are encouraged to reflect on their significance for believers. The Department actively fosters in pupils respect for the beliefs and practices of those who hold views different to themselves. It encourages pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and values and assists them in their search for answers to questions of fundamental meaning and purpose. The Department makes a major contribution to the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils.

Key Stage 3

The course introduces pupils to the festivals, stories, symbols and practices of the six major religions in the world today. In Year 7 boys study key aspects of Christianity and Hinduism and begin an investigation into the beliefs of Islam. There is a visit to Southwark Cathedral which explores symbols of the Christian faith. In Year 8 pupils continue their study of Islam by considering the significance of the Five Pillars for Muslims. This is followed by units on Judaism and Sikhism. Year 9 starts with a course in Buddhism, using an innovative resource produced by the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. There is a visit to the London Buddhist Centre where pupils are able to question an ordained Buddhist leader and also have the opportunity to be guided through a stilling exercise. Next there is a unit on the philosophy of religion which explores the arguments for and against religious belief. This is followed by the study of a number of exemplars of faith which leads on to an examination of different ethical theories.

GCSE

The Department offers the Edexcel GCSE in Religious Studies Specification A. The course consists of two units. Unit A looks at ethical and philosophical issues from mainly Christian and Muslim perspectives. These issues include abortion, euthanasia, beliefs about life after death, sexual ethics, marriage, divorce, family life, racism, sexism, religious tolerance, arguments for and against the existence of God and the problem of evil. Unit M explores aspects of Hindu belief and practice. These include Hindu beliefs about God and the purpose of life, the role of scriptures and the practice of yoga, the significance of worship, festivals, pilgrimage and rites of passage. There is a trip to the Swaminarayan mandir where pupils have the opportunity to question a temple leader, to view the sacred murtis and to observe the daily arti ceremony.

20% of the course is assessed by two coursework essays; the remaining 80% is assessed by two examinations at the end of Year 11. The revision programme includes a visit by the examination board's advisor on Hinduism, which gives pupils the opportunity to clarify any remaining concerns.

A Level - Philosophy of Religion and Ethics

The Department offers the OCR A Level in Religious Studies Route A. The course offers the opportunity to explore philosophical questions, to improve critical thinking skills and to understand why people reach certain decisions on moral issues and how these decisions affect their lives. Pupils do not need GCSE Religious Studies in order to study the A Level course nor do they have to be 'religious'. The A Level course is primarily the academic study of the philosophy of religion and moral philosophy (ethics).

The course is modular and requires the study of three modules at both AS and A2 level. The AS course introduces some of the core ideas and concepts in ethics and philosophy. Pupils begin by looking at the development of philosophy in the West and then study the five traditional arguments for the existence of God and the challenges to each one. They will also explore challenges to religious belief, in particular the problem of evil. The course includes the study of five ethical theories and meta-ethics. These theories are applied to medical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, the right to a child and genetic engineering.

The A2 course includes a coursework paper which is completed in the autumn term. The coursework titles are based on the Ethics module which includes the study of different theories of conscience, the debate over freewill and determinism, and the application of ethical theory to environmental ethics, sexual relationships and war, peace and justice. The Philosophy module explores different views about life after death, the concept of religious experience and the meaningfulness of religious language. The Synoptic module draws together ideas and concepts in ethics and the philosophy of religion across both years of study.

The department runs a number of educational trips during the A level years. Recent trips have included a visit to Auschwitz and attendance at student conferences. A ten week extra-curricular course on philosophy, run by a representative of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, is held periodically.

Every year the department successfully prepares boys to pursue the study of philosophy and/or theology at degree level, including at Oxbridge.