



# Great Marlow School

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16<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Dear Parent/ Carer

I am writing to you regarding GCSE option choices for the current Year 9 students for the academic year 2025/26.

As you will be aware, students will be making decisions regarding their option choices in March of this year. There will be more information regarding these choices and the Options Evening itself from Mrs Pendlebury (Director of Learning for Year 9) and Mrs Craig (Assistant Headteacher) over the coming weeks. The reason for this communication is to explain how the Science curriculum will be delivered to current Year 9 students in Year 10 and 11 (September 2025 – May 2027).

In the current academic year (2024/25), students in Year 9 are taught in 1 of 3 groups within their house and are being prepared for either the Combined Science (Double Award) qualification or, if they are in the top-set, in their house they are being taught material for the Separate Sciences (Triple Award), Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

From September 2025, all students in the current Year 9 cohort will be taught the Combined Science GCSE (AQA) curriculum. In each house there will continue to be 3 teaching groups and there will, in each of these houses, be a top set and two other mixed ability teaching groups. In the top set of each house the students will be taught the subject material that will enable them to take the Combined Science examination in the summer of 2027. In addition, the top set will also be taught the subject material that may allow some students to take the Separate Science qualification in the summer of 2027.

- **Combined Science:**
  - *Students experience all 3 science disciplines*
  - *Students sit 6 examinations (1 hour 15 mins each), 2 Biology, 2 Chemistry and 2 Physics (Summer 2027).*
  - *Students receive 2 GCSE grades for this qualification*
- **Separate Science:**
  - *Students experience all 3 science disciplines to a greater depth and demand*
  - *Students sit 6 examinations that are longer in length (1 hour 45 mins each), 2 Biology, 2 Chemistry and 2 Physics (Summer 2027).*
  - *Students receive a GCSE for each separate science subject finishing the course with 3 grades.*

Staff in the Science Department, led by Mrs J Webster (Head of Department) will use their professional judgement and assessment data collected throughout the duration of the GCSE course, to ensure that students are entered for the correct examination in summer 2027 and have the best opportunity of securing the highest possible outcomes in their final GCSE Science examinations. This will mean that some students in the top set may, if they have proved that they have the ability to do so (*and staff using their professional judgement think that it is in the best interests of that student to do so*), take the Separate Sciences. However, there is no guarantee that by being in the top set a student will take the Separate Science examinations.

- *It is important to note that students who take the double Combined Science qualification can access all grades 9 – 1 and in fact the majority of students will have a better chance of achieving grades 9 – 7 in the Combined Science rather than the Separate Sciences.*
- *Students on either course can access A-Level science courses if grade requirements are met. In many cases, students will find it easier to access higher grades on Combined Science (double award) due to the reduced content. Historically this has meant that some students attain the entry grades for Biology, Chemistry and Physics at A-Level and science related subjects such as Psychology on the Combined Science course and not in the Separate Sciences.*
- *Additionally, to contextualise, on a national scale only 26.9% of all students (2024) studied for the separate science qualification.*

Students in a top set will be kept informed throughout the duration of the course of the intended final qualification that they are working towards. Staff who have responsibility for the delivery of material to top sets will also communicate this information to parents/ carers so there is clarity at all times on the intended final examination qualification (Combined or Separate Science). All final decisions relating to the entry of students will be made by end of the Spring Term of Year 11 (April 2027) and clarified with students and parents/ carers.

If you have any questions relating to the content of the letter, please contact me directly. If you have a question relating specifically to the content of the GCSE Science curriculum, please contact Mrs J Webster (Head of Science) by email [jwebster@gms.bucks.sch.uk](mailto:jwebster@gms.bucks.sch.uk)

We will, in the week commencing Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January, ask Year 9 students to do a mock 'run through' of the options process and opt for the 4 subjects that they are currently considering doing. This supports the school with the initial planning of the curriculum for 2025/26 and in assessing current and future staffing requirements. The mock 'run through' will have no bearing on the final choices that Year 9 students make in March 2025.

Kind regards

Guy Pendlebury

Head of School