



BRENTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

LEARNING AND ACHIEVING TOGETHER

Year 8 Options Process

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

We have put this guide together to share answers to some of the questions parents or students ask each year. We hope that this gives you a little extra useful information to enable you and your child to make your choices.

The final deadline for online options choices is Wednesday, 27 March.

The hard copy should be handed to the Form Tutor by Wednesday, 27 March.

Year 8 Options FAQs:

1. What are the right courses for my child?

Our advice is usually to choose the subjects that your child will enjoy and engage in the most as motivation can have a real impact on learning. Our curriculum is very broad and so this protects students from narrowing down their choices too much.

2. Are some subjects only for some students or are all subjects for everyone?

Computing is usually for students who are in the top sets in mathematics because there is a fair amount of skill cross over. Music requires students to be able to sing or play an instrument. GCSE PE is more for people who are good at a sport. Beyond that, all subjects can be accessed by all students, including those students aiming for 7-9 grades (the old A and A* grades) and those aiming for 1-3 grades (the old D-G grades).

3. Are there particular subjects that my child should choose if they are a high ability student?

In terms of the options choices, our advice would be to choose whatever students enjoy. If your child has ideas about what subjects, they would like to study after their GCSEs it would be worth looking on our school website in the 'Sixth form' section at the prospectus page and downloading the document to see what GCSEs are needed to do a specific subject post-16. The 'Join our Sixth Form' section shows what grades are needed overall to get onto different types of courses and you will see that information about the overall grades needed only specifies mathematics and English as specifically required GCSEs and beyond that, what matters are the grades rather than the subjects. In addition, students in top sets will usually end up doing an extra mathematics GCSE (making two qualifications rather than one) and an extra science GCSE (making three qualifications rather than two).

4. My child finds quite a few subjects difficult, especially those with a lot of writing. Are there particular subjects that my child should choose?

We would advise that you look carefully at the subject page descriptions in the Options Booklet to see how a subject is assessed. All of our GCSEs give grades from 9-1 (A*-G in the old system) which means that students of all abilities are able to get a grade. To reassure you, 100% of our students each year get at least 5 x 1-9 grades. We are a mixed ability, comprehensive school for students of all abilities and it is our job to support your child to achieve as many GCSE grades as possible and to experience success in their studies. Our track record at this is very good.

5. What are the most common mistakes students make when selecting their options?

Firstly, it is relatively difficult to make a mistake because of all of the above explained so far. However, these are some of the things we offer advice to our students on:

- Do not make a choice of subject based on what your friends have chosen. There is a good chance that you would be in a different group when the timetable has been written. Also, friendships change, and it is good for us to learn to work with other people.
- Do not make a choice of subject based on a teacher. You may not be in that teacher's class when the timetable is done.
- Do find out as much as you can, please read the Options Booklet for more detailed information. If you want to, you can also email the Subject Leader of a course you are interested in and can ask them specific questions (their names are at the top of each page in the Options Booklet and their email addresses are at the back of the Options Booklet).
- There are no 'easy' or 'hard' subjects. There are subjects that require different skills and are assessed in different ways though. Some subjects are assessed almost entirely through coursework/controlled assessments which reduces the number of examinations for example. Others test mainly practical skills for those students who are more practical. Some avoid practical skills which may be better for those students who are not as confident in their practical skills.

6. My child is not creative, but they have to choose one of the Arts. Can they avoid this?

Creative industries are some of the biggest employers in and around London and all employers' value creative thinking and skills. As an arts specialist school we believe that creativity is important for students of all abilities and all of us need to show creativity in our daily work. We know that universities have fed back that they like the breadth of the subjects that our students do. There are also different types of creativity across the arts subjects. For example, drama uses literary and performance creativity, whereas graphic/digital art or photography use technology to create and fine art often uses more traditional methods such as drawing and painting. There are lots of different ways of being creative and your child has studied a wide range of art and technology disciplines as well as music and drama for the last two years and so is well placed to make the choice that is right for them.

7. My child is very creative, can they do more than one creative subject?

Yes- our options structure is set up so that a student can select one of the art disciplines as one GCSE and music or drama as another, or they can select music and drama and not study art if that suits them better. There are other creative subjects within the option blocks that students could choose from instead. A good read of the materials will help.

8. Will my child get their first choices?

We will try very hard to build a timetable that enables all students to get their first choice, but we do ask for a reserve (second choice) selection from each of the option rows so that if we cannot give your child their first choice in every one of their selections, we will aim to give them their second choice. If your child needs to use their reserve choice, we will get in touch with you and your child first.

9. Why do some students get their reserve instead of their first choice subject?

If only four students for example want to do a certain subject, that subject won't run. This is because to allow a class of four to run we would need to make numbers of students in other classes too high. As an example of this, if we have 40 students and two subject classes to put them in, if one class has four students, the other class would need to have 36 students and we would not do this. As another example, if we have 35 students who want to do a certain subject and we only have space for 28, the other seven students will need to be moved onto their second subject.

10. If too many students want to choose a particular subject and this gives too many to fit into the class, which students are moved to their reserve?

In the answer for question 9 we talked about 35 students wanting to do a subject that has 28 places only. In a case such as this we would look at all 35 students and what their reserves are. We would identify from the list those whose reserve subject still had places. The Year Team would also get involved with their knowledge of each student's skills and will advise on which of those students with space in their reserve classes would do well to move over. Finally, if there are two students who in the examples so far are equal, we would look at their Attitude to Learning score in the subject to see who has been trying the hardest and it is likely that that student would get their first choice.

11. I understand that nationally every student must study religious studies (RS) and citizenship and my child has been told that she gets to choose which out of RS and citizenship to do for core and which to do as a full GCSE.

You are right that both subjects are compulsory, and all students will study both. Students spend more hours a cycle on the subject that they are doing for GCSE and only an hour a cycle on the one they are not doing as a GCSE. We aim to give everyone their first choice as indicated on the options form. If however, there is a shortage of places in the subject your child chooses, we will assign places to those with the highest Attitude to Learning scores (i.e. those who have tried hardest) over the past two years in the chosen subject. A student's

ability is not used to assign them a place, only their effort in the subject.

12. Can my child get a GCSE in a heritage language?

Each year we ask if there are any students who would like to be entered for a GCSE/A Level qualification in a heritage/home language. Each year students sit qualifications in languages such as Polish, Arabic, Russian, German, Italian, Urdu, Japanese and Portuguese. Children do not need to communicate this during the options process. Mrs Sáenz (Subject Leader for Modern Foreign Languages, including heritage language examination entries) collects that information from students across the school each year. It is possible for students to take the GCSE one year and then if they do well, to take an A Level the following year whatever their age. Some languages do not have GCSE or A Level examinations, but when Mrs Sáenz asks for students to let her know if they would like to take a heritage language qualification, let her know the language that you are interested in and we will check if there is an examination board at GCSE or A Level that offers the qualification.

13. How do I know if my child has got their first choice of courses?

We send out a letter towards the end of this school year confirming your child's allocated courses. We wait for this long because it is possible that the students' choices lead to several follow up actions, for example us employing a new member of staff to expand a subject area. Also, the whole school timetable is created around the Year 8 option choices and this takes a lot of time to create and to find possible ways to give the greatest number of Year 8 students as many first choices as possible. You will know earlier though if your child is being given their reserve choice as we get in contact with you and your child if this is the case.

14. Can my child change his mind once we have submitted his choices?

Because of all of the actions that happen following students' option choices, for example employing an additional teacher and writing the entire school timetable for September 2024, we would encourage students to research and think carefully before submitting their choices. Students will have had a lot of time to find out more about each course.

Any late options submissions will mean that students will be placed at the bottom of the list of students wanting to do each subject, so we advise that you meet the deadline of replying by the end of Wednesday, 27 March. Early replies though do not put someone at the top of the list; we want you to take your time, research and think carefully before selecting.