



Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Students for admission to Year 7 in September 2021

Please read this document if you have a question that has not been answered by our other online material at <https://www.gwacademy.co.uk/joining-us/admissions> . It is designed to answer the main questions we know parents and students have, as simply as we can and is grouped into sections: General questions, Admissions questions, and SEND questions.

If your question is not answered please email office@gwacademy.co.uk and we will get back to you as quickly as we can.

General Questions

1. How big will the school be next year and when full?

We admit 150 students into each cohort and have about 100 students currently in our Sixth Form. With students in years 7 to 10 next year, as well as 12 and 13, this means we anticipate having just over 700 students on roll. This will grow to the school's official capacity of 1210 by 2023, at which point years 7 to 11 will be full and our first lower school cohort will be entering the Sixth Form, making the Sixth Form much larger than is currently the case.

2. How do you support students as they move from primary school?

We work very closely with all our most local primary schools. We usually offer chances for students in years 5 and 6 to visit GWA, or we send staff to visit them – at time of writing this is limited by Covid restrictions, but we are looking at 'virtual visits' of some sort. Once we know which students are coming to us (March 2021) we visit each student in their primary setting and talk with their class teacher.

Students for whom transition may be particularly challenging receive further support from our SEND team.

It's fair to say many parents worry about the move to secondary school but the very large majority of students settle very quickly.

3. How much homework should I expect, and can I see it what's set as a parent?

We believe home learning encourages good learning habits and the independence in studying which students need to succeed. In year 7 students should expect to have about an hour of work each evening – this will then gradually increase in future years. Work does not need to be completed the day it is set and can be organised to meet required deadlines. Parents can track what is set and whether it has been completed via a weekly update. Students can also use their self-study time in enrichment to complete their home learning.

4. Is enrichment compulsory?

Yes. All students stay until the end of enrichment Monday to Thursday each week and choose from a wide variety of activities, including the opportunity to complete homework. If

there is a very specific, individual reason why a student cannot stay one evening that can be discussed.

5. Do you set students?

In most subjects, yes. Students are grouped by ability from the start of year 7 in 22 out of their 30 lessons. This allows us to tailor their learning to ensure they are appropriately challenged. It is very important to note that sets are not fixed, and students move between groups where it is agreed that is to their benefit.

6. How big are your classes?

Each year group is split into six tutor groups and teaching groups, so averaging 25 students. In setted groups those needing more support tend to be in smaller groups, meaning some more able groups can reach 30 students – but that is a limit we do our very best never to exceed.

7. Which languages do you offer?

All students have the chance to study both French and Spanish, and to take both languages at GCSE if they choose to do so. Further languages – such as Italian, Latin and Chinese – are sometimes part of our enrichment offer.

8. How do you support very able students?

We challenge our most able in many ways, such as through ensuring our top sets really are challenged from day one, providing extra enrichment opportunities and, ultimately, supporting application to top universities and apprenticeships. This year we have several students applying to study at Oxford, Cambridge and top medical and veterinary schools, as well as applicants for specialist arts and engineering courses.

We also understand not all talent is academic; our Talent Programme focuses on four areas – Academic, Sporting, Arts and Leadership, and students can be identified and supported to excel in one or more of these areas.

9. Do students really get their own laptops?

Yes! Students in years 7 to 11 cannot take their laptops home, but they are used in any lesson in school when needed. It is the student's responsibility to care for them during school hours, and we provide clear expectation of how they should do this.

10. What is the school's policy on mobile phones?

Phones must not be seen in school. They are an unnecessary distraction during the school day. If seen they are confiscated and a further sanction imposed.

11. How do the catering arrangements work?

Our caterers provide a service at breakfast, morning break, and full hot meals at lunchtime. Payment is made electronically via a biometrics system with parents uploading credit via ParentPay. This avoids students needing to bring any cash to school, and also means that students entitled to free school meals pass through the dining area in exactly the same way as all others.

12. Is any transport provided?

There are two public buses which serve the school site at the start and end of the school day – the number 9 and the number 957. The very large majority of our students live within walking or cycling distance, so no other transport is provided.

Admissions-related Questions

1. I am aware GWA has been significantly over-subscribed in recent years – what are the criteria for allocating places?

Our full admissions policy is available on the website. In summary, students with EHCPs and those looked after have first priority, as in all state schools. We then offer places to siblings of current students, and then rank by straight-line distance from the school.

2. How far away from school do I need to live to gain a place?

This is probably our most frequently asked FAQ, but also the hardest to answer as it will vary depending on the applications in any given year. For the past two years the final place was allocated well under 1.5 miles from the school as the crow flies. However, this may change and we would strongly encourage anyone interested in GWA to name us as first choice on your application form.

3. What if I am not successful in gaining a place, do I have any options?

All applicants have a right of appeal to an independent panel if they feel there are specific reasons why a place should have been allocated to them; details are included in the offer letter you receive. If you are refused you are placed onto a waiting list which is held in oversubscription criteria order. Your child will stay on the waiting list until the end of their year 7.

SEND-related Questions

1. What interventions does the school provide?

We work on a hub basis and support students in their Cognition and Learning, Speech and Language, and Social and Emotional needs. Students are observed during the first few weeks of year 7 and together with information from primary schools this helps us to ascertain what support they may need and in what area. Interventions are then run, within hubs, to meet these needs.

2. Will my child always have support in class?

In class support will always be available through differentiation within the classroom by the class teacher as part of Quality First Teaching. Where students have been observed as needing more intensive support bespoke interventions, in a small group, are put in place to help give students the tools they need to self-advocate and become more independent within the classroom. A learning mentor will be available within some classes to help students practise these skills.

3. My child had 1-1 at primary school, will this be continued?

At secondary school, it is not possible to give 1-1 support for students at all times. Substantial research that shows that this is counter-productive and we believe strongly at GWA that students need to be supported in becoming independent in readiness for their future. Students will, where needed, have individual guidance in a lesson and tools to help them overcome difficulties, but a member of staff sat with them at all times within a classroom is not something we advocate.

4. My child needs a personalised curriculum- can you do this?

We strongly believe that every child has the right to access the full year 7 curriculum and should be in lessons to do so. We do not therefore offer personalised curriculums but do offer interventions for those that need it, offering support for specific needs on a standard 6-week intervention basis. These are reviewed regularly and your child may go through several interventions, each varying in support given, to ensure they can access the main curriculum successfully.

5. My child has dyslexia, how will you support?

We are working towards the Dyslexia Mark at GWA and strongly believe in universal support for Dyslexia. We have a regularly updated Dyslexia list which also includes students with difficulties with visual stress and those who have been tested for 'at risk' features of dyslexia. The SENDCo and Hub Leader for Cognition and Learning both test students to determine whether or not coloured overlays are needed. Cream books are used for students who need them and all staff are trained in dyslexic friendly strategies in the classroom and utilise these in lessons.

6. My child has sensory issues how will your school overcome these?

Where students have highlighted sensory issues with clothing, we can signpost them towards sensory ranges of clothing to help overcome these. In terms of classroom lighting, sounds, smells and so on, we can adjust seating areas to ensure that your child is sat in an area of the classroom that helps meet their needs. This can be discussed through the SEND department and we can look at this on a case by case basis.

7. My child has ADHD - will your teachers make allowances?

All staff have had access to training on different areas of SEND and how to differentiate for these within the classroom, including ADHD. Individualised strategies can be agreed with individual students to help them engage successfully, such as giving students a clear role (e.g. book/equipment monitor), providing a discreet fiddle toy, or giving clear focussed tasks that are broken down and support to refocus on what they need to do next. All staff allow for this and where the need is more pronounced, support from Learning Mentors can also be available on a class basis.

8. Do you provide a safe place for my child when they need time out?

We run a Nurture club at break and lunch for students who struggle socially. This is typically for SEND students and is staffed by the SEND team. We encourage students to play games, interact and work on homework during this time so we can help them practice social skills and ask for help in a quieter environment. This tends to be by invite only so we can ensure the students that need this provision get the quiet support they need.

During normal lessons if a student feels overwhelmed a Learning Mentor may decide they need time out but as this can take away from their learning, we try to encourage students to stay in class as much as possible.

9. Who can I talk to about my child's SEND needs?

If your child is on the SEND register, this will typically be the SENDCo, Hub Leader or key worker (if your child has one). If your child is NOT on the SEND register, this would typically go through the Pastoral system (Tutor, Pastoral Intervention Leader, Head of House) and then they would discuss whether or not we need to do an assessment to see whether or not a student does have SEND needs that may need addressing beyond that of standard classroom/pastoral support. This would then follow a graduated response which would be discussed with you.

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