



## Curriculum Policy Options: Policy and Practice

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At GCSE and A-level, student choice is a priority in our aim of providing a personalised education for each individual: girls are given a free choice from a wide range of subjects, and the option pools are drawn up to accommodate as many of these as possible within the resources available.

**Policy:** Our aim to provide a personalised education for each individual as far as possible drives our policy of providing a free choice of options for students. The school is committed to making every effort to accommodate each student's preferred combination of subjects. The school may remove a subject from the list of option choices if the numbers opting for the subject are considered not viable or not sufficient to provide a suitable educational experience.

**Practice:** Options are significant at two key points in a student's senior school education: in Year 9, when they chooses their GCSE subjects, and in Year 11 when they choose their A-level subjects. At each of these points, guidance is provided about the subjects available and associated higher education pathways and careers. A broad outline of the processes is given below:

- Students will receive information relating to option choices and their next pathways through the PSHE curriculum. Parents are invited to attend a GCSE Information Session scheduled for the same evening as the Year 9 Parents Evening in the spring term. Similar A-level Information Sessions are held during the course of the Sixth Form Open Evening. Information booklets are provided either prior to or at these evenings, including details of the options schedule and copies of the options forms to be completed, and careers-related guidance is given. Heads of Department follow up with details of the courses they offer – either on the evening itself, in the case of the Year 11/Sixth Form Open Evening, or in subsequent lessons, in the case of Year 9. Students are encouraged to discuss their options with staff.
- GCSE Trial Examinations take place in December, and the results of these may inform girls' decisions.
- There are entry requirements for the sixth form. From September 2017, students require a minimum of 50 points from their best eight GCSE results using the new GCSE points system of Grades 9-1. (For GCSEs receiving grades from the previous grading system the following conversions will apply: A\*=8, A=7, B=6, C=5 etc). Entry onto courses is at the discretion of the Headteacher and Head of Sixth Form.
- All students are made aware of these requirements and that, if they do not meet them, entry to the sixth form may be refused. They are expected to discuss any shortfall in results with the Head of Sixth Form once their results are known. In some individual cases, a student and her parents may be advised after the GCSE trial examinations with discussions around whether a student should consider courses other than A-level.
- Students in Year 9 return their options forms around half-way through the spring half-term: completely free choices, although all must follow the core at GCSE – English, Mathematics, a Language, Religious Education and the three sciences. These draft options will be shared with Heads of Department so that they may advise on any inappropriate choices at this stage.
- The school (through the Head of Sixth Form or Head of House) will counsel a student if, for example, her preferred combination seems too restrictive.
- Students in Year 11 return their option forms in January.

- Option blocks are drawn up by the school based on an understanding of course combinations that facilitate post-18 pathways.
- Inevitably a small number of Year 9 and Year 11 students each year will find that their first preferences cannot be accommodated, and these students will be seen individually and their options reviewed, and advice offered. A letter is sent to each student to confirm her option choices. At this stage she can request a change of options if it is deemed appropriate and works within the finalised blocks. Provisional teaching groups are drawn up from these selections as part of the timetabling process, and group sizes and numbers are balanced as far as possible at this stage.
- We discourage students from changing their minds after this point. They are made aware that it is not always possible to change their options once the timetable has been drawn up: certain teaching groups may be full. In practice, however, a number will change their minds, particularly for A-level courses after GCSE results are published, and we do try to accommodate as many of these as possible.

### **Dropping a subject at GCSE or A-level**

The school will make every effort to see that students who embark upon an examination course see the course through to its satisfactory completion, ie grade C or above at GCSE, and grade E or above at A-level.

Dropping a subject is not a decision to be taken lightly and requires the student concerned to seek advice and assistance from members of staff. Help from subject teacher(s) should be sought as soon as difficulties arise so that remedial action can be taken and useful advice given on areas of weakness. Time should then be allowed for improvements to take place. Parents need to be involved in these discussions to ensure support from home too.

If a colleague is concerned about a GCSE student's lack of progress, the concern should be raised first with the tutor, who has the background knowledge and following consultation with the Head of Department. There are sometimes domestic or personal reasons which cause a pupil to underachieve and if it seems in her best interests to permit a lightening of the examination load, this may be considered. The tutor will consult with the Head of House who will interview the pupil and seek to ascertain whether improvement is possible or likely. If a pupil wishes to drop the subject and it seems likely that reducing the load will improve the overall learning situation, the Head of House will liaise with the Deputy Head. Parents will be consulted, and will confirm in writing their agreement for their daughter not to be entered for the examination in that subject. Normally this will take place after Year 10 examinations or Year 11 mock examinations. The Exams Officer and Data Manager are advised at this point.

Where difficulties encountered by a sixth form student persist to the point where the student wishes to give up the subject concerned, she should discuss the situation with her tutor and seek an interview with the Head of Sixth Form. The Head of Sixth Form will discuss the situation with the student and consult the tutor and the Deputy Head. The agreement of parents will be sought before any final decision is reached.

There may be occasions when performance in trial examinations at GCSE or A-level is disappointingly lower than anticipated. In this case the school may recommend a smaller number of examination subjects so that the student can work to guarantee success in other subjects, particularly the core subjects at GCSE. Parents will be advised of the recommendation and their agreement sought.

From time to time there may be educational reasons for the school to conclude that entry to a public examination is not justified. Failure to make acceptable efforts to meet the requirements of the course, demonstrable inability to meet the minimum demands of the examination, or repeated or lengthy unjustified absence are among the reasons why entry may be refused. The school will warn students and parents in writing that entry to the examination may be refused unless there is acceptable improvement, such warning to be in sufficient time for students to improve before the mock examinations.

In all cases where the number of GCSE entries is reduced, the pupil will do work in the extra time made available which aids improvement elsewhere.

### **Changing a subject/subjects at Advanced Level**

This is likewise a decision which requires consideration and advice. It must not be taken by the student by herself or in conjunction only with the teachers of the subject it is proposed to drop or change to. The Deputy Head must be consulted as well as the Head of Sixth Form so that the implications are fully considered and the possibilities examined. It is not always possible to transfer a student to another group. Equal opportunities issues may arise if subsequent requests from other students cannot also be met.

The student must continue to attend all lessons in the originally agreed courses until such time as Head of Sixth Form have ascertained that a move is desirable and possible and parents have been consulted. Normally such changes should take place only within the first half-term of the sixth form course. The Exams Officer and Data Manager are advised at this point.