

FORUM FOR COLLEGE PARENTS

TUESDAY 27 JUNE 2017

1. English Language and Religious Studies GCSEs taken early in the Fourth Year.

- 1.1. "I wondered whether the rationale behind taking RS early next year when they will be the guinea pigs with a new 9-1 syllabus still stands? My daughter's RS teacher has told me that the new syllabus not only has a lot more content so there is much more work to get through, but also it is much harder with material previously taught at A level. My daughter says it is by far her hardest subject at the moment and I wonder whether if she was a year older and more mature she would be able to cope with it better as she will still be only 14 when she takes it. Many parents (particularly those with boys) feel similarly regarding English Language. I assume there are timetabling issues to deal with but it would be helpful to understand why the school feels this is the best approach."
- 1.2. *This is currently under discussion with SLT. It is still felt that English Language should be taken a year early, giving students a 'practice run' for GCSE revision and exams and since it is an IGCSE, there is an opportunity to retake both in November and again the following summer. However, RS is under consideration given that the syllabus has changed, we have the new 9-1 grading and it contains more challenging content. An extra year may benefit results with extra time for students to mature academically. What are the parents' thoughts on this? (HM)*
- 1.3. *(Both sides of the argument were then discussed, with a slight preference to delaying until the Fifth Year).*
- 1.4. What does the RS department think about having an extra year, with so much content to cover? There is a great deal of pressure to cover the syllabus from September to May.
- 1.5. The RS Department is also considering this matter in detail. We will make a final decision and communicate it to parents in September.
- 1.6. As a non-RC, can the RS syllabus be broader ie. cover other religions?
- 1.7. *The syllabus currently requires us to study 2 religions. In addition, as a RC school, SGC is required to include the study of Catholicism, to retain this status as a Catholic school. We cannot change to IGCSE as this is not approved by the Diocese and the Bishops Conference. (HM)*
- 1.8. The RS exam was well prepared for this year, with packs of information.
- 1.9. Can these exams be retaken more than once? Does retaking disadvantage university applications? With a young son in the year group, taking RS and English early may put him at a disadvantage as he is more immature than his peers.

1.10. *Yes, they can. In terms of university applications, only the final grade is disclosed to UCAS, and it is not recorded how many times a student has re-taken the exam to achieve the grade. (HM)*

1.11. My daughter took the 'old' RS exam a year early which was positive as this didn't detract from the other major subjects the following year.

2. The length of the girls' skorts for sport.

2.1. "My daughter tells me that Games staff have told girls they must wear tracksuit bottoms at all times with their skort if they are anywhere but on the game fields because they are so short. I have to admit it is very short - possibly even indecently short for school uniform. There must have been a design change at some point as when I purchased a larger size for my daughter (an age 13-14) it was actually shorter than her old size (age 10-11). It seemed silly to buy a shorter size but she needed it because her waist size had increased. On hot summer days it is not comfortable for her to wear tracksuit bottoms in addition to her skort although I understand the Games dept point of view. Can something be done?"

2.2. *Agreed, the girls' skorts are too short! This is likely to be because the supplier has changed and this will be investigated. (HM)*

2.3. *Response from Dinae McNish in the College Shop: 'Currently the girl's skort is a standard length only, which I understand is the norm amongst suppliers. The skort supplier has changed but that was 5 years ago. I am not aware of the comments by Sports staff that pupils have to wear tracksuit bottoms to cover short skorts. I will follow up with Laura Gibson. If this is happening a lot, then the skort design/supplier may need to be reviewed as the skort should be able to be worn alone as an acceptable item of kit. It can be difficult to ensure the catalogue fits all sizes/heights.'*

3. Careers

3.1. Careers guidance is notoriously poor at the College – how will this be improved?

3.2. *By coincidence, Elizabeth Soared - Careers Consultant (recommended by the Trinity Group of schools) is meeting with HM & Dan Wright, Deputy Head Staff today to discuss sourcing the new Head of Careers. It has been decided this role will not be a teacher but a careers professional or former business person dedicated to Careers with contacts in the business world. Watch this space! (HM)*

4. Revision Materials

4.1. As a parent of First and Second Year boys, there appear to be huge discrepancies between different subjects on the information provided for revision, ie. making students search for information vs providing information for them to focus on revision. Different messages are being given on timing expected for revision.

- 4.2.** *Agreed, there can be different messages from HoYs and Subject Teachers and the real issue is getting expectations and guidelines in-line. It is worth noting that further up the school, more information is provided for revision, but it is important to find the right balance in the lower years. I will take this up with Ms May, Deputy Head Academic.(HM)*
- 4.3.** My daughter is in the First Year has found exams very difficult this year due to inconsistent, mixed messages. The results came out irregularly and grade cards are not released until the end of term. Should the exams be moved to before half term?
- 4.4.** *First of all, staff should be fully informed of any issues about a child who is not coping – please make sure the GT is aware so that we can help! As a parent, I sympathise with the idea of moving the internal exams before half term to allow the children a break during that week, but there are pros and cons to this. Above all, revision guidance should be provided for the lower years and more consistent messages given. (HM)*

5. Pastoral Care at SGC

- 5.1.** Pastoral care at SGC is not as strong as it should be – will this improve?
- 5.2.** *The College is extremely proud of its pastoral care, but accepts that other schools have improved their care in recent years and it is important for us to continually move forward to ensure we are the best we can be. Therefore, Tanya Hall has just been appointed Assistant Head Pastoral, to join Sally Hall who is Deputy Head Pastoral. Two representatives in this department will give stronger support within the school. (HM)*

6. Mufti Day during Public Exams

- 6.1.** It is not appropriate for students taking exams to take part in Mufti Day. They have enough pressure on them and do not need to spend time of deciding what to wear. It also sends conflicting messages for exam procedure.
- 6.2.** *This is an interesting point and thank you for bringing this up! Yes, agree – students taking exams should wear uniform – it ensures focus. This will be flagged up next year to ensure that those taking exams are not included in Mufti Day. (HM)*

7. Group Tutors

- 7.1.** Do the children have the same Tutor throughout school? My child does not have a strong relationship with current Tutor.
- 7.2.** *Students have the same Tutor in First and Second Year and from Third to Fifth Year and then in Lower and Upper Sixth. Unfortunately, it does sometimes happen that a student does not have a strong connection with their Tutor and it is important for a child to have someone they feel that they can approach.. Therefore please reiterate to them that any member of the teaching staff may be approached, whether it is a Subject Teacher or Head of Year, if a student needs to help and/or advice. (HM)*

8. Complaints about Teaching Staff

- 8.1. Whilst there have been a number of new teaching staff joining in September – and well done for this – it is felt that under-performing teachers stay year in year out at the College and nothing changes.
- 8.2. *Rest assured, as HM I am prepared to deal with difficult issues and make decisions/take procedures to deal with staff that are underperforming. I believe every staff issue has been tackled and dealt with this year. (HM)*
- 8.3. What is the proper procedure if a complaint has been made to HoY and nothing is done?
- 8.4. *If an academic issue, then Francesca May, as Deputy Head Academic would be the next point of contact; if pastoral, Sally Hall, Deputy Head Pastoral or if staffing, Dan Wright, Deputy Head Staff. Or myself as Headmistress! (HM)*

9. The Headmistress's Vision for the College

- 9.1. Now that you have been in the post for a year, what would be your vision for the College going forward?
- 9.2. *Ultimately to produce happy and successful children. I wish all of our students to leave the College feeling that they have achieved the very best - whether this is academically, in sport, Georgian spirit etc. The students should be enabled to be the best version of themselves.*
- 9.3. Sadly there is not the same passion from teachers at the College as at the JS. Why is this?
- 9.4. *I'm not sure that this is a fair reflection of the College; our staff are encouraged to strive to be the best they can be for the children! I have seen many excellent teachers this year. Perception at JS and the College is different – remember, your children are now teenagers!! (HM)*

10. Benchmarking & Monitoring

- 10.1. My daughter has had a wonderful first year and is highly involved with sport and other activities. However, I am concerned that academics are secondary and with lots of sport competitions, she's doing a lot of catching up. Whilst I'm delighted that she has enjoyed her year so much, I want her to do equally well on the academic side, as this ultimately will give her more choice in the future.
- 10.2. *Monitoring children is done in two ways; a critical role of our new Assistant Head Pastoral is to monitor children who are overloaded and ensure they are not missing vital subjects. Secondly, the MIDYIS test, for First to Third Years predict GCSEs. From this baseline, we have a benchmark in order to add value and to review performance. If a child is felt to be struggling, interventions will be made. In addition to this, each grade card is carefully monitored and benchmarked by the Assistant*

Heads, so there is a great deal going on in the background of which parents may be unaware. (HM)

10.3. Some parents need support from the College to nudge and organise a child and ensure he/she finds the right balance and does not under-achieve.

10.4. *Yes - another role of the new AH Pastoral is to look out for children who are 'under the radar' ie. They could do better with more attention and by raising their game a little. Parents please do inform us of these concerns, so we can take action. (HM)*

11. Sets for English

11.1. I have been informed via my child that sets for English will be abolished for the whole school next year – is this the case?

11.2. *Yes, a letter from Francesca May, Deputy Head Academic, is due to be sent to inform all College parents (now sent). This was agreed by SLT after careful review and analysis by the Head of English, Nik Waight. It was felt that sets in English do not bring about better results and the lower sets can create a self-fulfilling prophesy to fail. However, Maths and French sets will continue as these are skill-based subjects. (HM).*

If there are any further issues or questions which have not been raised at tonight's Forum, please don't hesitate to contact Rachel Owens by email:
headmistress@stgeorgesweybridge.com.

Parents will be reminded in advance of two Fora on either side of the Christmas Term 2017; the topics for discussion will be **Pastoral Care** with Rachel Owens & Sally Hall (Deputy Head Pastoral) on 21 September and **Academic** with Rachel Owens & Francesca May (Deputy Head Academic) on 21 November.