

## PARENTS' FORUM (ACADEMIC)

RACHEL OWENS - HEADMISTRESS & FRANCESCA MAY - DEPUTY HEAD ACADEMIC

TUESDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2017

### 1. Religious Studies GCSE

- 1.1. *Several parents have asked why the option to sit GCSE RS early has been stopped and why it is a compulsory exam.*
- 1.2. The new GCSE syllabus is more challenging, with greater complexity, which has meant that it can no longer feasibly be taken a year early. The RS department is well prepared for the new specification and by taking the GCSE later, students can go through many specimen papers and have adequate revision time to prepare. As a Catholic school, SGC must include RS as a GCSE subject –and each year group must be offered RS lessons through the school. This has been confirmed by Bishop Richard Moth (FMM). In the same way, the Bishop has advised that Confirmation and other sacramental preparation must take place within the parish rather than at school – this is a shame, I agree, but this position is fixed. (HM)
- 1.3. *Why is English Language taken early?*
- 1.4. English Language allows students to re-sit the exam in November and again in the following summer if necessary – unlike other subjects. This subject requires little revision, is more skills based and can be prepared for from the Third Year. It provides students with good experience of public exams and the outcomes are consistently good from this GCSE – the A\*/A percentage is consistently well above our College average. (FMM)
- 1.5. *Why not Mathematics early?*
- 1.6. Able students will take Further Maths in addition to Maths GCSE, in the Fifth Year. The preparation for Further Maths undoubtedly enhances students' results in Maths as well, thus we would be highly reluctant to bring forward the Maths GCSE even for the most able. Statistically there is a disadvantage by taking Maths in the Fourth Year and it is better to take all of the Maths exams a year later, even for the most able. (HM)

### 2. Oxbridge

- 2.1. *Are there plans to increase the proportion of Oxbridge entries from SGC in future?*
- 2.2. It has become increasingly difficult for the independent sector to achieve places at Oxbridge (vs the state sector). However, 20 applications have been made by our students this year. As a rule, we have a good record of achieving in the pre-tests but the main challenge is at interview. In response to this, two new Oxbridge (and American University) coordinators have been appointed this year. Similarly, two new Careers experts have been appointed from January, and one of their main foci will be Oxbridge as well as broader issues. (HM)

### 3. Homework

- 3.1.** *As a First Year parent, I am concerned that the homework timetable is too much in this introductory year at the College.*
- 3.2.** We are guided by the homework given to Years 5 & 6 at the Junior School, and there is no increase from that for the First Year homework set at the College. Staff are asked to be careful about setting homework with realistic deadlines and keep to the correct night. We are aware that homework is an issue for many parents, and have been looking into this. (FMM).
- 3.3.** There are differing expectations by parents on homework (often depending on whether their child comes from the state sector or prep). Some wish for more and others less! Gender balance is a significant factor; staff are encouraged to set fixed times for students to do their homework but at this age, girls tend to be more fastidious and will take longer over it. (HM)
- 3.4.** *Should there be a period of transition for First Years to acclimatise them to homework?*
- 3.5.** Staff try to encourage students to work on homework for a fixed period of time. In fact, in a recent review of Maths homework, First and Third Year students said that the homework task was not the issue, it was more that some students want to review the notes (even if not necessary in order to access the homework task) from the lesson before completing the homework! However, we are conscious that staff must set homework at correct times and this message will be reinforced to HoDs. (FMM)
- 3.6.** *There is a lot of inconsistency with communication by which homework is set; either by written notes, on Firefly or Homework Diary which is frustrating! In particular, some homework is posted very late on Firefly.*
- 3.7.** Yes, we are aware that use of Firefly can be inconsistent. Again, a message will be reinforced to staff that homework should be posted by 4.30pm at the latest. (*Now done*). That said, Firefly has been very successfully launched at SGC and we have come a long way in the last 12 months. We will aim to make this the main way of setting homework going forward. We would ask parents to ensure we are made aware of any of these issues please. (HM).
- 3.8.** *Is it usual for a year group as a whole not to be able to do their homework? This seems to be very often for my Fourth Year daughter.*
- 3.9.** No this shouldn't be the case – there could be a wider issue. Please take this up with their tutor / the relevant HoD.
- 3.10.** *My child is unable to attend a Maths clinic each Thursday; is provision made for those students like him who can't make it?*
- 3.11.** Yes absolutely but we need to be made aware of this to arrange an alternative option.
- 3.12.** *Firefly Homework: my daughter was unable to complete her English homework on-line on FF and having turned her computer off, it was lost!*
- 3.13.** We will check this out. (HM).
- 3.14.** *Should there be a policy to set homework consistently? Should we have, for example, less focus on RS, Art etc. in the lower years and more emphasis on core subjects?*

**3.15.** We welcome feedback from parents, as this is vital to keep us informed on homework. Please continue to keep in touch! However, we believe that all subjects should have a homework slot, though core subjects (including RS) have more slots allocated to them. (FMM)

#### **4. Retreats**

**4.1.** *First to Third Year students take time out for Retreats by Tutor Group which is okay, but the Fourth Year disrupts the children as lessons continue, and they miss content.*

**4.2.** Thank you – very useful feedback. Fifth Year do it as a whole year, which may be the answer. We will ask Fr Martin whether this can be revisited. (HM)

#### **5. Warnings for substandard work**

**5.1.** *Is there a new regime by staff to give warnings for sub-standard work? My daughter was told that this was the case and she has been upset by this.*

**5.2.** No, definitely not – it is not appropriate to deliver warnings to conscientious students. Again, parents should make staff aware of such incidents. There are careful guidelines given to staff on warnings which should be done gradually and appropriately. Staff are encouraged to use their judgement, and recording of sub-standard work on SIMs, if required, is aimed at Sixth Formers only. We will reiterate with HoDs. (FMM).

#### **6. Balance between Academic & Sport commitments**

**6.1.** *My daughter is under pressure to fulfil her Academic and Sport commitments. Currently in the lower school, this is not an issue but may become increasingly difficult as she moves up the school.*

**6.2.** This is an area which has been under review by SLT recently. As a result a spreadsheet has been introduced to track sport absences for each student each month, which is then reviewed by SLT. If there are 3 or more absences as a result of sport, the relevant HoY is directed to get in touch with parents to inform them and monitor. It is a vital means of keeping track of those students under pressure with their sport commitments – and a means of preventing a meltdown! (HM).

**6.3.** *Recently Sport staff seem to be increasingly forceful about student attending events and it is difficult to say no!*

**6.4.** Our Sports staff are extremely dedicated and enthusiastic about their role, but occasionally the balance is out of kilter. It is important that we have feedback from parents about this, either via tutors or Director of Sport directly, in order to address concerns together. (HM)

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

Next term, the Fora for College Parents will take place on Thursday 1 February (Sport) and on Thursday 1 March (SEN).