



Options Evening- Thursday 4th March 2021

Frequently asked questions and answers

Common questions asked by students before the evening

1. I am on blue pathway and want to change to yellow, can I do this?

The pathways that you were sent are our strong recommendation and are based on prior attainment at Key Stage 2. The blue pathway encourages those students who were high prior attaining to study a language and qualify for the Ebacc. The languages department have also looked at blue pathway students and confirmed and added those students they feel have excelled at languages so far and should therefore study a language at Key Stage 4. If you feel strongly that the blue pathway, and in particular studying a language, is not appropriate for you or your child please complete a yellow pathway form and send a letter or email for the attention of Mrs Watts explaining the reasons for the change.

2. I am on yellow pathway, can I change to blue?

This is unnecessary, there is nothing on a blue form that isn't on the yellow. Just choose a language and Geography or History on the yellow form, and it is then the same as a blue as you qualify for the Ebacc

3. Can I study a subject that I haven't studied in year 9?

No, you cannot. If you choose a subject you have not studied in year 9 on your options form, you will not be allocated that subject and will be allocated your reserve choice. I look at all the forms that come in and compare them to your current timetable to check this.

4. I would like to study computer science, how do I know if I will be able to do this?

Computer Science is a challenging GCSE who suits students who have a passion in this field, but who are also strong mathematicians. Firstly, you can only study computer science if you have studied IT in year 9, but also you have to have a high prior attainment level or current progress in IT and Maths to achieve well in this subject. For example, be on the mastering or excelling pathway. If you unsure if you are suited to this subject, speak to Mr Benjeddi or Miss Dowd when you come back to school who will liaise with the maths teams too.

5. I chose Enterprise/Business for year 9 and want to switch to IT, can I do this?

No you cannot do this for the reasons previously stated. You haven't studied IT for a year and would be at a significant disadvantage. You also can't switch the other way from IT to business or study any subjects that you haven't studied this year as previously mentioned.

6. I want to opt for more than one BTEC subject, can I do this?

Yes in a simple answer but.... BTEC subjects are assessed very differently to GCSE's, fundamentally they have far more coursework elements and only one smaller exam. If you plan to choose more than one BTEC subject, you will be under pressure to complete regular coursework in these subjects although you will have less exams at the end. BTEC is relentless because you are continually completing and refining work to attain your target grade. It is important to be able to meet deadlines because the course does not stop and new content will continually be taught so it is important you are able to manage your time well. If this type of studying works for you and you work well

independently, then 2 BTEC's would be no problem. If you perform well under exam conditions, then maybe consider taking just one BTEC subject.

7. I have been recommended green pathway, will I get support with my choices?

Yes, Mrs Lee and Mrs Johnson in the students centre can help you and will even complete the form with you. They will be aware of your progress journey, your strengths and your career aspirations so will help you choose the best options to meet your needs.

8. When will we start our new timetables?

At the moment, we plan for year 9 to start their new courses after summer half term, so Monday 7th June. However, this may change as there is no official guidance to inform us when Year 11 will officially end their courses although we know that their Teacher Assessed Grades must be submitted by mid June. In order for us to re-write the timetable, year 11 and 13 and 13 courses need to have finished and these year groups need to have left for the summer.

9. What happens if after completing my form I change my mind or make a mistake and want to redo the form?

Only one options form will be accepted, but this will be the latest form you submit. All previous forms will be ignored, so if you make a mistake or change your mind before the deadline, submit another form, but please try and complete the form correctly first time!!

10. What happens if I miss the deadline?

Forms are not treated 'first come first served', but forms submitted after the deadline are less likely to get their first and second preferences and more likely to get their reserve choices.

The deadline is 2 weeks tomorrow, the 19th March

11. What happens if I don't get my preferred choices?

In 97% of cases, students will receive their preferred choices but sometimes there are difficulties with students who opt for unique combinations or who don't complete the form correctly. If there is a problem and we need to use a reserve choice, we will ask to see you to discuss alternatives. We won't just put you into a reserve choice without a conversation.

Questions asked on the evening

Do those on green pathway have more opportunities than those on the blue pathway?

No, Green pathway students may actually study fewer qualifications, but are given additional time to make progress in those that they do choose. They also spend an additional lesson each week to consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills.

What are the stringent entry requirements for the blue pathway and how is it decided? Exam results?

Blue pathway students have been identified through data (Key Stage 2 results and CAT test data) and also by the languages team and Directors and Subject Leads

What's the difference between the blue and yellow pathway

Very little, but blue pathway students must complete the Ebacc by studying a language and Geography or History

Do people on the blue pathway have more of an opportunity than the people on the yellow pathway?

No, opportunities will be the same for students that work hard and achieve their potential. GCSE's and B/CTEC's are all challenging and each pathway allows students to progress to their next stage in education. It will be student's outcomes in Year 11 that will determine pathways into A-Levels, Level 3 BTEC's or other courses.

Can you confirm what the likely field trips are for geography please?

This is difficult to answer at this time, but it is likely that field work for geography would be completed through day trips rather than overnight residential trips

I want to pick food tech ahead of product design will I be able to change it?

You can only pick food if you have studied it in year 9

Would taking both History and geography be difficult?

It would be challenging, but if you enjoy these subjects and have a strength in writing, this combination could be a good choice for you, many students study both geography and history. All GCSE's / L2 courses are challenging and with hard work in lessons and keeping on top of extended learning, students can manage their time very well.

Can I choose geography and history on a yellow pathway?

Yes, especially if you enjoy these subjects

One of the slides mentions personalised interviews, are these for particular subjects?

No, interviews will take place with selected students so we can make sure they feel confident about the choices they have made

Does a Performing Arts subject have to be picked?

No

Do you have to be in a specific maths set in order to take computer science?

No, but you must have a passion for Maths (and Science) and have attained well at Key Stage 2 and made good progress in Key Stage 3 in these subjects and ICT. Your child will need to be proficient in maths and be on the mastering or excelling pathway or alternatively making good excellent progress on the securing pathway.

Does your maths set affect your maximum GCSE grade?

No, but the tier of paper you take does. There are two papers which have different tiers, foundation and higher, and the maximum and minimum grades you can achieve vary in both papers. For the higher tier students can achieve a grade 9-4 and grades 5-1 on the foundation. It is imperative students work hard throughout their GCES's to ensure staff have lots of evidence to place students in the right tier.

Does music, art and drama have to be picked?

No

What's the difference between Computer Science and ICT? How do I know what to choose? I do ICT in year 9...

Computer Science is a GCSE and ICT is a BTEC qualification. Computer Science comprises of more programming but please look at the description in the booklet for more information or speak to Miss Dowd.

Will there be sets for Science and English, in Year 10?

This is not yet decided, but there will be will triple science classes, these have already been formed in year 9

When should they start revising for their GCSE's?

Revision is effective when it is done often, continually reflecting and revisiting lesson content and practicing skills. It is never too early and this process will have already started for some students.

If the preferred options are not allocated on a first come basis, how are they allocated?

Options are allocated when all the choices are submitted after the deadline. The option 'blocks' are formed based on what students select. In 97-98% of cases, students receive their preferred choices and we always start with their favourite subject through to their second/third choice when we allocate them. If there is a problem and we have to use a reserve, we will make you aware and have a conversation. Think carefully about your reserve choices

Does behaviour effect what you will be able to take?

No, but students who behave well and exhibit positive learning behaviours will make the most progress and have a better chance of achieving their potential at GCSE and beyond. Data analysis shows that students with poor attendance and behaviour make significantly less progress than their peers.

I don't know what to pick and I worry too much?

Come into school when you return and speak to us, we can help you make these choices. Speak to your tutor or Miss Andrews/Mrs Hewitt first

Can you confirm what age they stay at school till?

You need to stay in education or training until you are 18

For those students on the Blue Pathway what resources will St Marys offer students to manage/organise workload? i.e study groups, exam practice etc?

Intervention is planned throughout Year 10-11 to provide opportunities for students to consolidate their learning; practising skill and retrieving knowledge. This is provided for all student who need additional support in. This also includes access to tutoring, holiday interventions and tutor time as well as those planned after school.

What is EBACC and what does it effect?

Schools are measured by the percentage of students they enter for the Ebacc and those that achieve it. This is a grade 4 or better in English, Maths, Science, a Language and Geography or History

Can you leave out a humanities subject in my options?

Yes, if you complete a form on the yellow or green pathway and choose a language in the first step

What to do if I have chosen an option then later on decided that I don't like it?

Re-submit an options form before the deadline, your latest form will be considered, the earlier one deleted.

What are the BTEC subjects ?

BTEC's are equivalent qualifications to GCSE's that contain more coursework. They normally have one exam worth approx. 25%. Most GCSE's have limited coursework and have two or three big exams at the end of the course

Is level 2 equivalent to GCSE?

Yes, Level 2 is studied to GCSE, Level 3 is studied in the Sixth Form and is A levels and level 3 BTEC's.

Do Universities and/or colleges care about which GCSE options you choose?

For a small amount of very specific courses, GCSE courses and grades achieved can matter, but for most Degrees, Level 3 courses and grades are more important, but you can't study these until you achieve GCSE qualifications.

Is coursework not used for a grade anymore?

Some GCSE's contain a small amount of coursework, but BTEC subjects contain a lot of coursework

My child is on the blue pathway and is currently studying a language out of school, so would prefer not to take a language in school what can be done about that?

It would be best to have a conversation with us in this instance, it is not possible to answer this question without the specifics but don't forget, students who are excellent linguists and have a passion for languages can study more than one in year 10 and 11.