

21<sup>st</sup> March 2017



**ST FRANCIS  
XAVIER'S  
COLLEGE**

CATHOLIC ACADEMY

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Dear Parent(s)

As you will know from the media and school letters, there have been many significant changes to the Key Stage 4 Curriculum in recent months. These have been in response to changes in policy generated by the Department for Education.

These changes have required Examination Boards to -

- Change the way they grade examinations
- Add significant content to their specifications
- Make examinations linear (examined at the end of the course)
- Remove Coursework
- Increase the degree of challenge (difficulty) in their specifications

Furthermore, there has been a push for pupils to be entered for the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc), meaning the study of GCSEs in English Language and Literature, Maths, two Sciences (which may include Computer Science), History or Geography and a Language.

Finally, the Government framework for assessing the progress of pupils and schools is now centred upon pupils succeeding in eight subjects, which are dominated by the Ebacc subjects.

It is fair to say that schools have struggled to respond to the scale and speed of these changes. At SFX we have taken a cautious approach. Until now we have kept our offer of three option blocks, resulting in nine subjects for most pupils. We have resisted the temptation to force any group of students to take the Ebacc. Our principle is to offer a curriculum which suits our pupils. We do agree that for the majority of pupils, studying at least one of the Ebacc subjects of History, Geography, Computer Science, French or Spanish, alongside Maths, English and Science does create a balanced curriculum, but that the full Ebacc is only suitable for a smaller number of pupils. Therefore we introduced an option rule to that effect in recent years. We have already given more time to English, Maths and RE and we have added an extra set in year 11 in English, Maths and Science.

During the last twelve months, further changes have been taking place nationally and we now have experience of the new specifications. It is very clear that attempting to cover the content of a GCSE course in two hours per week for two years will pose problems for most pupils. Some schools have opted to deal with this issue by beginning Key Stage 4 at the start of Year 9. There are some advantages to this, but our view is that we need a little more time to complete Key Stage 3; pupils in year 8 are very young to make option choices and the time they would be gaining for the study of the GCSE is at a young age.

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EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER :  
Mr L D RIPPON, B.A. Hons., N.P.Q.H.  
HEAD OF SCHOOL:  
Mr G. Flowers, B.A. Hons., M.A., N.P.Q.H.  
DEPUTY HEAD (KS4):  
Rev. Bro. Peter, f.i.c., B.A. Hons.  
DEPUTY HEAD (KS3):  
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BUSINESS MANAGER:  
Mrs M. Black, B.A. Hons., M.A.A.T.





Our solution is to keep a three year Key Stage 3, although English, Maths and Science will begin their GCSE work in the course of Year 9.

We feel we need to make additional changes to the Key Stage 4 curriculum in order to allow the pupils to have sufficient time to cope with the additional content and degree of difficulty of the new GCSEs. Therefore we are reducing the number of options blocks from three to two, but allowing each block to have three hours of time per week rather than two. These changes -

- Allow a third more time (approximately 70 hours over the two years) to study each option
- Bring the option subjects more into line with the time allocation for Core Subjects
- Preserve an element of choice as we are not compelling any pupils to study the Ebacc
- Provide a balanced curriculum by allowing pupils to choose one Ebacc subject and one other subject
- Reduce the number of subjects studied from nine to eight (nine for set 1s who do Separate Science)

I conducted a short piece of research with 160 pupils in Year 9 to see how this reduction in options might affect them. It seems that the vast majority of them would choose one of the Ebacc subjects anyway as one of their first two choices. In many cases boys described finding it easy to pick two subjects but not being sure about the third choice.

The Government expects the new national curriculum and Ebacc subjects to be suitable for approximately 90% of the country's pupils. We are also aware that for some pupils, this curriculum offer may not be the best set of choices for them and we will look at such instances on an individual basis to try to accommodate and support individual needs.

There is a special evening on the calendar to explore these issues further on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March. I think it more appropriate now to call the evening a "Preparation for Key Stage 4 Evening" rather than options evening. But the event will follow the usual course of a meeting in the Main Hall at 6.00 pm where I can explain things in more detail, followed by an opportunity to tour the Departments and meet subject teachers. You will also be given a pack and options form to complete.

I hope you agree that this approach is the best way to prepare your children for what are very interesting but challenging examinations and I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March.

Yours sincerely

Mr Flowers

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