

How can I help my child choose their subjects?

Mid way through third year, pupils are asked to select the subjects they wish to keep on in the senior school. Choosing these subjects is easier if they have an idea of what job/career/ pathway they are aiming for. However many do not or they change their mind a few months later, so it's often best to choose a broad selection of subjects. In S4, Maths & English are compulsory and pupils choose a further 4 subjects to study but keep in mind if they want to try and study five Highers in S5 these five subjects should be within the six selected for S4 (some Universities require five Highers to be sat at the same time).

The teaching staff will advise your child what level of SQA Qualification they should be capable of. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and want to encourage pupils to choose their courses so often you may have to help your child choose between several subjects. Bear in mind, the National qualifications are different to the previous Standard grades; the National 4 is roughly comparative to the general level Standard grades, while the National 5 is generally more challenging than the credit level Standard grade as it includes some content from the old Intermediate courses (which were the qualification between Standard grades and Highers). This is why studying six National 5s is the maximum recommended by Education Scotland. There is also a range of SQA Wider Achievement Awards which are skill based; some of these are becoming available at our school and could be an ideal alternative to traditional subject courses for your child <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/41280.2540.html>.

The Nationals are one year courses and some subjects are very “full-on”. Some pupils will find they need additional time to fully grasp the content and so may choose to take an extra year to study before sitting the exam. When helping your child choose their subjects, discuss the various options with them (and teaching staff where necessary) to agree a range of courses which will challenge them enough but also be achievable and enjoyable for them. Watch out that they don't choose a certain subject just because their friend has or they like the teacher! (they may not be allocated that teacher and they may fall out with the friend!)

Your child will have been taught “science” from first year (which covers all three sciences) so they may need help working out whether they prefer Biology, Physics or Chemistry (likewise with Social Studies which includes Geography, History, Modern Studies & Religious Education). Looking at the course content might help them decide which subject is right for them – this information is provided in the “senior phase information” section of the school's website www.dehs.info and on The National Parent Forum of Scotland's website www.parentforumscotland.org, which has a “For Parents” section with a “Nationals in a Nutshell” page, both of these give an overview of each subject and the assessments involved.



The SQA website www.sqa.org.uk has lots of useful information too, including past exam papers, a parents section and the exam timetable. It can be useful to look at one of the past exam papers to get a feeling for the subject and what's expected – e.g. some children are good at writing essays and some are not so it's worthwhile seeing what each subject's exam requires.

Do not worry if your child does not know what they want to do. Keep in mind, the largest percentage of children do not know what they want to do after school! If they do not get the results they wanted, it's not the end of the world; there are often other pathways to the same destination.