



St. Mary's Secondary School, Charleville
Our Community, Learning Together

Draft Policy on Subject Options

February 2024

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1. How our Policy was Developed

This policy outlines the rationale and procedure for students' option subject choices at Junior and Senior Cycle. The policy has been developed following consultation between students, staff, parents, Principal and Board of Management. This policy will be reviewed regularly.

The Policy on Subject Options aims to provide clear and transparent guidelines on subject option choices informed by:

- Education Act 1998
- Education Welfare Act 2000,
- Admission Policy of St. Mary's Secondary School, Charleville
- DES Circular 0028/2023 (Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to the school year 2023/2024)
- CEIST Charter
- Mission Statement of St. Mary's Secondary School, Charleville.
- The Whole School Guidance Plan
- The Additional Educational Needs Policy

2. School Mission Statement

St. Mary's Secondary School, Charleville is a voluntary catholic secondary school for girls only under the trusteeship of CEIST. The mission of St Mary's Secondary School is to provide holistic education, in the Catholic tradition, for all our students. We are committed to the academic, creative, emotional, spiritual and physical development of each student, in a caring and safe environment.

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Aims of school:

- To enable the students to become fully developed and integrated persons. To prepare the students by academic and practical training for adult living and to promote in them a co-operative spirit so that they can make a constructive contribution to society.
- To enable the students to live in reverent relationship with all of creation and to nurture in them a respect for life and a care for the earth
- To enable the students to develop a healthy self image with the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing world and to live at peace within
 - To nurture in the students:
 - A sense of their cultural identity
 - An appreciation of the diversity of cultures
 - To assist the moral, social, cultural and political growth of the students

3. Rational

Option subject selection is an important process and students and parents are asked to give careful consideration to the subject choices they will make. St. Mary's will make every effort to facilitate subject choice in accordance with student preferences. This however is influenced by the following factors:

- The allocation of resources from the Department of Education and Skills
- The school's ability to offer a subject in a given year.
- The preferences for a subject relative to the cohort in a given year.

Every effort is made to meet the preferences of students and there are support structures in place to ensure that students make informed choices. The process of subject choice, banding and timetabling is very rigorous and time consuming, thus there is limited scope for change of subjects after submission of preferences.

4. Junior Cycle Option Subject Choices

4.1 Curriculum Provision

Students will study a maximum of ten subjects for assessment by the State examinations Commission(SEC). Most students will study between eight and ten subjects or the equivalent. Where students are studying a combination of subjects and short courses, a maximum number of eight subjects can be studied for assessment by the SEC for students studying three or four short courses. A maximum number of nine subjects can be studied for assessment by the SEC for students studying one or two short courses. The Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP) is offered to students as per the Additional Educational Needs Policy.

In 1st Year, all students study the full 7 option subjects: French, Spanish, Business, Home Economics, Art, Music, and Wood Technology, in addition to core subjects: Irish, English, Maths, Religion, History, Geography, Science. All students will study Well Being which incorporates Physical Education, Digital Media Literacy, Civic Social and Political Education, Social, Personal and Health Education and Guidance. The rationale behind the provision of tasters across all options to empower students' to make informed option choices for Junior Cycle.

The maximum class size will not exceed 30 pupils in academic subjects. In practical classes, the maximum number will not exceed 24 pupils however the maximum number of students for Home economics is 20.

Students with specific learning difficulties may on the advice of the Additional Educational Needs Department and in consultation with parents/guardians, the Student Support Team and the Principal be granted a reduced curriculum. If a student is granted a subject exemption by the DES, this will be fully accommodated.

4.2 Support Structures for Students

The process of subject selection begins late January/early February annually. All students will receive a presentation by the Guidance Counsellor on subject choice in order to help students make choices for Junior Cert subjects. Subject teachers discuss the Junior Cycle course components for their respective subject area with 1st Years. Career Guidance Modules are provided in 1st Year and students can avail of individual guidance appointments to support option choices for Junior Cycle.

4.3 Support Structures for Parents

Parents are recognised as a vital part of this process.

1. We encourage parents to attend presentations provided by the Guidance Counsellor to inform choices given for career paths. Parents may discuss the same with guidance counsellors and subject teachers. Parents are encouraged to research sites such as careers portal etc Reach plus and more, as recommended by the guidance counsellor.
2. Parents are encouraged to support student choice by focusing on realistic and attainable goals. The school strongly discourages subjects outside of what students study within the school day.
3. Parents are expected to attend Parent Teacher Meetings and use the opportunity to discuss subject options with the relevant teacher. Students are expected to attend open days/talks/careers fairs etc. as organised by guidance dept as part of whole school guidance.
4. Well being is an integral part of our St Mary's. We ask parents to support our work in this area and particularly as it relates to this process.

The options process in St Mary's is based on students preferences, as opposed to previously constructed/set bands in other schools. This student focused approach is a lengthy demanding process requiring liaison with the Department of Education and Skills.

While every effort is made to meet the preferences of students, there may be situations where preferences cannot be met for many reasons. We strongly encourage students and parents to liaise with our Guidance Counsellor and Senior Management to discuss pathways and past experiences in

this area, in this case. St Mary's is widely recognised for its focus on the highest leaving certificate results, student care and academic standards.

4.4 Selection Procedures

The process of making option subject choices is summarised as follows:



Modern Foreign Language Choice

All students study either French or Spanish (therefore French/Spanish should be written as No 1 in their option forms) . In exceptional cases, parents may apply for an exemption from modern foreign languages(MFL). In Dec of 1st year, having completed tasters of both languages, students together with their parents enter their MFL preference in VSWARE once the link is made available. Students will be assigned to their chosen MFL class in January of 1st Year.

Second Year Subject Choice

- Subject choice begins in January annually with a subject choice presentation by the Guidance Counsellor. This is a valuable opportunity to ask questions and research areas of interest. The guidance counsellor also delivers a CAO presentation so parents and students can research not only their area of interest but also the specifics of CAO courses.
- At all times the Guidance Counsellor will draw on our Whole School Guidance programme for events such as college awareness week and careers investigations. Parents will have discussed the same with students.
- Students select three subjects from the following list of subjects: Art, Business Studies, Home Economics, Materials Technology Wood and Music

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- Students together with their parents enter their preferences 1-4 in VSWARE once the link is made available. It is vital that students enter four preferences as we endeavour to meet the needs of students.
- Students are advised to speak with subject teachers before making any decision. Parents are encouraged to speak with individual teachers at parent teacher meetings as the teacher as professional will be able to guide the individual student. The teacher has most regular contact with the student, often on a daily basis.
- The process of subject choice, banding and timetabling is very rigorous and time consuming and thus there is limited scope for change of subjects after submission of preferences.
- Only in exceptional circumstances will changes be accommodated up until a deadline of September 30th in 2nd Year.
- If a situation arises that a subject is oversubscribed, then the following criteria will apply :
Lottery
- Senior Management will analyse the preference data entered by students in order to create the subject bands. The creation of classes for subjects demanded is dependent on the resources allocated from the Department of Education and Science. Consequently, the school is not in a position to support via staffing, timetabling, excursions, class change, or assessment, any pupil who has taken additional subjects outside of school. Students must attend class and participate in all of their chosen subjects/timetable, throughout the entirety of the Junior Cycle.
- When a student fails to return a subject preference form by the specified deadline then the process of subject line formulation will continue without her preference accounted for. She will then meet with the Deputy Principal and select a subject from each of the lines generated.

5. Senior Cycle Option Subject Choices

5.1 Curriculum Provision

All students study the core subjects Irish English, Maths, Religion, Guidance, LCVP/ PE/SPHE. Students then select five subjects in order of preference from the following optional subjects: French or Spanish, History, Geography, Home Economics, Business, Accounting, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Agricultural Science, Art, and Music. Given the extensive subject choice and rigorous efforts to meet subject demand, students study the core subjects above and four subjects from the above list on the daily timetable. Huge efforts are made by St Marys to maintain this very broad range of subjects for students. Options may have to be varied or reduced, however, due to *insufficient demand* for a subject or lack of funding by the DES.

The maximum class size will not exceed 30 pupils in academic subjects. In practical classes, the maximum number will not exceed 24 pupils however the maximum number of students for Home economics is 20.

Students with specific learning difficulties may on the advice of the Additional Educational Needs Department and in consultation with parents/guardians, the Student Support Team and the Principal be granted a reduced curriculum. If a student is granted a subject exemption by the DES, this will be fully accommodated.

5.2 Support Structures for Students

There are many support structures in place to ensure students make informed decisions on the option choices for senior cycle. A Subject Choice Options Day is scheduled annually for TY's and 3rd Years progressing directly into 5th Year. This consists of current 5th year students meeting with students at SUBJECT CHOICE WORKSHOPS to provide valuable information and insights into the different subjects, offering students the privilege to gain first-hand knowledge and ask questions from experienced peers. Presentations followed by question and answer sessions are made by subject teachers. TY students are timetabled for guidance once a week, which also supports option choices

and subject requirements for third level courses. TY students are also given the opportunity to sit in on 5th year classes when not involved in certain TY activities. Students can also avail of individual guidance appointments to support subject option choices for senior cycle.

5.3 Support Structures for Parents

Subject choice begins in January annually with a subject choice presentation by the Guidance Counsellor. This Parent Information Evening on Senior Cycle Subject Options, consisting of presentations by the Guidance Counsellor and Principal further supports the selection process. This is a valuable opportunity to ask questions and research areas of interest. The guidance counsellor also delivers a CAO presentation so parents and students can research not only their area of interest but also the specifics of CAO courses. At all times the Guidance Counsellor will draw on our Whole School Guidance programme for events such as college awareness week and careers investigations. We encourage all parents to attend this very important presentation and discuss the same with students.

5.4 Selection Procedures

The process of making option subject choices is summarised as follows:



- Students together with their parents enter their preferences 1-5 in VSWARE once the link is made available. It is vital that students enter four preferences as we endeavour to meet the needs of students. In the event that an inadequate number of preferences is entered senior management will enter preferences on behalf of the student.
- Students are advised to speak with subject teachers before making any decision. Parents are encouraged to speak with individual teachers at parent teacher meetings as the teacher as professional

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will be able to guide the individual student. The teacher has most regular contact with the student, often on a daily basis.

- Look at text books of subjects, exam papers and websites.
- The process of subject choice, banding and timetabling is very rigorous and time consuming and thus there is limited scope for change of subjects after submission of preferences. Only in exceptional circumstances will changes be accommodated up until a deadline of September 30th in 5th Year.
- If subjects are oversubscribed then the following criteria will apply:
 1. Student Preferences
 2. Subject taken at Junior Cycle
 3. Lottery
- Senior Management will analyse the preference data entered by students in order to create the subject bands. The creation of classes for subjects demanded is dependent on the resources allocated from the Department of Education and Science. Consequently, the school is not in a position to support via staffing, timetabling, excursions, class change, or assessment, any pupil who has taken additional subjects outside of school. Students must attend class and participate in all of their chosen subjects/timetable, throughout the entirety of the Leaving Certificate Cycle.
- When a student fails to return a subject preference form by the specified deadline then the process of subject line formulation will continue without her preference accounted for. She will then meet with the Deputy Principal and select a subject from each of the lines generated.

6. Subject Change – Exceptional Circumstances

Given the importance of and support given around the subject choice process, we do not anticipate any changes. Any change can cause unnecessary stress and uncertainty for your daughter. Planning for subject choice is key to informed decision making. There may be unforeseen circumstances where a student needs to change during September. Applications must be made to the Principal in writing in conjunction with:

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The completion of 'Change of Mind' application form which must be submitted on or before September 30th in 2nd or 5th Year only. **'Change of Mind' applications will not be considered after September 30th.**

- A meeting with the guidance counsellor
- A meeting with parents and student

The Principal will communicate her decision to the student and parents as soon as possible after receipt of application and meeting with parents. 'Change of Mind' applications will not be considered after September 30th in 2nd or 5th Year.

Note:

Section 28 of the Education Act allows for the Appeal of the Principal's decision to the Board of Management

Review Dates

BOM		Ratified	
Staff			
Student Council			
Parents			



St. Mary's Secondary School, Charleville

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Form: Change of Mind Options Subjects Exceptional Circumstances

I understand that the change of mind for option subjects must be examined before September 30th annually.

My subject preferences and those of my fellow students formed the basis of creating the subject bands. The creation of the timetable was dependent on these.

I now wish to change from _____ to _____.

In order for my change to be considered, the following meetings need to happen:

1. Meeting with parents = Yes
2. Meeting with guidance counsellor to discuss impact on careers = Yes

When both these steps are complete, the principal will sign off on the change and bring it to the attention of the board of management at the next meeting.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Student: _____

Parent: _____

Principal: _____

Chairperson: _____

Date: _____

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