

Choosing Courses for Year 9 at Island School

What are the broad aims for all students in year 9?

This is the point at which students start to take control of their education in terms of the subjects they choose. There are choices in both Entrance and Elements courses, but the framework of the programmes continues to give a broad based curriculum with access to all areas.

Students should start the process of finding out where their future success and love of learning will lie. In making choices this year, they are preparing for the greater freedom they will have in the years to come. They are starting to answer questions about how to make responsible decisions.

It is also a year where they begin to learn from older students in an academic context. In Explorations and Elements they will share projects with students in years 10 and 11. They will see the leadership roles that we hope they will go on to take up in the years to come.

This is the next step in developing a love of learning and a joy in their education.

What are the differences from years 7 and 8?

The challenge is greater in all areas, and the challenge includes taking greater responsibility. The choices that they have need to be made with guidance and reflection. At this stage students should be looking for balance and breadth, saving the specialisation for later.

The element of choice extends outside the classroom and includes Quest Week, where the camp of year 7 and 8 is replaced by a variety of optional activities either in Hong Kong or abroad.

What are the mandatory courses that all students will take?

All students will continue with English and Maths. In both these areas the IGCSE programme begins in year 9 leading eventually to examination in English Language, World Literature and Mathematics.

Science is also mandatory in year 9 and covers a range of aspects from Biology, Chemistry and Physics to prepare students for choice in this area the following year.

A new course to the students is Explorations. The content of this is an IGCSE in Global Perspectives, which will be completed in year 11. Alongside this is the IE Award in ICT. Students will learn key communication skills in ICT that they will use to express their responses to the global issues they are researching. A key element of this course is collaboration, which is learned through working in groups and finding out how to make this successful for all individuals and the group as a whole.

Escape is a physical education course that works on the core skills of fitness and health.

Where are the choices, and when are they made?

Final choices for Elements and Entrance courses are made in January of year 8.

Students will choose six Entrance courses from nine possible courses. There are three options in each of the Arts, the Humanities and the Design subjects. In the interests of breadth we recommend two from each area, and certainly at least one.

Students will choose two Elements courses for year 9 out of a choice of 30. If they do not get what they want this year, then they are all available again in years 10 and 11.

What is the difference between Entrance and Elements?

The first difference is the time frame. Entrance courses are “long and thin”. This means one period a week for the whole year, giving steady growth in understanding. Elements courses are “short and fat”. A single treble period a week for half a year, allowing an intensive burst of concentration in a particular area.

The time difference allows, and requires, a different style of teaching and learning. Elements courses lend themselves to subjects where intensive study or practical sessions are important. They also allow time for students to take their learning out of school to make the most of Hong Kong without interrupting other learning.

Entrance courses are aimed to provide a base for future study in these subject areas. Each one can lead on to an Entrance (IGCSE) course or one of a variety of Elements courses in years 10 and 11. Elements courses are more experience-focussed, where the lack of external constraints allows teachers and students to explore the areas of greatest interest, which may be different for different students. In a sense there is no limit on where an Elements course can go.

We believe that the two types of learning in Entrance and Elements complement each other and contribute to a complete education.

What are the future implications of choices in year 9?

At this stage no course choice closes any doors for the future. Obviously students should choose the subjects that fire their interest, and these are likely to include those they take on in the future. However, none of the courses in year 10 have any pre-requisite that a particular course is studied in year 9.

What is the general advice for the best package of courses?

We strongly advise that some Arts, Design and Humanities is included in all students’ packages. Breadth of educational experience is vital at this stage rather than making a decision to specialise too much. The picture across Entrance and Elements should reflect this breadth. We also recommend that students try some new things that will push them out of their comfort zone.