

Choosing Courses for Years 10 and 11 at Island School

What are the broad aims for all students in these two years?

We aim for students to have a balance of depth, in subjects they choose to study intensively, and breadth, of understanding a wide range of learning areas. During these two years students should discover their strengths and build on them. They should find out what their passions and interests are and find paths to pursue them.

Students should develop the skills they have begun to acquire in all subjects in the early years. They should be able to take some subjects through to a significant level of depth of understanding. They should be able to try a wide range of different areas of study.

By the end of the middle school, students should be well placed to make informed choices for the next phase of their education based on their strengths, skills, interests, passions and learning styles.

We aim for students to enjoy the experience of school for its own sake and because students perform better in a climate of enjoyment. We also aim to blend the academic curriculum with co-curricular life.

What are the differences from years 7, 8 and 9?

There is a steadily increasing challenge in these two years, that prepares students for the next phase and introduces the notion that deep study is interesting and enjoyable.

There is a much greater breadth of choice with over 60 different courses of different types on offer. Students with clear aims can specialise in areas that interest them, while still sampling others. Students who have yet to be sure of their direction can sample a wide range of disciplines while still developing depth in the core skills.

There is much greater depth to courses that students choose to pursue. This depth can come through pursuing a single subject for two years or from intensive study of a subject for a shorter period of time

There is more emphasis on the student taking responsibility for their learning. This happens in the option choice structure itself, where the student becomes increasingly at the centre of the process. It also happens within courses where students can take leadership roles and make choices about the direction of their own learning. These are necessary skills of a mature young adult that need to be acquired during the middle years

What are the mandatory courses that all students will take?

All students will continue the English and Maths courses that have begun in year 9. They will follow these through to the end of year 11, where they can sit IGCSE exams in English Language, World

Literature and Mathematics. These vital core skills are important for future education and life in general. They prepare for mandatory courses in the IB Diploma and optional courses in the Applied learning Programme (ALP).

All students will also continue the Explorations course begun in year 9, gradually taking more of a leading role in the working groups. This will lead to an IGCSE in Global Perspectives and the IE Award, a GCSE equivalent qualification in ICT.

The four IGCSEs mentioned are examined at the end of year 11 and the IE Award is assessed by coursework during the two years.

Where are the choices, and when are they made?

Final choices for Elements and Entrance courses are made in January of year 9.

Students will choose four Entrance courses leading to a total of eight IGCSEs, and the IE Award, including the core courses. These courses are called Entrance courses and once chosen, the students will stay with them for two years leading to exams at the end of year 11.

Students will choose four Elements courses for year 10 and then a different four for year 11. Some of these courses are stand alone, and others are linked so that one leads on to another. Yet others are so flexible that students can take them twice building in the skills learned the first time round.

What is the difference between Entrance and Elements?

The first difference is the time frame. Entrance courses are “long and thin”. This means two periods a week for the two year period, gradually building skills and knowledge. 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, through expeditions off campus, to make the most of Hong Kong without interrupting other learning in other subjects.

Entrance courses are end-focussed. The syllabus is set by an external exam board and that defines the course for the two years. The exam board awards the qualification based on exam and/or coursework. 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.

Escape also provides a range of choices in physical and outdoor education. Students make their choices at the end of year 9 for year 10, and again at the end of year 10 for year 11.

What are the choices, and how do they affect choices in 12 and 13...

...in languages?

Entrance courses in languages are offered in Chinese, Japanese, French and Spanish. Each leads to an IGCSE at the end of year 11. Chinese IGCSE exists at different levels for students with different facility in the language. None of these are beginner's courses and depend on having been doing the language in year 9. Students and parents will choose the language, with guidance, and the school will decide the appropriate class and level. These courses will enable students to take language A or language B courses at IB Diploma or Applied Learning Pathway (ALP).

There are also Elements courses in French and Spanish. These are for beginners in these languages, and would enable students to follow the IB ab initio courses in year 12.

The Elements course "Independent Language Centre" supports students who are studying their mother tongue in a language that we do not teach. We can help find tutors for these languages, where available, which are at the parents' cost.

A second language (IB Group 2), other than English is mandatory for the IB and optional for the Applied Learning Pathway.

...in Humanities?

While Global Perspectives is mandatory, all other humanities subjects are made by choice and there is a wide range in both Entrance and Elements. It is important to note that none of the IB or ALP courses in this area have any prerequisite in terms of middle school courses. Students can start any IB or ALP course in Humanities (IB Group 3) without having studied the subject before, so students do not need to choose in year 10 and 11 to facilitate choices in year 12.

...in Sciences and Technology?

In Entrance science is offered at IGCSE in Biology, Chemistry or Physics. In Elements we offer Biology Matters, Chemistry Concepts and Fundamental Physics. The Elements courses are in three parts, with each one lasting a half a year.

Either Entrance or Elements 1 and 2 (together) provide the necessary background to study IB Science at HL or SL. This means that students can take IB courses in any science if they have been successful at either the IGCSE Entrance course or the Elements course provided they complete both parts 1 and 2. The content of these courses are equivalent and the level of difficulty is the same. The difference lies in the way they are taught and the way they are assessed.

Elements part 3 courses go beyond the Entrance and Elements 1 and 2 courses and are an ideal course for someone who loves science and wants to pursue it at IB Higher level.

In deciding how many science courses to take, students must consider their future aspirations. 3 core sciences at either Entrance or Elements are possible for those who love their science and see their

future in areas such as Medicine and other trans-disciplinary science based vocations. Many students take 2 sciences, which keep open a wide number of science or science related paths. 1 science is really for students who do not see their future in something with that emphasis. It is possible to take no science course at all, but discussions need to be had about what the future may hold.

At IB, students need to take a group 4 subject. Group 4 includes Biology, Chemistry and Physics, but there are also IB courses in this group that do not have any prerequisite in terms of middle school courses. It is perfectly acceptable to take an IB Diploma with Environmental Systems, Design Technology or Sports Science which satisfies the science requirement. In this case there is no need for any particular course to be studied in Entrance or Elements. The prerequisites are only the case for studying pure Biology, Chemistry or Physics at IB. There are no science requirements for the ALP.

There are many Design and Technology courses available in Entrance and Elements, and students who love this area, or want to try it, can pick up a series of courses in Computing, Graphics, Design, Food, Textiles, Engineering, Architecture or Robotics.

...in the Arts?

As in the other areas there are courses available in Entrance and in Elements in a wide variety of artistic domains. Some Elements courses lead naturally to others, where learning skills in one semester can lead to a production, performance or exhibition in the next. Students of this particular mindset can concentrate on their area of passion by picking up several courses. Others, who are not so certain, can try different areas to see whether there are things they would like to pursue.

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

We strongly advise that some Arts, Design and Science is included in all students' packages. They are a vital part of education and indeed human culture as a whole. In the interests of the breadth of education and the full range of ways of thinking, students should keep some level of all of these strands alongside the Language, Literature, Mathematics and Humanities that are in the core.

Beyond that students should look for a balance of academic challenge and pursuing stretching their comfort zone, and the opportunity is there to go into real depth in areas of interest and passion.