

SIR THOMAS RICH'S SCHOOL

“The most important and the most difficult part of the whole of education - the crisis that serves as a passage from childhood to a man's (or a woman's) estate”.

J. J. Rousseau : “Emile”

In considering the important matter of Sixth Form choice the following notes aim to give guidance to both pupils and parents alike.

Academic considerations are paramount at Sir Thomas Rich's School. In pursuing academic excellence we aim to prepare our pupils for entry into highly regarded, selective universities. As a consequence our entry standard, five Bs at GCSE, preferably A*s or As in the subjects preferred at 'A' level, may be more demanding than elsewhere. The gap between GCSE and Sixth Form standards is wide. Students need to prove themselves at GCSE not just to qualify for Advanced Level, but to catch the eye of university admissions staff too. In short, not securing the best GCSE results you can will be regretted later.

How to choose subjects?

You should talk to both the staff and students here tonight, that way you will get a balanced view. Do consider vocational issues: medics need Chemistry; Engineers require Mathematics and Physics; a career in Biology needs Chemistry too. Watch out for tired old myths: lawyers don't need Law at 'A' level, nor software engineers Computing; psychologists need not have read 'A' level Psychology. Clearly, many subjects can be started at undergraduate level.

So, vocational demands aside, read what appeals and what offers the prospect of very high attainment. The Sixth Form Prospectus will answer many of your likely questions but do seek

clarification from staff as necessary, not least coursework requirements in subjects like Geography and Design.

All work and no play makes Jack/Jill a dull boy/girl. There is a flourishing extra-curricular life at Rich's and we expect you to contribute where your talents allow: that could be rugby, soccer, cricket or mixed hockey and girls' netball. It could be school drama or music or in the array of House activities which occur. So we are looking for participation and quality input where possible because excellence is the aim across the board. Having said that, most can find a suitable niche at the appropriate level and if the activity you fancy isn't available, why not try to establish it?

How to succeed?

First, secure excellent GCSE grades. Second, demonstrate perseverance and strength of character, the sheer stickability and drive to keep going when the pressure is on. There will be support at hand. Third, show self-discipline; even if the Brit Awards or Champions' League are on T.V. you must show the personal toughness to meet work deadlines. This, of course, is not just an issue for school, but for university and working life too. Fourth, you must participate in the learning process. In lessons you need a questioning approach to progress learning and make the whole process more enjoyable. Fifth, you should be ambitious: set yourself realistic, but challenging targets in the certain knowledge that the culture of STRS is one of pride in high achievement. Finally, want to 'fly solo'. You should have the desire to prepare yourself for a higher education environment in which the capacity for independent learning is the key skill and a world in which achievement is rated rather more highly than stories of mitigating circumstances.

Next, some tips for parents (which may make you unpopular with your children - at least in the short run).

“There is no such thing as no homework.” This refrain means that your son or daughter hasn’t yet realised what ‘A’ level work demands in terms of reading, notemaking, research, etc. It may also mean that his/her time management is awful. Don’t let them fool you with “I do my homework at school”. There simply isn’t enough private study time at school for this to be plausible. In short, if he/she is not beavering away most evenings contact the Form Tutor for a progress report.

Part-time jobs are a threat to academic progress. The Prospectus gives guidelines on this, but suffice it to say that ‘A’ level success should not be traded-off against short-term financial gain: sadly, sometimes it is. Help them get the balance right.

In the “Brave New World” of Curriculum 2000, the Lower Sixth year takes on a greater significance as students face a wide range of ‘AS’ level examinations in the summer. They will have modules coming at them from all directions, each ‘AS’ constituting 50% of the marks for the full ‘A’ level. You should forget the idea of a quiet year between GCSE and ‘A’ level, those results will influence full ‘A’ level predictions forwarded to university selectors. There is, therefore, a need for the right balance of parental carrot and stick in an era of growing academic pressure. No easy trick.

Finally, to matters of personal growth. If the topic of individual rights arises over the tea table, do mention that individuality in achievement and contribution will be preferred to that in regard to dress or hair colour. Indeed, our rules in relation to the way our pupils present themselves are clear and periodically reinforced.

Perhaps above all else, cling to the idea that home and school working in harmony towards the achievement of excellent results is a formidable alliance.

Enjoy the Open Evening, may it give you a true flavour of what 'Tommies' has to offer.

Sixth Form Uniform

Blazers should be ordered during the evening for which a deposit of £20 will be required (cheques payable to Sir Thomas Rich's Parents Association). All applicants are advised to order a blazer to ensure their size is available should their place be confirmed. The deposit will be returned in full, immediately and without condition should the place not be taken for whatever reason.

The deposit is an indication that an applicant has thought carefully about, and has a definite commitment towards, joining Sir Thomas Rich's Sixth Form. We have to make decisions in February about viability of subjects and numbers of teaching sets for the following September. This in turn allows us to determine our staffing needs and, where necessary, to employ additional teachers. We need to make such decisions on a sound basis and so we wish to be sure that students applying to us are sincere. Applications which are not accompanied by the £20 deposit will be assumed to be not serious.

This condition applies to all applications, to Year 11 students from Sir Thomas Rich's and from other schools. If anyone is entering the Sixth Form and does not require a blazer (e.g. they already have one) please would they let the School Secretary, Mrs. J. Brown, know.

M. A. Seales
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