

RIPLEY ST THOMAS

CHURCH OF ENGLAND ACADEMY

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February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to you to let you know of the Governors' decision regarding proposals to move to a longer, three year Key Stage 3 and a commensurate shortening of Key Stage 4 / GCSE to 2 years.

As a school we strive to do the best we can for the children in our care and to be outward looking to spot the trends and changes that mould the educational landscape. We have always tried to anticipate these changes and therefore give our pupils an advantage over their peers in other schools. As you may be aware from the media, although first Brexit and now COVID have been more prominent, there have been discussions about the nature of the curriculum in schools, especially the wish to ensure the broad and balanced foundations provided by Key Stage 3 before the specialism that the GCSE curriculum affords. The key to the debate has been the length of each stage in the secondary curriculum. As you will appreciate this is not a simple question but it is one that we have been considering for a couple of years. Now we believe the time is right to change to a three year Key Stage 3.

Why we believe that now is the time for change

- As a school we monitor and review our curriculum annually to ensure that we offer an engaging, robust and broad education to all our pupils.
- As part of this review process we consider the latest thinking and educational research to inform our planning.
- The latest educational research highlights the benefits of giving students a broad and balanced curriculum for as long as possible before specialising at GCSE.
- Research suggests that by giving pupils more time to develop their knowledge and skills across a range of subjects at Key Stage 3, this will better equip them for the rigours at Key Stage 4 / GCSE.
- Many schools around the country now are delivering a three year Key Stage 3 or have advanced plans to do so from September 2021.

What are our reasons for change?

- This change will allow a greater period for students to consolidate their knowledge, skills and passion at Key Stage 3 in preparation for the demands of GCSE.
- A three-year Key Stage 3 curriculum will help us ensure that our pupils are offered the best curriculum and co-curriculum across the full amount of time. Three years ensures that we have allocated enough time for our children to explore the core subject areas deeply enough to equip them with the foundational knowledge that is important for future success. The added time will allow for additional content and themes to be explored and for key concepts to be deeply embedded.

Believe.....

Principal Mrs C Walmsley
Chair of Governors Mrs J Garnett

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- Our aim is to instil a love of learning and passion for each subject. This change will allow pupils to have a deeper understanding of **all** the subjects so they can make more informed, ambitious option choices as they prepare for their GCSEs and beyond.
- A broader foundation of subject knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects better equips our children to engage in the wide ranging debate and discussions of adult life from a position of informed authority rather than personal opinion.

What will the changes mean?

- Key Stage 3 will now encompass Years 7, 8 & 9. Your child will continue to study the full breadth of subjects that we offer for longer and commence the GCSE curriculum in September 2022.
- The Year 9 curriculum will be re-written to ensure strong foundation for GCSE. Our monitoring of students' attainment will permit early identification where there are gaps in subject knowledge because of time missed in school. This will give us the opportunity to put in tailor-made interventions and additional support to ensure a smooth progression to GCSE. We are confident this approach will lead to better outcomes for pupils.
- As we are changing our curriculum from September 2021 this means that your child will not now need to select their Options until next year, and can look forward to the additional time to explore their full curriculum.
- This change will not reduce the breadth of qualifications being offered at GCSE.

We shall be letting pupils know of this change by video during tutorial time this week so that they understand how this will affect them. We would like to take this opportunity to thank those parents who did write into school during the consultation. We got a wide spectrum of responses from vehemently opposed to absolute support. All responses gave articulate reasons for their standpoint which, in this multifaceted question, are all equally correct and valid. As I said at the start of this letter, the complex nature of this debate means there is no right or wrong answer; rather we must be guided by the best course of action for all pupils in our care. We now firmly believe that lengthening Key Stage 3 is the right and proper course of action and this will happen from September 2021.

Yours sincerely

Mr G Gomersall
Director of Operations

Mr P Cairns
Senior Assistant Principal