



Academic Matters: The Step Up to Sixth Form



The type of study and learning that students encounter in the Sixth Form is different to studying and learning at GCSE.

Students will be expected to take much more responsibility for their own learning, and teachers will expect different things from them.

It is important that students develop the skills of independence because doing so will have a direct

impact on their success, both at A Level and in the future, and at St Chris we pride ourselves on the support we give to students to enable this journey to independence and self-motivated learning.

Study Programme

For most Sixth Form students at St Chris, their study programme comprises:

- Three A level courses, or two A level courses and a Level 3 Diploma. The opportunity to consider four A Level subjects will be offered to some particularly well-qualified applicants, however it is not necessary for university entrance.
- An additional A Level Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)
- Optional Core Maths
- Tutorial programme
- Study periods for independent learning
- PSHE, careers and higher education programme
- Options programme, every Thursday afternoon



The school day is constructed of five one-hour lesson periods. As a general rule, each subject you take will have five one-hour lessons per week. The

number of study periods on your timetable depends on the number of A Levels that you are studying.

Information about the curriculum and subject breakdowns for each year group, including Thursday 'Options' afternoons, can be found on our website.

Queries relating to curriculum matters should be sent to the subject teacher, the Head of Department or to Nat Baker, the Deputy Head (nat.baker@stchris.co.uk).

Academic and Learning Expectations

St Chris has the following expectations of all Sixth Form students:

- Attend all timetabled lessons;
- Be on time for all lessons;
- Be prepared with the relevant equipment and materials;
- Work to your best ability;
- Meet deadlines for the completion and submission of assignments;
- Use your study periods effectively;
- Ask for support or guidance if you need it.



Independent Study

Year 12 is a hugely important year for students and will not always be easy. Students will encounter unfamiliar situations, take on roles that they may not have considered previously and tackle work that is more advanced and demanding.

Sixth Form provides students with ample opportunities to develop skills, self-confidence and the chance to take on greater responsibilities. It also provides students with increased academic skills, one of which is becoming a good independent learner.

Independent study skills have become increasingly important as A level and other Level 3 qualifications have changed. Students will not achieve their potential if they do not put in the work outside of the lesson.



Assessment frequently asks students to apply their subject knowledge to unfamiliar contexts and it is difficult, if not impossible, to do this if they have not taken the time to extend their understanding independently.

For all subjects, wider reading will be set and there is an expectation to use independent study time to answer key questions that students will be set by each subject, designed to stretch your thinking and encourage you to bring your own learning and discovery into your next lesson.

Experience tells us that the students who achieve their potential and who gain the highest marks are those who take the greatest responsibility for their own progress. This independence of approach is an area that all students should strive to improve, building on strategies that they have started to develop for GCSE. In Sixth Form there is a greater expectation that students develop independent skills and knowledge to underpin those learnt in class.



What is an Independent Learner?

Independent learners are motivated to learn. They accept responsibility for their own learning and have the confidence to approach others for help if they need it. Independent learners manage their learning processes effectively. This includes:

1. Identifying what they want to learn, for example, reading the learning outcomes in the course handbook.
2. Identifying how they are going to learn, for example, individual study, working with a friend, asking for help.
3. Managing time, stress and other commitments.
4. Using a wide range of learning opportunities and resources.
5. Adapting the learning process to make use of new opportunities.

Students with specific learning needs or those who are finding it difficult to manage their study time will be offered specialist support, in house from our Sixth Form team. This will include helping with formulating study plans, timetables, and identifying specific resources to help students.

Essential Study Skills for Independent Study Periods

To achieve their potential, Sixth Form students are required to put in a minimum of three to four additional independent study hours per subject, outside of lessons, per week.

Study periods are allocated time slots for students to continue studying independently. They should not be viewed as “frees”.

Students should make a point of discussing the most effective use of their study periods with their subject teachers, as they are best placed to give advice for individual subjects.



Some of the most effective general strategies include:

- Maintain a well-organised, logical subject folder for each of your subjects. Even practical subjects need to have a folder or sketch book to take down tutorial notes or make annotations.
- Go over lesson notes, organising them and where possible building upon them through further research around topic areas.
- Get ahead (especially with regards to coursework) and start to complete homework and reading set that day.
- Undertake extension work (extra exercises or questions) in the areas you find most difficult.
- Read through teacher’s comments on marked work, writing detailed responses to benefit future progress.
- Carry out additional reading (journals, newspapers, case studies, podcasts, TED talks etc) around academic subjects.
- Complete past papers.
- Write essay plans.
- Complete project work.
- Work on practical work in Art/3D studios or in music, for example.



Tips for Effective Studying

- Turn notifications off on your mobile. *Only you can say if listening to music whilst you study is either helpful or a distraction. If you do decide to listen to music, please ensure that you are wearing headphones as not everyone will share your taste in music or want to be disturbed. Consider the volume of headphones please.*
- Ensure that you have all the equipment and resources you need.
- Be brave in telling your friends and people around you that you are studying and need concentration.



- Take breaks where you can get fresh air and natural light.
- Join one of the School sports teams or other co-curricular groups.
- If studying for a whole period, plan a 5-minute walk half-way to give your brain a rest.
- Consider whether you need a 'study buddy' as sometimes you can save time and be more efficient.
- Be realistic with your study sessions—don't over plan what you want to cover.
- If you are feeling overwhelmed or worried about something, speak to someone. It may feel like the hardest thing to do but it is often the quickest and most effective way of reducing the stress or anxiety it is causing.



Academic Progress and Reporting

At St Chris we pride ourselves on our student-focussed provision. The dedicated Sixth Form team are there to support students every step of the way to ensure their transition from GCSE to post-16 study is a successful one.

Teachers are more than happy to support students in their learning and will welcome your questions and an open dialogue with students about how they are finding the work on their course. If you have an issue or need help with your A Levels, your first port of call should be your subject teacher.

The jump from GCSE to A level is considerable; subject teachers aim to make the transition as easy and gradual as is feasible, but students will help themselves by keeping up with the work they are given, reviewing work they have already done, and speaking to their subject teachers if they find something difficult.

Teachers track attainment and progress in a number of ways using a range of assessment methods. This includes assessed work in lessons, independent work, in-lesson assessments, mock exams and the completion of practical work.

Throughout Sixth Form students receive regular feedback and guidance about their progress from their subject teachers and Personal Tutors, to enable them to stay on track and have a clear view of progress.

To ensure that no student is left behind subject teachers, subject leads, Personal Tutors and the Sixth Form team use a wide range of strategies to monitor the progress of our students and where this data highlights that a student needs our support, we quickly work with them to support their academic progress.

As part of keeping parents and carers informed about their child's progress at school, we hold regular Parents' Consultations and send academic reports, with the calendar of dates for these sent to parents at the start of the Autumn Term.



Parents' Consultations

We offer two Parents' Consultation evenings each year. These appointments are an important and valuable opportunity to discuss student progress and explore areas relating to a student's A level study. Parents' Consultation dates are published at the start of each year and run as hybrid events: parents can choose whether to attend in person or online. Parents book the appointments online via a link on My School Portal and will receive an email confirming their bookings.

If you feel that there is a lot to be discussed, we recommend that you contact the subject leader in order to arrange an extended appointment or meeting.

Academic Reports

Parents receive regular updates on progress and how their child is doing through written reports, which are sent to parents via My School Portal at set points in the year. These reports detail student attainment, predicted grade for UCAS and attitude to learning. These grades shouldn't ever come as a surprise to students or parents/carers as teachers will regularly feedback on your attainment, progress, and contribution to your own learning.



Academic Support and Extension

All departments and subjects offer opportunities to support and extend student's learning beyond the classroom. These are often at lunchtime or after school, and in some cases, such as for A Level 3D Design, at weekends.

Personal Tutors, the Heads of Year and Assistant Head (Sixth Form) are all available to support students who may be experiencing problems, alongside school counsellors if appropriate. Any issues or concerns are sensitively and thoroughly discussed with students and parents. Student support is on-going and comprehensive.