

SQA exams, what can a parent do?

Many parents feel at a loss when their children enter S1 and above confused by the complicated systems of SQA exams, coursework and practical assessments.

If you feel like this you are not alone! The exam system has changed greatly over the years, and is continuing to change, and sometimes it feels as if it is best just to let the 'experts' at Calderhead High School get on with it. But your involvement during these crucial years can make an enormous difference - the difference between success and failure or between 'C' and 'D' passes and 'A's and 'B's.

Parental support is eight times more important in determining a child's academic success than other factors, according to a study by The Campaign for Learning.
(TES, 10 October 2003)

The good news is - you don't have to be an expert in any of the subjects your child has chosen to make a real difference, and you don't have to become a 'super-parent' giving up your own life and responsibilities - you just need to know how best to spend the time you do have, at each stage of the process. Perhaps the hardest demand on students is that of understanding the long-term importance of doing the best they can, and learning to shelve short-term fun at times in the interest of long-term benefits (not easy even for adults).

Unfortunately for us, from the teenage perspective, interest and effort in education and the long-term benefits this can bring often come rather a long way down the priority list, after friendships, the 'right' clothes, social life, romantic concerns and hobbies. In addition, children will differ in their levels of maturity, organisational skills, levels of motivation and their ability to take responsibility for their own learning.

This is where you come in. You are the expert on your child and have always been his or her most important teacher. **Your support, encouragement and interest can make a spectacular difference to your child's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of the exam years.**

When you, your child and Calderhead High School work in partnership, you can be sure that your child will achieve the best results possible.

Your role may include some or all of the following:

- **Attendance Officer** - making sure your child goes to lessons and understands the importance of making the most of lesson-times.
- **Partner with school and child** - going to Parents' Consultation Evenings, asking questions and finding out how you can best help your child at home.
- **Provider of the tools** for homework and revision - a quiet space, a 'workbox' of pens, paper and other necessities.

- **Banker** - paying for the tools, files and revision guides they need.
- **Study Buddy** - showing an interest in the subject, helping with homework (but not doing it for them), testing them when they ask you, and so on.
- **Entertainments Officer** - finding out about TV programmes, theatre productions, films, exhibitions relevant to your child's learning and enjoying them together.
- **Sounding board and adviser** - helping your child to break tasks down so that they are manageable, keeping a subtle eye on progress and celebrating achievements, and seeing a positive way forward when things go badly.
- **Project Manager** - agreeing the rules for homework or revision (they won't work if they're imposed), helping them to make a realistic timetable, balancing work against the 'fun stuff' and revising the plans as necessary.
- **Go-between** - for your child and the school when necessary; making sure problems are nipped in the bud and asking the questions your child can't or won't.
- **Information Provider and Interpreter** - finding copies of old exam papers, searching out websites, finding out about the subject, exam structures and content.

Whatever your individual child's needs your chief role will always be that of the person who cares most in the world, champion of their needs and admirer of every achievement. The most important role you will play is that of person who will love them and be proud of them whatever happens.

Good exam results - what is the secret?

We tend to think of our children's results being down to what happens on the day of the exam itself. Will they be in the right frame of mind? Will they be lucky and get the right questions? Will they remember what they have revised? In fact the results of exams are generally determined well *before* they sit the exam itself. There are a number of stages in the process of achieving exam success. The secret of good results in exams is about getting things right (and being aware of what can go wrong) at each stage of the process. The broad stages are:

STAGE 1: Learning the content first time round

- The process of revision (literally 'looking at something again') does assume that the content of the subject has been learnt in the first place - every lesson counts so excellent attendance is important.

STAGE 2: Revision

- Even the 'perfect student', who has attended every lesson and paid attention throughout the course, needs to revise to achieve their potential. For the rest of us the need for revision is even greater. Revision can be done in many ways, some of which are more effective than others.

STAGE 3: The exam itself

- Even with the first two stages successfully achieved, things can still go wrong. There are three sets of skills involved in taking exams - knowing the subject matter, organisational skills and 'exam technique'.

Your most important role, as always, is to encourage and praise your child. Show an interest by talking to them about what they are learning in different subjects and in their homework and coursework.

The most important thing is that your child attends lessons. Sometimes just missing one lesson means that they miss out on key information about coursework or the introduction to a topic - starting out behind often results in a vicious circle of not understanding, falling further behind, disagreements with teachers, an increasing dislike of the subject and giving up.

This is an extract from our "SQA exams, what can a parent do?" which can be found in our website in parents – useful links for parents section.