



3 December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope this letter finds you well and that you will understand why a portion of my letter must again be devoted to COVID-related issues. However, before that I wanted to praise our year 11s and 13s for their hard work throughout the mock exams that have been running in recent weeks.

Preparing for Examinations

Preparing for examinations begins on the first day that students embark on their GCSE and A level courses. You will be aware that we have placed a greater emphasis on the acquisition and retention of knowledge in recent years. This, alone, contributes towards a more successful revision programme.

In both years 11 and 13 we do not let revision become something that is merely encouraged or suggested; it is integral to the teaching and learning that will take place in their final six months of study. We adopt two principles around starting their revision nice and early, and doing a little bit of revision over a longer period. We know that students are far more likely to feel overwhelmed or demotivated if there is too much left to do at the end of the course. We have to avoid this together.

Which means that from January, students in years 11 and 13 will be revisiting previously taught content on an increasingly frequent basis. Homework is replaced by explicit revision activities and, in the case of year 11s, this is known as the Get Ahead Programme. The GAP is our way to bring in that 'little and often' principle so that we build gradually towards the final exams and ensure that children are able to switch off from school and studies and avoid becoming overwhelmed.

In lessons, we use a lot of fact testing – this is because raw factual knowledge represents the essential building blocks of deeper ideas and concepts. Students are exposed to comparative models – examples of secure and excellent responses that can be deconstructed and applied in a similar context. There will be a lot of practice taking place as well – with students becoming more skilled at knowing the standard of their own work and becoming more autonomous in securing improvements.

There is rarely a quiet moment in schools and I am also very proud of my colleagues as they turn from their mock marking and evaluation to thinking how their students can reach their potential next summer. Our advice to the year 11s and 13s is to have a really relaxing and refreshing Christmas holiday, so that they can make a solid start in January and gradually build towards the success they deserve next May and June.

Continued...

COVID Updates

Firstly, thank you for supporting the switch back to face coverings across the school site. This has gone smoothly and we have plenty of spare face coverings if one is lost or accidentally dropped on the ground!

Secondly, you will also be aware that schools are again asked to test students for the virus on their return after the Christmas holidays. This will necessitate a staggered return to school as follows:

- Thursday 6 January: All students in years 10 to 13 to return as normal / as per the school calendar. Those who have provided consent will then be taken out of lessons (throughout the day) to take a lateral flow test in the main hall (as before). Normal bus and food services will operate.
- Friday 7 January: Students in years 7 to 9 will return as normal. Likewise, they will be tested in the main hall throughout that day. Normal bus services will operate but we must ask that students in years 7 to 9 bring in a packed lunch on that day because the use of the main hall for testing will limit access to our catering facilities. All students who are eligible for a free school meal will be provided with a hot meal or baguette / sandwiches, as they prefer.

Consequently, we ask that you again provide consent for this testing programme:

- Parents and carers of students in years 7 to 11 are asked to [click here](#) to complete the online consent form. *It will take no more than 1-2 minutes to complete.*
- Sixth Formers are invited to provide their own consent [via this link](#). *It will take no more than 1-2 minutes to complete.*

In all other respects, it will be a normal start to the term. Our celebration events this side of Christmas are unaffected by COVID, with clubs and activities continuing as planned. We continue to have a small number of students (and staff) who have tested positive for COVID-19, or are awaiting PCR results. However, that number has remained low and is falling slightly. No complacency but also absolutely no need to overreact either.

I guess many of us may be searching for our decorations this weekend and beginning to get into the festive spirit. Whatever your plans, have a lovely weekend.

Yours faithfully



Barry Doherty

Headteacher