



18 May 2020

Dear student,

I am writing to all Year 10 and 12 students to try to give you an update, because the headlines in the press over the past week and various announcements will have confused some of you and worried many more of you.

I am aware that when this crisis started, we spent a lot of time working with Year 11 and 13 who were coming up to exams and worrying about how they would progress next year, whether that be University, Post 16 or employment. I think that was the right thing to do, but this has gone on for longer than we expected and with uncertainty about when you will be back to school as normal, I know that you will be worrying about the impact on your education and exams.

There are many things that we do not yet know or cannot control, but I hope that by setting out my thoughts below, it will give you some comfort and a sense of what the future might hold.

What will exams be like next year?

The first issue that some of you have started to ask about, is in relation to what exams will be like next year, given how different they are for current Year 11 and 13. At this point, there have been no changes for next year announced, so we presume that you will sit exams next summer in the normal way. One thing they may do is move the exam period back by a few weeks. This would allow you a bit more time to catch-up on what you have missed, but logistically might not be possible, because the exams still need to be marked and moderated to give results out in time for people to finalise university admissions or Post 16 places. While I know that you will have missed a sizeable chunk of your GCSE courses, this is also true for everyone in your year group and if the whole country were to do a bit worse in the exams, there is a mechanism to lower the grade boundaries to take this into account. There are other things that the exam boards could do, for example in many subjects they could set 5 questions but only ask you to answer 4, so if there is an area of the course you have not covered (this may be different in each school) you could miss out that question without being disadvantaged. At the moment, exam boards continue to focus on this year, but we will keep you informed as and when we find out more that impacts you.

What happens from 1st June?

You will have seen that the press has focused on primary school children potentially going back to school 'at the earliest 1st June' and unfortunately this has caused a lot of conflict in the media. For you, (Y10 & 12) the government have said that they would like you to have 'some form of face to face contact with your teachers before the summer'. This is a little vague and we are not yet sure what they mean by it, so we have made some plans and I am happy to share them with you, to give you some idea of what might happen, but they are subject to change at a moment's notice.

The government have said 1st June is the **earliest** that schools should re-open for more children. They have also said that the scientific evidence for whether this should happen, will be reviewed on **28th May**. I don't think it is fair for you, your families or for school staff, to be waiting for a government announcement on a Thursday evening, that might drastically change what will happen in school on the Monday morning. So, we

plan for any increase to the number of you in school to happen from 8th June at the earliest. This will give enough time to make sure we can safely implement whatever we decide to do, without rushing and increasing the stress and uncertainty over the announcement.

Whatever plans we make, they will always be based on what we think we can do safely, bearing in mind that the safest course of action for most people at this time is still to remain at home. We also need to balance what the government would like us to do, with what we think is best and what our community, your parents and carers, think is best. If your parents / carers don't think you should be in school, you will not need to be. If we open to more students, we will need to make a judgement about how the educational benefits compare to the health risks, particularly if we can better use technology to provide a better remote learning experience.

It is difficult to know what 'face to face contact' will mean and we expect to get further guidance on this in the coming weeks. A lot of people think this means coming into school to meet with a teacher to go through the work you have done during lockdown and make sure you know what you need to do over the summer to try to catch up. If this is the case, we are confident that we could do this by having a small number of students on site at once, or it might still be better to do this via telephone or video call.

We think it is unlikely that Year 10 or Year 12 will be expected to come into school for normal lessons, so we are currently trialling with groups of staff and students, online lessons. We hope to have safe, online and interactive lessons with your teachers for all year 12 groups up and running by 1st June, allowing students to interact with their teachers in a much better way. If this goes well and the first few lessons I have observed have been good, we will look next at Year 10, but we are aware that what works well for a small group of Post 16 students may not transfer easily to larger groups of Year 10, but we will work it out. If we do have Year 10 students on site for lessons, there are issues around transport, food and moving around the site we would need to work through, but the broad idea would be that you would be in a small group of c15 students, based in one of the large areas around school (eg Business) all day in the same seat and would be taught English, Maths, Science at school and options subjects would continue to be taught remotely. The logistics of teaching different groups of students in different subjects, while maintaining social distancing would likely be too difficult at this stage.

How to ensure students are not disadvantaged next year?

At this stage, we do not know how school will look, even in September. Although we hope we are starting to get back to normal as much as possible – there may still be restrictions. Nationally, all Year 10 and 12 students will be in a similar position, but we are making plans to help you. At this stage these are not confirmed and will not be until we have a better idea of the larger picture, but it might be reassuring to have some idea of the support you will get:

- Year 12 online lessons should be up and running across all subjects by 1st June. If these are successful, these may continue through the Autumn if we do not have full school access. If we can safely do so, Year 10 will follow.
- Every year we run revision sessions for Year 11 students on a Saturday morning, we intend these to start as soon as we are able to safely do so in September. There will also be a full programme of after school and holiday revision to support.
- We plan to use tutorial time in the mornings to create an extra half an hour period each day to support Year 11 with revision in each subject.

- Staff have already enquired about how they can continue to support our students over the summer holiday. Presuming it is not safe to be back in school, it may be that we can continue to run some online lessons through the summer holiday to help students catch up.
- When Year 11 students this year were released from school we bought a large quantity of resources and revision guides. With the cancellation of their exams, the majority of these have not been used. We are currently in the process of collating these for Year 10 and plan to provide personalised revision and work packs for all students over the next few weeks.

What can you do now?

The priority throughout this time has been to encourage you to look after yourselves, including your mental health. It is still the case, that work should not- be adding to pressures at home if you are struggling to cope. However, I would expect for most of you that the structure of completing school work is beneficial. I can see that the majority of you log in to Show My Homework every day, keep doing this and it will help for when you return. A small minority of students have not been doing this and there may be good reasons why, but if you possibly can, now is the time to start focusing on your school work again.

Overall, I understand your frustrations and concerns. It remains true that we cannot tell you exactly how the next year will go, but I can tell you that the staff here will go above and beyond what I ask them to, in order to support you. If you work with them, and when you are able to focus on your school work you give it your maximum effort, if you seek help when you need it and persevere when it seems challenging, you will have every chance of great success next year. I already look forward to next August when we give you your results and celebrate your success.

I hope that this letter offers you some reassurance in such difficult times and should you have any questions or concerns please do contact us.

Take care.

Shaun Simmons
Principal