

**October 19<sup>th</sup> 2020**

Dear Parents and Carers

### **Changes to Arrangements for GCSE Exams 2021**

Last week, the Government announced the arrangements they have put in place and the issues that are still under consideration for the GCSE exams next summer. The main points of the announcement are as follows:

1. The Prime Minister and Education Secretary are clear that exams will go ahead if at all possible, as they believe they are “the fairest and most accurate way to measure a pupil’s attainment”.
2. The main exam “season” has been delayed until immediately **after** the May half term. This means that exams will begin on **Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June** and continue through to the beginning of July with the final papers likely to be on **Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> July**.
3. However, the first Maths exam and the first English exam will take place in the week **before** the May half term. This is to ensure that, even if a student falls ill during the exam season, they are most likely to have had the chance to take at least one exam paper in each of these essential subjects which will enable the exam board to award them a grade. These exams will take place in the week beginning **Monday 24<sup>th</sup> May**.
4. Because of time lost during the school closure last year, an element of choice has been introduced into a number of the exam syllabuses. This will affect the number and the length of papers taken in some subjects.
5. The government recognises that there may well be disruptions to exams for individual students or groups of students who are either ill or self-isolating. They are still working on contingency plans for these circumstances. It is likely that this will involve an improved version of the Centre Assessed Grades which operated last year.

This announcement has a number of important implications for students in Years 10 and 11:

1. The extension of the exam season means that all **Year 11 students will need to be in school until Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> July**. While it is unlikely that people will be planning holidays at the moment, **please do not make any arrangements which could conflict with the revised dates of the exams**. The final exam timetable is not yet published; we will issue it to students and parents as soon as we have it.
2. The fact that the government is intending to proceed with exams if at all possible means it is essential that individual students or groups of students who are self-isolating need to do everything they can to keep up with the work that is set for them. If there is a minority of the Year group isolating, this is likely to be through completing classwork and homework on Show My Homework (satchel:one). If the whole group is isolating, this will be through logging on to remotely taught lessons on Microsoft Teams. **If your son or daughter is likely to have any difficulties accessing either of these platforms, please let us know as a matter of urgency, so that we can do whatever is necessary to help.**
3. It is possible (perhaps even inevitable) that some students will miss some exams either because they are ill or because they are self-isolating. In such circumstances, we are likely to need the best possible evidence from coursework, mock exam results etc to support the awarding of Centre Assessed Grades. In addition to end of unit tests across many of the pathway subjects, Year 11 students are already taking regular mini mocks in their English lessons and will take socially distanced Maths and English Literature mocks shortly after half term. **It is essential that students try their very best in these mocks in case the results are needed as evidence for their final grades.**

The nature of our curriculum means that our year 10 and 11 students on almost all of our one year pathway courses are less affected by last year’s closure than those on non-core courses in almost

any other school. Indeed, the additional teaching time we have allocated to these courses within the normal school day means that they have lost hardly any time at all. The challenge for us, therefore, is to ensure that our Year 11 students are as well prepared as they can possibly be for their exams in English, Maths and Science and that our Year 10 students who missed out on teaching time in French and Spanish last year are ready for their GCSEs in the summer. All these students already have additional teaching time in these subjects and we will continue to look for further strategies to ensure that our recovery curriculum is giving them all the support they can ahead of the “new-look” exam season in the summer.

These are difficult and confusing times, but please rest assured that we will be relentless in our determination to support every student in achieving the best possible exam grades. The current crisis will pass, but our students’ qualifications will stay with them for ever.

With every best wish

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Hedge', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

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