

6th January 2021

Dear Year 11 students, parents and carers,

As promised, I am writing now that the Secretary of State for Education has provided an initial update following the announcement on Monday that, once again, GCSE exams are to be cancelled in 2021, as they were in 2020.

I completely understand that pupils and parents alike are going to have lots of questions about this, and there is considerable potential for some to be very anxious and worried about this – especially given the fact that details about how this will work this year are still not really very available. I have also attached a FAQ guide for students that I hope covers most of their initial questions (spoiler – there are very few definite answers yet to give!)

I will try to divide the rest of this communication into three sections – **‘What we know’**, **‘What we don’t know’** and **‘What to do next’**

What we know

- The usual season of GCSE exams, which had been pushed back until June/July, have now been cancelled completely. There will be no, full GCSE examination timetable this summer
- The DfE have announced that grades will be awarded based on Teacher Assessment instead of GCSE exams.
- These teacher assessments will be moderated by the exam boards, although details of how they intend to do this remain vague today. The one thing ministers have promised is that there will be no repeat of the 2020 approach, where a central ‘algorithm’ was applied to the grades after schools had submitted them, which led to much controversy. I hope this news provides some reassurance to you – it certainly does to me!
- **The CACHE Childcare exams at CWA which were scheduled to take place next Wednesday, 13th January, are not running as CWA have decided they are uncomfortable with the difficulty of guaranteeing student safety. The college will provide more information in due course.**

What we don’t know

- The timescales for completing these teacher assessments, or the process to be followed for agreeing, moderating and submitting them when teachers have finished them
- When exam results will be available for students – the Education Minister today said that he is looking to see if they can be brought forward from late August, given the fact that there will be no exams to mark this year.

- The evidence of pupil work to be used to create teacher assessed grades. Possible options could include some form of assessments, like controlled assessments or short internal tests set by the exam boards, but these are only guesswork – we simply do not yet know.

What to do now

- **One massively important piece of advice – students need to continue to work their socks off! We are only in January, we have some level of practice exam data on every pupil already, and those teacher assessments can only be based on their work.** We do not expect to be asked to provide this information for some time yet, so nothing is yet set in stone, and there remains all to play for.
- We know that students in this cohort have missed time in school – both in the first lockdown and now again. Fortunately, coronavirus has not had a huge impact on Year 11 between the two lockdowns, with very few pupils in the year group missing much school time through self-isolation. In addition, almost two-thirds of students returned to KLA in June and July and benefitted from intense teaching in small groups to help them catch up. I genuinely believe our Year 11 pupils have benefitted from more teaching time than their counterparts in most schools up and down the country, so I am less worried about the impact of this on most of our pupils than I would otherwise be.
- Recent Year 11 assessments just before Christmas were completed and provide a solid basis for next stages in learning. These assessments were all of GCSE standard, and were marked tightly. We have exam board markers in most GCSE subjects here at KLA, and we have a strong track record in the accuracy of our assessment, so these provide an early, accurate view of **current grades of attainment**. As I say, these are informative but not set in stone – most pupils make around one grade of progress in most subjects between December and June of Year 11, some make considerably more, some make very little. Which group each pupil belongs in obviously is most closely linked to their work ethic, attitude, attendance and revision.

I will be publishing two sets of grade reports for all Year 11 pupils in the coming week, to help students and parents gauge their current individual standing in each subject.

The first of these will show **current** grades in each subject, and are quite honestly what we would be submitting now if we were being asked to submit evidence of current grades. This is factual, evidence-based and accurate at this point in pupils' study, following their December 'mini-mock' assessments.

The second report reflects grades that staff have produced in answer to the question 'What do you think currently is the **most likely final grade** in your subject for each pupil?' This involves forecasting, assessment of untapped potential and teachers' interpretation and professional judgement of current rates of progress and levels of effort. These are not as accurate at this point, and can still be changed by any student who produces better quality work and higher assessment marks in the coming months.

It is hugely important to stress that Year 11 pupils have clear goals now to work for, and how important it is that they work as hard as they can to achieve them. My staff team are working enormously hard to teach lessons remotely to all Year 11 pupils every day, and while I am pleased that most Year 11 students have been participating in these, I am concerned that a minority have not yet accessed this offer. I would urge parents to make sure that your Year 11 child is successfully engaging in these

lessons all day, every day – that is the best route to continuing to see those current grades improve. If you have any queries at all, please do let Mrs Mann or Mrs McGivern know – Year 11 has two Year Heads precisely because they are the top priority, so please do make use of their skills and huge expertise.

I hope this letter provides at least some reassurance for you amidst the uncertainty. I completely understand how difficult this is to manage for parents – I myself have a son in Year 11 in another Norfolk school! If you have any further queries, as always do email me alan.fletcher@kla.eastern-mat.co.uk and I will try my best to provide an answer, or at the very least explain the reasons why I can't!

Best Wishes, and I will be in touch again with you all next week.

Alan Fletcher