

5th January 2021

Dear Parents and Students

I appreciate last night's announcement by the Prime Minister, while providing some clarity, will still have caused concern and questions for parents and students. As both a Headteacher and the parent of a Year 13 student, I understand this anxiety. Therefore, I hope this letter answers some of your questions and provides some reassurance in these still uncertain times.

This letter will cover:

1. The Year 11 and Year 13 Exam Situation
2. Year 9 Update
3. Year 10 and Year 12 Update
4. January External Exams
5. Children of Critical Workers and Vulnerable Student Provision
6. Pastoral Support and well-being
7. Free School Meals
8. Remote Learning
9. Access to IT Resources
10. COVID-19 Testing
11. Contacting the School
12. Conclusion

1. The Year 11 and Year 13 Exam Situation

As I said in my message on Twitter last night, the alternative to exams in the summer is still unclear.

I have to say, given this was always a possibility, I do find it unacceptable that a Plan B is not available immediately, to alleviate the concerns of students taking exams in the summer.

The Prime Minister's statement last night said that GCSE and A' Level exams will not be able to go ahead as normal and that Ofqual (the exam board regulator) will make 'alternative arrangements' for delivering the results in due course.

Therefore, given the lack of clarification regarding these alternative arrangements, I must stress that students in Year 11 and Year 13 must continue to complete the work set by their teachers, each day. This will be monitored by class teachers and could be directly required for assessment in future.

For Year 13, the Trial Exams will not go ahead. However, this week's tasks will continue to be revision, review and consolidation work. In the following weeks, the lessons will cover new material and students will follow their normal timetable until we hear definitively regarding the alternative arrangements.

For Year 11 - students must continue to follow their timetable and complete the remote lessons and work set by staff.

Catch up sessions offered to Year 11 and Year 13 students will go ahead. On Tuesday, this will continue to be Year 11 Core Catch Up. Wednesday and Thursday sessions will continue for Year 11 and Year 13 students in their option subjects on a carousel basis.

Clearly, the prospect of Centre Assessed Grades is a real one and therefore all the work students do based on these lessons can be used as part of our evidence base. It is also important to say that, like all year groups, once the lockdown is over, Year 11 and Year 13 students may return to school where further assessments might be required as part of these alternative arrangements and therefore the work covered in lockdown is critically important.

I appreciate this is a difficult situation for students in their final exam year to face, but I cannot emphasise enough the need to try to stay focussed and make the most of the remote learning provided by their teachers.

I will update students and parents as more information becomes available.

2. Year 9 Update

The remote learning approach we have adopted at WBHS has been explained to students by their Head of Year. However, if students are having any issues accessing their work then please do not hesitate to contact Ms Welch (Head of Year).

Regarding the GCSE Options process - this was due to start this week with option assemblies, followed by individual guidance meetings for every student in Year 9. We know how important this process is in helping students select the most appropriate GCSE courses that they will be happy studying and also go on to achieve success in. This process will still take place, even if it is carried out remotely. You will receive further information about this shortly.

Parents will receive a Year 9 Progress Check this week in the post. This would normally be followed by a Parents Evening. This will still go ahead albeit remotely. You will receive more information about this next week.

3. Year 10 and Year 12 Update

I appreciate that students in these exam year groups have now missed a lot of face-to-face teaching in school, both last academic year and now again this year. Students should continue to work hard on the remote learning that is set during this current lockdown period. Students and parents must contact teachers or the Head of Year if there are any issues or concerns.

I also think it is important to highlight we will do everything we can to support students to gain their personal best grades and then achieve their Post 16 or Post 18 ambitions. This will include additional support and catch up sessions as student's progress through their GCSE and A' Level courses.

I, with the support of the governors, will continue to lobby the government, exam boards and Ofqual in ensuring this missed face-to-face teaching is reflected in the summer 2022 GCSE and A' Level exam arrangements to ensure students have a fair opportunity to achieve grades that reflect their hard work and ability.

4. January External Exams

A small number of students in Year 10, 11, 12 and 13 have external exams scheduled over the next two weeks (these students know who they are so do not worry if you are not one of them). The Government has said, despite school closures, these exams will go ahead. This raises a number of issues that we need to consider in terms of the logistics of running these exams in a safe way.

Also, for Year 11 and Year 13 students it raises the further issue, if the summer exams are not going ahead, then will students taking these January exams benefit from doing them. This also needs to be carefully considered.

Students scheduled to sit these exams should prepare as if they are going ahead as normal, but we will be in contact as soon as possible with further information.

5. Children of Critical Workers and 'Vulnerable Student' Provision

The school will continue to provide on-site provision for the children of keyworkers and vulnerable students.

However, given the country has gone into a national lockdown, including closing schools to most students due to a significant rise in positive cases and the increased transmission risk of the new variant amongst young people, this should only be for students who cannot work safely and independently at home.

The Learning Support Department is liaising with students with Education and Health Care Plans and their parents to plan additional support.

6. Free School Meals

We continue to work with the Local Authority to ensure students eligible for Free School Meals receive them. The lateness of announcements by the government will mean the system of distribution may take some time to set up so please bear with us – we will work as fast as we can to get these to you.

The plan, at present, is for students to receive one food hamper per week. We have contacted all eligible parents about this and, if you have not already responded to the questions asked about distribution, please do so as soon as you can.

7. Pastoral Care and Well being

Your child will continue to receive pastoral care to support both their learning and wellbeing during school closure. This will include regular contact from their Head of Year, a weekly recorded assembly, 'Thought for the Week' and a wellbeing email each Monday from our school counsellor with support, advice and information. If you have any pastoral concerns, please contact your child's Head of Year in the first instance via email.

8. Remote Learning

This week, teachers are adjusting to providing on-line learning for all year groups until February half-term. As you are aware, to try to create a structure for students, they should follow their normal timetable each day starting from today. By Monday of next week all lessons will either be live or recorded presentations. Students should complete the work set and any assessment tasks. This will allow staff to monitor progress and contact students or parents if there are any issues.

Students should contact their teachers by email if they are having any difficulty with the work. In addition, parents can contact their Head of Year if they have any concerns or questions.

Class teachers and the Pastoral Teams want this remote learning to help students maintain their progress and feel supported during this lockdown period. Further information can be found on our school website about our remote learning strategy.

9. Access to IT Resources

If students have difficulty accessing remote learning due to a lack of IT in the home, as outlined on the 'Remote Learning' section of our website, parents should contact the appropriate Head of Year as soon as possible. Our remote provision can be accessed on all devices, and we will endeavour to help students who do not have access to devices, so their learning is not adversely affected during this lockdown period.

10. COVID-19 Testing

I would like to thank all parents who volunteered to help with the COVID-19 Testing process following my email yesterday.

At present, given the current lockdown, this process is now on hold. However, I still expect this will remain part of the return to school strategy following lockdown. Therefore, if you could still complete the registration document and then the subsequent consent form which will follow in due course, this will allow us to be fully prepared for this testing when students return to school.

For those parents who have volunteered to help, I will be in contact later this half-term with further information.

11. Contacting the School

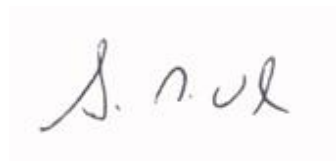
The school office will be staffed every day from 8.30am until 3.30pm. The school number is 0191 731 7070. Alternatively, if you have a general enquiry please use the usual email address info@whitleybayhighschool.org.

12. Conclusion

I know this was not the start of the new term we had all hoped for. However, I am still optimistic that with the roll out of the vaccines and a carefully planned approach to COVID-19 testing in school we are getting closer to something like a normal return to school. I will continue to keep you updated as more information becomes available.

I hope this letter has answered some of your questions and please bear with us as we are having to respond to ever changing circumstances with little notice. Please be assured we will do everything we can to support our students and help them through these difficult times.

Yours faithfully



STEVE WILSON
Headteacher