

26th January 2021

Dear Students and Parents

I appreciate this is an uncertain and unsettling time and therefore I am keen to provide as much clarity as possible even when, currently, we do not have the final guidance regarding how Year 11 grades will be awarded.

Exam Grade Consultation:

As you may be aware Ofqual (the exam board regulator), instructed by the government, have issued a consultation on the awarding of grades. This includes consulting on the use of externally set mini tests or tasks. In my response to this consultation, I have argued against the use of these for all the reasons I have highlighted in previous letters to the government and Ofqual. These reasons centre around the disadvantage caused by the variation between regions in student and staff absence related to COVID-19.

Given that this consultation does not close until 29th January, and it will take time for Ofqual to process all the responses, I do not expect any firm announcements until February half term at the earliest.

Therefore, I thought it was important to try to provide a plan for the rest of this academic year for Year 11 students and parents.

November 2020 Progress Check:

Year 11 students received a Progress Check on 18th November, which included a Currently Working at Grade (CWA). It is important to point out that every year the majority of students make good progress from these November CWA grades and we expect the same to be the case this year.

Year 11 Trial Exams:

As you are aware Year 11 Trial Exams were scheduled to take place starting the week after February half-term. I am sorry to say, these Trial Exams will no longer take place. The cancellation of these Trial Exams is for a number of reasons including:

- I, although I have heard nothing official, do not expect students to be back in school immediately after February half term
- In addition, even if students were back, I would consider it inappropriate to give them 7 days of exams following another period of lockdown.

However, I can reassure you that teachers will continue to teach the course content and assess and provide feedback on the work students complete as part of their courses.

Year 11 Report:

The Trial Exams are, under normal circumstances, followed by a Year 11 Report issued on 17th March, which gives the Trial Exam results and targets to help students improve prior to the summer exams.

Students and parents will still receive this report, but this will now include an updated Currently Working at Grade and targets to help students improve in the remaining weeks of Year 11. This CWA grade will be informed by all the work students have done while in school and during their remote learning. This will allow students and parents to see the progress made since the November CWA grade.

Year 11 Parents Consultation Meetings:

As scheduled on the school calendar, Year 11 Parents Evenings are due to take place on the 18th and 24th March. These will still take place during these two weeks, although this may have to be carried out remotely. At these consultation meetings the following will be discussed:

- the progress of students in relation to the March Currently Working at Grade
- strategies/targets to ensure the work produced in the remaining weeks reflects the student's best efforts.
- We will be unable, however, to discuss Centre Assessed Grades.

When will Year 11 students finish their courses?

Gavin Williamson has stated, correctly in my view, that he wants Year 11 students to be taught for as long as possible to ensure the content of courses are covered. However, there is a suggestion in the Ofqual consultation that final exam grades may be issued to students at the beginning of July. This would suggest Centre Assessed Grades would have to be submitted by the end of May at the latest.

Therefore, I would suggest, although this is still based on no guidance from the government, that Year 11 students can expect to continue being taught either remotely or in school until at least May half term.

Until we hear otherwise, teachers will continue to teach Year 11 students right up to the submission of Centre Assessed Grades. Therefore, it is important students continue to complete their on-line lessons and work hard on all assessments.

Regarding externally set mini-tests/tasks:

We await to hear whether such tests/tasks will be used in the awarding of grades process. However, regardless of this decision this does not change the plan outlined in this letter. Once we hear definitively if such tests/tasks are being used and what format they will take, we will adapt our teaching to accommodate them and give students the best opportunity to achieve their personal best grades on them.

Regarding Centre Assessed Grades:

Although the final guidance regarding Centre Assessed Grades is not yet available from Ofqual, I want to reassure students and parents regarding this process. We learnt a great deal from the successful Centre Assessed Grade process we went through last year. Please be assured we will do this fairly, based on all the information we have about students throughout the two years of their GCSE studies and recognising the disruption to in-school teaching that has taken place.

We have students' best interests at heart and your Centre Assessed Grades will represent a fair picture of your progress.

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At Whitley Bay High School, the majority of our students achieve GCSE grades that are higher than their predictions based on their prior attainment at Key Stage 2 (Year 6 SATs) and we will ensure exam boards and Ofqual are aware of this when our Centre assessed Grades are submitted.

Students should try not to worry about this process but rather concentrate on their on-line learning and completing all tasks to the best of their ability.

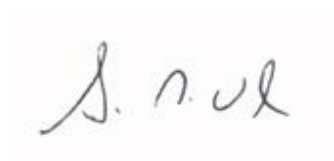
Conclusion:

I hope the information in this letter is helpful in explaining our current plans for the rest of this academic year. Teachers will continue to teach Year 11 students either remotely or in school until we are given a finish date by the government.

As I have said before, the best thing students can do is continue to attend their on-line lessons and complete any tasks and assessments to the best of their ability.

I will continue to update you as we receive further information.

Yours faithfully



STEVE WILSON
Headteacher