13 January 2021

Dear Year 11 Parents/Carers

As you will be aware, Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, announced to Government last week that GCSE examinations scheduled to take place in the summer term would be cancelled. Ofqal, the regulator for qualifications, examinations and assessments, are conducting a consultation over the next two weeks to identify how students' grades will be awarded. However, Gavin Williamson has indicated that teacher assessment will be the main basis for awarding GCSE grades based on students having a portfolio of assessed work. We anticipate systems being put into place for rigorous moderation of students' work both across subjects internally and externally. It is possible that Ofqal will recommend some in school standardised testing, however we await confirmation and clear guidance from them.

**Low Stakes Assessments**

On Friday, I held a Teams meeting for all Year 11 students to explain the approach that we would be taking as a school. **Our intention is to support all our students in achieving the highest grades they are capable of.** We are building in regular short assessments each week in all relevant subjects (this will not be relevant in subjects that have substantial coursework already).

The assessments will be between 20 minutes and an hour long and teachers may give additional time to take into account the technical challenges of remote learning. They will cover all aspects of the course covered to date so that each student's ‘portfolio’ of work reflects both the breadth of the course content and the skills and understanding which students have developed. This also means that the hard work in preparation for mock exams will not be wasted! These assessments should be viewed as “low stakes”, i.e. if a student does not do well in an assessment, it will not impact on their overall grade as long as further assessments can demonstrate consistent achievement.

Teachers will be looking to award achievement wherever possible, rather than arriving at an average grade across all of the assessments. We recognise that many Year 11 students ‘step up’ in the final months of year 11 **and want to reassure students that if assessments taken in the course up to this point do not represent what students are capable of, they will not impact on their final grade.** However, we do need students to have a broad evidence base and so it is important that they submit all assessments set, in order to demonstrate that they are secure across the course content.

**College References**

In the absence of mock exam grades, we will be asking Year 11 teachers to revise students’ college reference grades as planned. As we have limited evidence at this stage, teachers will be advised to use the evidence they currently have, what they know about the student’s engagement and motivation and will be asked to err on the side of positivity when making predictions. **The college reference grade will not represent the final GCSE grade for students as they will not have gone through a formal assessment process and will not have been moderated.** **Our intention is to ensure that students are able to progress to suitable college courses and do not have barriers to their progression from their references.** As with any report, you will be notified through e-mail when these are available to access on the SIMs Parent App.

**Remote Learning**

We do not know for how long we will be working remotely. The Prime Minister stated that all schools in England will be closed until February 12th (half term).  However, with high transmission rates of the virus in our local area, we are preparing for school closure to possibly continue beyond half term. It is therefore important that we ensure that we develop students’ portfolio of assessments throughout this time of remote learning. We have prioritised access to technology for Year 11 students and have issued a high number of laptops to students from the year group. **If your child has technological problems, please contact us through** **info@wsfg.waltham.sch.uk** **and we will put support in place.** We currently hold a waiting list for devices but are continually looking to meet the needs of students. Where students are struggling to maintain their motivation and are not submitting work, we will ask them to work on site as we do not want any students to fall behind and underachieve.

We have made the decision to cancel mock examinations and do not currently have any plans to reschedule these on our return to school. Students are likely to sit exam papers in some subjects as further evidence for a teacher assessed grade when we do return to face-to-face learning, and where these are scheduled by Heads of Faculty, students will be advised in advance.  It remains our intention to support students so that they achieve the best possible results, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged in any way by circumstances created by the pandemic.  We will adapt our plans as necessary when we have more national guidance and will inform students and parents/carers as soon as we know of any changes.

Please do contact us with any queries or concerns.

Kindest wishes to you and your family

**Ms Kennedy**

**Deputy Headteacher**