

12 January 2021

Dear parents, carers and Year 11 students

Follow up to the webinar on 7 January.

Thank you to all those of you that attended last Thursday to hear of our plans to support you during this lockdown period and our plans in the light of the examinations this summer being cancelled.

We noted all your questions and I committed to providing a response to them. These are attached to this letter. I hope you find them useful and reassuring as we move forward.

My overriding message to every Year 11 student is that **every lesson, every piece of work and every assessment** will now help shape the final teacher assessment grade we are able to substantiate.

It is therefore critical that we have full engagement with our remote learning provision or in face-to-face lessons for the small number of students that are eligible to be in school.

I also said that we would plan a further webinar to specifically give more detail related to careers and colleges. We have planned this for **Monday 18 January at 6.00 pm**. To register for this please follow this link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_l4qUE-JTry4NSwjb2yn4Q

If you have any problems registering for the webinar, please contact my PA Mrs Ruth Harrison – harrisonr@lowtonhs.wigan.sch.uk.

I will write to you again by the end next week with more detail on how we will implement the graded assessment model starting from Monday 25 January.

Take care. Stay safe. Stay in touch.

Yours faithfully

Kieran Larkin
Headteacher

CARING, LEARNING AND SUCCEEDING



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from the Year 11 Parent and Student Webinar on 7 January 2021.

Following on from the webinar last week, I said that I would piece together a summary of your questions and our response. Some of these we may have answered in the webinar we didn't because of time.

Some responses are still dependent on the outcomes of the national consultation that the exam regulator Ofqual will be launching this week. We are not likely to know their response and the full detail of the national approach until late February, but we know enough now to proceed with our general approach and we can refine it in due course.

Let me emphasise again, that **every lesson, every piece of work** and **every assessment** will now help shape the final teacher assessment grade we are able to substantiate. It is therefore critical that we have high levels of engagement each and every day from every student. Do contact us if we can help improve this for you at home in any way.

Thank you for your continued support.

Kieran Larkin
Headteacher

1. Will every 'test' be used as evidence towards the teacher assessed grade in a subject?

We will use the full range of evidence available to us to arrive at an informed teacher assessed grade. This includes previous, current and future work.

The Government has said that there will be some form of moderation process. It will be a few weeks before we hear the detail of this, but we can reasonably expect it will make sure that each school for each student in each subject has a range of supporting evidence that matches the teacher assessed grade the school provides.

2. What if I don't do well in some assessments or pieces of work, but do better in others?

The teacher assessed grade will be informed by all the work completed over time using a 'best fit' approach to arrive at a grade based on all the evidence available to us.

The work in the coming weeks and months is likely to be of a higher standard than that produced before now and in Year 10, so it is really important that each student engages in all the work we provide now, carries on with their revision as if the exams were going ahead and does their very best in each of the graded assessments in each of their subjects in the coming weeks and months.

3. Will we know our grades in each subject from the graded assessments?

Each graded assessment is intended to give an indicative grade for that piece of work of the standard that is broadly demonstrated in that piece of work. It is very likely that in a given subject the grade in each assessment is not the same each time – that would be surprising as some students will find some topics easier/harder than others.

However, because we will have a suite of graded assessments to refer to we will be able to arrive at a 'best fit' grade. This will not be a simple 'average' of all assessments, as we would reasonably expect students

grades to get better in the coming months as they complete the course content and the gaps in their learning are addressed and closed. Some graded assessments will cover more content than others.

4. Will we know the final teacher assessment grade that the school submits?

Last year, schools were mandated not to share the data submitted to exam boards with parents or students ahead of results being awarded in August. We will wait to hear what the final guidance on this is for this year. For now, the important thing is that each student does their best in each of the graded assessments to demonstrate what they can do and this will help us finalise the teacher assessed grade in that subject.

5. How will you stop students from copying the work of others and 'cheating'?

The vast majority of students submit their work as their own. However, we are aware that a very small number of students are sharing their work and it is quite obvious to spot. Where this the case, the grade from that work **will not count** and we will exclude it from our records for that student when deciding their teacher assessed grade.

We are looking at how we issue the graded assessments which may include, in some instances, students being observed via the camera on their device. If students do not follow our expectations it will severely impact the reliability of the evidence we are able to draw on and will most likely impact on the grades that can be given.

Students are due back in school after half term. It will clearly be easier to manage that when we have students face to face.

6. Will there be an opportunity for students to catch-up work they did not complete from Year 10?

The exam boards had already published revised detail on what would be in the examinations had they been going ahead. As the exams are not going ahead, we will now do all we can to ensure that each student has evidence that covers as much of the full subject content that was going to be examined.

We will also wait to see the full detail of what is published by Ofqual and the Government following the consultation starting next week. Each subject in school is in the process of mapping out what needs to be taught to ensure all of the relevant content of the course is covered and assessed.

7. Why are you not waiting until the Government publishes the full detail of the arrangements for this summer?

Given that we have been told that the examinations are not going ahead and grades will be issued based on teacher assessment, it is the best interest of students to now start gaining a full and detailed picture in each of their subjects.

We cannot go ahead with mocks as we had first hoped and the challenges of doing them remotely are too large to overcome.

Either way, mocks would be just one part of the overall grade. It is worth remembering that mocks are typically lower than the final grade a student achieves and so a student's final subject grade would be lower if we relied solely on mocks.

8. I am concerned that there will be too much testing and not enough teaching. How will you get the right balance on this?

We know that assessments and testing is part of what we need to do, but our first priority is to ensure the full teaching of the course is done. We have already held meetings in school across all subjects to map this out and adjust our planning and we are now building in when the suite of graded assessments will take place.

We will look at this across subjects so that we map it out fairly across subjects so that we can avoid pressure points.

It is better to think of the graded assessments as 'little and often' - as regular 'check-ins' to see that what has been taught is demonstrated in appropriate tasks and questions that reflect the GCSE grades.

Graded assessments done remotely will not be a full exam paper – that does not make sense or is indeed fair to do. However, part of our approach will be to break up an exam paper into chunks so that we can build up a picture over time as well as provide other assessments to form an overall picture.

9. How will remote lessons help a student to do their best and demonstrate what they are capable of?

We deliberately have a '*blended approach*' of recorded lessons, live lessons and time given over to feedback.

The recorded lessons allow students to work at their own pace, rewind, pause and revisit what has been taught. Live lessons are more interactive and allow for feeding back on work to the whole class or setting up future work. They are very dependent on a stable Wi-Fi connection and no Internet issues. We think this balance allows the best of both approaches.

This has recently been endorsed by Ofsted in their recently published review of remote learning.

We are also starting to catalogue the recorded lessons in each subject so that a student can go back to them to use them as revision. They are more 'bite size' than a full live lesson and are likely to be a better aid for students to revise from.

10. Is there a 'cut-off' date for all of the GCSE work to be completed by?

We have not been told yet what date the teacher assessment information will need to be submitted by. We will let you know when the Government publishes it, but we are not expecting to be told until late February.

We plan to carry on with our teaching and assessment until as late as possible to allow students the most time and opportunity to maximise their grades.

In the context of the time that has been lost during the pandemic, we want to make sure every lesson, every day counts and the evidence that a student provides will help improve their final grade.

11. Will previous mocks and grades be taken into account?

Yes, absolutely but we recognise that these may well be lower than the final grade a student would have got in their examination if they had taken it this summer. We will not unfairly disadvantage any student by what has happened in the past that they cannot now change through no fault of their own.

The message to students is clear. Make it count now and in the coming weeks and months. This is the time to engage with all your work and get the best possible grades at the end that will give you the options to choose what you can do next year.

12. Will college interviews and careers interviews be going ahead?

We will be holding a further webinar on this as we know this needs more time and more explanation.

The date and time for that is **Monday 18th January at 6.00 pm**. We are liaising with our links at each college to gain the information ahead of the next webinar. We aim to make sure that we can support every student with the choices they make next and give them all the support they need to make good choices and complete their applications well. We can do much of this remotely if we need to.

Students can access further information through Xello. This is a personal careers app that students have accessed in school. Xello supports students in identifying skills, interests, career preferences and learning styles. It then tailors the individual student information to provide careers research in pathways that interest them.

It identifies what students need to enter that career in terms of qualifications and skills, and gives them information on the duties and activities related to that career path. Students can use the app to plan their careers journey now and in the future.

13. How are students made aware of their recorded lessons?

The work for each day is posted on Satchel:One. Every student knows their login details.

14. As a parent, how can I find out if they are doing all the work they should be?

Every parent has been sent login details for Satchel One. The password reset function can be used if needed.

15. How will practical elements of subjects be supported from home. For instance, what about the speaking element of the French/Spanish?

We are waiting to hear what the expectations of each exam board will be for the practical elements. For now, we have records of what has been completed to date, but we will look to add to this in due course should we need to.

It was announced earlier in the year that formal speaking exams in French and Spanish would not take place. This element of the course will be assessed in class and through graded assessments.

16. Should students carry on using the revision materials and books they have been given?

Absolutely. All this material is still relevant and the content of it will be looked at in our lessons and graded assessments. It is best to think in terms preparing for the exams as if they were going ahead as this is what we will be covering in the graded assessments.

17. Is lesson 7 carrying on?

While students are at home, we have decided to suspend Lesson 7. When students come back to school we will look to see whether there is a need to reintroduce it.

18. If a student is entitled to special arrangements, will this be taken into account in the graded assessments?

We will do everything we can to ensure a student is not disadvantaged. Some students who are eligible to be in school fall into this category and we will make sure that they complete the graded assessments with all arrangements they are entitled to.

When students are back in school we will make sure that any student entitled to special arrangements has those needs met and we will do all we can remotely to ensure they can access what is being taught and assessed.

19. Will students be told in advance what is going to be in the graded assessments?

We will adopt the method that we were doing for the mocks (that are now not going ahead). That is, we will give advance notice of the topics or skills that are being assessed, but not the actual questions they need to answer.

20. Will students be able to use revision aids to help them with the graded assessments?

This will vary from subject to subject and between the graded assessments. Our overarching aim is to find out what students understand and can do. We are looking to establish a fair and informed grade. We are not looking to catch students out by giving them assessments that make this hard for them to do. However, we do need to make sure that students have sufficient evidence to back up the teacher assessment grade.

Our graded assessment approach will allow us to tailor and adjust assessments over the next few months to ensure that any gaps can be retaught and reassessed giving every student the chance to show us what grade they are capable of.

21. When will the graded assessments start?

We will formally start this from week beginning 25 January when the mocks were due to start. This gives us time to plot out across subjects what is going to be assessed and when, and communicate this to parents and students.

However, in many ways, it is best to think that every piece of work being completed now is helping to inform the final teacher assessment grade.