

11 June 2021



Ralph Allen School

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Dear year 10 parents,

I thought it was important that we inform you of some specific plans for year 10 and share our thoughts on the possible uncertainties for year 11. As you are aware, there has been major disruption in the final examinations over the last two years and we want to make sure students are supported through this process.

This term 'end of year assessments' will take place in the week beginning 5 July. These assessments will be carried out in classrooms. The sole purpose is to assess progress this year. Teachers and tutors are assisting with strategies to support revision and individual subject specific support.

Next year's examinations

We are anticipating that examinations will take place in the summer 2022 and we will continue to prepare students on the journey towards this eventuality. However, we are also conscious of what has happened in the previous two years. To this end we will also record assessments starting in year 11.

Below is an overview of how we applied government guidance this year. Our guiding principles in the awarding of this year's grades was as follows:

- Ralph Allen should provide the best opportunities for students to succeed.
- The process should be open and transparent.
- Judgements will be made using a broad range of evidence.
- The process should reflect the student's ability.

Our experience in carrying out this process means that, if necessary, we can support students if required. We will explain the possibilities to students in term 1 of year 11.

Work experience and Duke of Edinburgh

In addition to the feelings about lockdown, this year group has missed out on several opportunities. We will not be able to build these activities into year 11 and purposely have never included these in their final year due to the focus on examinations. Students will have the opportunity to take the gold award in year 12.

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Work experience has also been impossible due to Covid regulations. To support students, we will be holding our 'informal careers event' next year. This involves students having the opportunity to speak to over 60 employers about their own careers.

Parental support

What can you do as a parent to support? Every student is different, and you know your son/daughter the best. Below is a general overview of how you can support them.

Throughout the year students need to keep motivated and strong. Teaching others is an excellent way to learn so asking about their day and what they have learned is very powerful. I am aware that not all teenagers will initially welcome this conversation, but perseverance will be beneficial. When it comes to revision these are general areas for support.

Preparation

When it comes to revising for exams, preparation is key. Before your child starts revising, help them create a revision timetable; this will hopefully stop them from cramming the information closer to the exams. The timetable should provide achievable goals, dividing their time between each key subject. Making this visual plan should help your child see how they are progressing and stop them from feeling so overwhelmed by the amount they need to learn. Make sure plenty of breaks are included in their timetable, it will help with concentration levels.

Using brightly coloured highlighters, coloured pens and note cards can be helpful when students are trying to digest large amounts of information – so take a trip to the pound shop together and stock up! If past papers are available, build in practise as part of their revision timetable, so that the actual exam is not a shock when they enter it. A planned approach helps reduce their stress, and yours, so it is well worth the extra effort.

(This will help supplement work that is taking place in school. Two tutor sessions each week are devoted to revision and planning strategies).

Techniques

Remember that we all retain information at different rates, and your child might find they are better at remembering one subject over another, so their revision timetable should reflect their strengths and weaknesses. Encourage them to start revision sessions with something they find more difficult – that way they will get the hardest bits out of the way first.

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Talk about all the different ways they could revise and encourage them to shake things up and find ways that work best for them - providing the materials to create mind maps, flash cards, diagrams and flow charts will help. Find out about mnemonics and rhymes that they could use, as these are great techniques for remembering information and make revision a little more fun!

If they are up for it, get the whole family involved in helping with revision. Stick notes and posters around the house with facts on, and then you can quiz each other as a family during mealtimes or in the car. You could also test them with a Q&A session, getting them to speak on a particular topic for a set amount of time, say 2-3 mins - they will probably surprise themselves by how much they know, and it will help highlight the areas they need to focus on.

Motivation

Your child might feel overwhelmed or demotivated at times, trying to balance their schoolwork, revision, and social life. If your child is feeling like this, speak to them about the issues they are coming up against, and help them come up with solutions. Praising your child and reassuring them that however the exams go, it is not the end of world, will help them to feel more confident.

To help your child remain focused, it's so important that breaks are built into their timetable, and you praise them for their hard work and effort. So, if they are revising for 2 hours, let them choose a TV show they want to watch for an hour afterwards, or dish up their favourite dinner to keep their motivation and energy levels up. Remind them that their social life should not end just because they have exams coming up and encourage them to still go to their clubs and meet up with friends.

It is also important to keep exercising during revision and to support their general wellbeing.

Practical support

There may be times when your child is not their usual happy self and does not want to listen to your excellent advice. Try not to get cross if they are stressed and take it out on you – exams will come to an end, and they will return to normal! Be a little lenient when it comes to chores so you cannot be accused of adding extra pressure - of course, exams are not an excuse for bad behaviour, so you will have to strike a balance.

Do not worry if you feel you are not able to help your child with their studies (you are certainly not the only parent who feels that way), being there to listen and provide practical support is just as important - healthy meals and snacks, lots of water and plenty of rest means they can focus on getting the work done. Make sure there is a nice quiet place in the house (or at school) where they do their revision in a calm atmosphere. And finally... try not to interrupt them!

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Microsoft Teams

This is an excellent resource that we were all unaware of eighteen months ago. We will continue to use this for homework next year and be able to upload lots of revision material and support for students.

Final thoughts

We have a strong history of success at supporting young people through the examination process. We are also in this together and committed to support students into achieving their personal best. Please keep in communication with any concerns or further advice.

We are very proud of this year group and how they approach everything with good humour and positivity. They are now the oldest students in lower school and excellent role models for the younger students. It did seem like yesterday when they had their first day in year 7!

Kind regards

A small, square image containing a handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'A. Greenhough'.

Andy Greenhough

Headteacher

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