

St. Gregory's Catholic High School

Cromwell Avenue, Westbrook, Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 1HG.
Telephone: 01925 574888



Headteacher
Mr E McGlinchey BSc (Hons) NPQH & NPQEL

Our Ref: PF/EM/03/20

26th March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers of Year 11 and Year 11 pupils,

Year 11

I hope you are all as well as you can be and looking after yourselves and each other.

My personal feelings towards the way last week and potentially the entire year ended for Year 11, fills me with great sadness as our time together should end in a much more fitting way than it did, this sadness is shared by all staff. I will say more about this topic towards the end of my letter.

In school we have been busy staying open for the key workers of our community and getting to grips with the relentless changes and updates that we receive from the government. We are also forward planning for when school reopens again so that we can recommence the great school we have built at St Gregory's.

I want to provide additional detail to all in our community connected to Year 11 regarding the cancellation of this summer's examinations and what information we have been provided with so far.

The latest advice from the government is dated the 20th March and I have included the questions and answers listed in the 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): cancellation of GCSE's, AS and A levels in 2020' document that I think will be very useful for you to read through. You will find the questions and answers from this document under my signature at the end of the letter.

In my previous letter to parents and carers on the 19th March and during my visits to form classes on the same day, I made it clear that pupils should continue to study at home. There are three important reasons for this:

1. You need to keep your mind active and keep learning so that you are prepared for all eventualities and to complete your courses as best as you can.
2. It will prepare you better for the start of your new courses and qualifications in September as it will ensure a natural stepping stone and reduce gaps in your knowledge.
3. You could be required to return to school within weeks (even though the exams are cancelled) if the government announced a reopening, whilst this is not likely to happen soon, if we did reopen, all pupils would return and your teachers would continue to work on the courses from where they are up to including the remote work that has been sent out.

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Teachers and support staff will continue to do their best to provide work remotely through our online and ICT systems but we appreciate that this is not the ideal way to learn and it is certainly not a like for like substitute for actually being in class with subject specialist teachers and specialist subject equipment where applicable.

Grades

It is expected that we will receive some clarification about this year's qualification grading next week and when we do, we will share this information with you on our website and via school comms.

I mentioned in my previous letter that teaching staff have been asked to review latest grade predictions for all pupils in Year 11 based on all available evidence since the last Year 11 data collection in school. Teachers are now undertaking this exercise and when this is complete we will await further instruction from examination boards, regulators and the government about what we are required to do next with our predictions. As you can imagine this situation is completely unprecedented and therefore examination boards will be working hard with the government to determine how best to resolve this national issue.

In the meantime, Year 11 pupils are more than welcome to be in contact with staff about their courses and to ask for advice where it can be given, however, pupils **should not** suggest what their grade might / should be with staff as all grades will be based on evidence and following any guidance provided to schools by the appropriate bodies.

Destinations after St Gregory's

Year 11 will be clearly and understandably be thinking about their next destinations and as I mentioned in my previous letter, our partner colleges will be very supportive in ensuring that you move to your next chosen destination. I will personally support Year 11 with this process, ably supported by my staff, if there are any issues pupils face in gaining admission to their chosen next destinations.

Support and Safeguarding

Our safeguarding team are very busy contacting pupils and families that have identified as requiring additional contact during this school closure period. If you feel you need additional support or want to speak to staff in school, please get in contact with school as we remain here for you at this difficult time. Contact details are on the homepage of our website or you can contact the Year 11 Pupil Progress Manager, Mr MacKenzie, in the first instance who can direct you accordingly via lmackenzie@stgregoryshigh.com

A fitting farewell

I mentioned at the start of my letter that I was very sad to see Year 11 leave school in the manner that they were forced to by the coronavirus crisis and the urgent need to close schools. I have nothing but wonderful memories of the current year 11 since starting their first day at St Gregory's and we have all been on a great journey since then. Therefore, I want to ensure that when the time is right and appropriate, we can all come together again and have a fitting end to your time with St Gregory's Catholic High School.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr E McGlinchey
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Questions & answers from 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): cancellation of GCSE's, AS and A levels in 2020'

1. Did exams need to be cancelled?

From Friday 20 March, all educational settings are closed to everyone except the children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

The coronavirus outbreak is expected to continue having a significant impact on the education system, and the country, for months to come. Therefore exams have been cancelled now to give pupils, parents, and teachers certainty, and enable schools and colleges to focus on supporting vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

2. What will happen to those who have already done some non-exam assessment?

The calculated grade process will take into account a range of evidence including, for example, non-exam assessment and mock results, and the approach will be standardised between schools and colleges. Ofqual is working urgently with the exam boards to set out proposals for how this process will work and will be talking to teachers' representatives before finalising an approach, to ensure that the approach taken is as fair as possible.

3. How will you address the fact that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have their grades under-predicted?

We are not awarding students their predicted grades. Ofqual, the independent qualifications regulator, will develop a fair and robust process that takes into account a broad range of evidence, including teacher assessment and prior attainment. Ofqual will make every effort to ensure that the process agreed does not disadvantage any particular group of students.

Pupils who do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance will have the opportunity to sit an exam, as soon as is reasonably possible after schools and colleges open again.

4. Will all students get their predicted grade?

No, we know that simply using predicted grades would not be fair to all students. The calculated grade will take into account teachers' assessment of the likely grade as well as other factors such as prior attainment, so students' final grades will not necessarily reflect their predicted grades.

5. Will schools be using mock exam results as a barometer for results – and is this fair on students as they did not know at the time these would be used as their final mark?

Mock exam results will be one of the pieces of evidence that will be taken into account in this process, alongside other factors. Ofqual will ensure schools are provided with clear guidance on how to do this fairly and robustly.

6. Will the past performance of the school be taken into account when devising the calculated grade?

Ofqual will consider carefully how to ensure the process is as fair as possible, which is likely to include considering measures that reflect how much progress a student would have been likely to have made at the school they are attending.

7. Is this an entirely new system?

Exam boards have experience of using moderated teacher assessment to award grades to a number of students, such as those who fall ill immediately before an exam. Ofqual will draw on this experience when developing the process to be used this year.

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8. How will schools/colleges cope with the burden of putting on an atypical exam season?

We recognise that exams are a stressful time for schools and colleges. We will set out in due course the steps we will be taking to minimise this burden.

9. Will universities/colleges/sixth forms accept these calculated grades?

The calculated grades awarded will be formal grades, with the same status as grades awarded in any other year. University representatives have already confirmed that they expect universities to be flexible and do all they can to support students and ensure they can progress to higher education.

10. What if I am unhappy with my grade?

We will work closely with Ofqual and awarding organisations to ensure candidates are awarded a fair grade that recognises the work they have put in. If a student does not believe the correct process has been followed in their case they will be able to appeal on that basis. In addition, if they do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam, as soon as is reasonably possible after schools and colleges open again. Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021.

11. Will there be an opportunity to take exams this year if a student is unhappy with their grade?

We recognise that some students may feel disappointed that they have not been able to sit their exams. If they do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam, as soon as is reasonably possible after schools and colleges open again. Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021.

12. What about private candidates or home educated students?

We will work closely with the independent regulator of qualifications, Ofqual, to explore options for awarding grades to private candidates, including home educated students.

13. Can private centres run GCSEs/A levels if they chose to do so?

No. Exam boards will not be issuing papers for this summer's GCSE, AS and A levels so there will not be the opportunity to sit them at any centre.

14. Does this mean every exam in every module in every subject being cancelled, or will a limited number go ahead at GCSE and/or A level?

Exam boards will not be issuing papers for this summer's GCSE, AS and A levels so there will not be the opportunity to sit them in any subject.

15. What about vocational and technical qualifications?

No exams will be taking place in schools and colleges this summer.

There is a very wide range of different vocational and technical qualifications as well as other academic qualifications for which students were expecting to sit exams this summer. These are offered by a large number of awarding organisations, and have differing assessment approaches – in many cases students will already have completed modules or non-exam assessment which could provide evidence to award a grade. We are encouraging these organisations to show the maximum possible flexibility and pragmatism to ensure students are not disadvantaged. Ofqual is working urgently with the sector to explore options and we will work with them to provide more details shortly.

16. Will parents be required to educate their children while they are off school?

We are completely committed to ensuring that every child receives the best education possible and will be working with the BBC and others to provide resources for children to access while at home.

17. What if have started my coursework but it is not finished?

Exam boards will provide advice on this to schools and colleges as soon as possible.

18. What will young people with university offers do?

The grades awarded to students will have equal validity to the grades awarded in other years and should be treated in this way by universities, colleges and employers. There is no reason for the usual admissions cycle to be disrupted. We welcome the constructive approach taken by the main university representative body, Universities UK, who have said that universities will be flexible and do all they can to support students and ensure they can progress to university.

19. Do universities need to start making unconditional offers / should I accept an unconditional offer now that exams are cancelled?

The grades awarded to students will have equal validity to the grades awarded in other years and should be treated in this way by universities, colleges and employers.

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There is no reason for the usual admissions cycle to be disrupted. Universities should not begin making new unconditional offers and applicants should feel no pressure to accept such offers, as they will be awarded a formal calculated grade for each exam they would have taken.

20. If I already have an unconditional offer, does that remain?

Yes, an unconditional offer means you have already met the entry requirements, so the place is yours if you want it.

21. If I take the exam option, will I still be able to go to university this year?

Students who do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, will have the opportunity to sit an exam, as soon as is reasonably possible after the beginning of the academic year.

While it cannot be guaranteed in every circumstance, Universities UK has assured us that the majority of universities will show the utmost flexibility to ensure that such students who take this option are able to begin their course with a delayed start time.

If a student is in this circumstance, they should speak to the university from which they have an offer after receiving their calculated grade.

22. Are iGCSEs and the International Baccalaureate also cancelled?

We are making clear to all awarding organisations that no exams should go ahead in schools and colleges in England this year.

23. How will colleges, sixth-forms, universities cope with the fact that these students will have missed out on some of their education?

These are extraordinary circumstances. We are working with schools, sixth forms, colleges and universities to ensure that we do everything we can to best help students prepare for and progress to the next stage of their education.

24. Might the exams be reinstated if the coronavirus (COVID-19) is not as bad as expected?

No, the decision has been taken to cancel all exams this summer.

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