



21<sup>st</sup> June 2021

Dear Parents and Carers of Year 10,

### **Coronavirus Update 44**

The first day of our new regime appears to have gone well. There never was any doubt about the educational benefits that would come from teaching our students in surroundings suited to the subjects being studied. My concerns were on the other side of the account, the additional risks that our students might face if the increased movement were not properly handled. So far the signs have been encouraging, thanks in part to the good sense shown by so many of our students.

The virus, as many Year 10 parents will know all too well, has not gone away. There was a case in Year 10 at the end of last week and 30 students are self-isolating as a result. This underlines the need for us to be very alert to any new risks that emerge at the school.

Over the past six or so weeks many of the staff have had to take up a very substantial new responsibility, the testing, assessing and provisionally grading of our A-level and GCSE candidates. It was work which few of us had ever done before, at least in the format required and it was crucial that we did it to the best of our ability.

Our provisional results are now with the exam boards, so that phase of the work is over. There is no escaping the fact that it has been completed at a cost; part of that cost I have to recognise has been paid by members of Year 10.

As we would normally do our very best to prevent any such unbalanced situation from occurring, I want to take a little more time in explaining how it has arisen.

The decision to assess, mark and grade the 2021 A-levels and GCSEs within schools transferred much of the work involved from exam boards, where it is normally done, into schools such as this one. (The exam boards, let me reassure you, retain responsibility for standards and for issuing the final grades.)

The exam boards charged their normal fees when our candidates were entered early in the school year. These fees are a substantial item in our annual budget; last autumn they came to around £140,000. Much of the work which those fees would have covered has, in effect, been done within the school and done without any increase in resources. I have been hoping that a substantial proportion of our fees for 2020-21 will be returned, but even at this late stage there has been no more than a consultation.

We have therefore had to squeeze more out of our existing resources and that has meant shifting the priorities of some teaching staff. At least that phase is now behind us and we can adjust our priorities and bring Year 10 to the front of our concerns.

The assessments next week will be very helpful in identifying where staff – and individual students – need to focus their efforts. These tests are a stocktaking, a diagnostic exercise; whatever the year ahead may hold for the next cohort of GCSE candidates, the findings of next week's assessments will not be part of the overall score or grade.

A report will follow before the end of term. I hope this will bring you up-to-date with your son or daughter's standing in their various subjects. This year has asked a lot of them and a careful assessment at the halfway stage of their courses is more important than ever.

Yours sincerely,



Natalie Waters

Enc. Year 10 Outline Assessment Timetable