



25th March 2020

Re: Wellbeing - Year 11 & Year 13 – and recapping what we know about Exam Replacement Grades

Dear Year 11 & Year 13 Pupils,

I am writing to you today to build on the messages I have sent you via your parents, and further to what I said to you on Thursday in our last assembly / Q&A session. In the fullness of time, I might try to broadcast you an assembly, but we're not yet set up for that, and you and your parents might prefer this advice via letter so that you can read it carefully.

Firstly, I hope you are all managing to keep well, and that you are being honest with yourselves about the anxiety that these times are causing. Please know that it's fine to feel anxious, it's fine not to feel anxious, and it's fine to vary from anxious to not anxious all on the same day! We are absolutely gutted that we can't be with you now, I and all staff miss you terribly (I appreciate that may still be a surprise to you!), and so in lieu of chatting with us, you will need to talk to your parents and friends (not in person!) about how you're feeling – don't bottle it up.

On to exams. You'll know from my words to you last Thursday, and my tweeted letter from the night of the announcements about exams, I was and remain bitterly disappointed for you about events, and recognise the strain for you all right 'at the finish line'. I still feel as I did last week – this is a very bitter pill for you to have no choice but to swallow.

We are working hard all day and night to try and find information for you about exam grade substitutions. I've said before that the school is completely reliant on other organisations for this information. The DfE has not given enough detail (it has only made one announcement), and students are being left feeling like they are in limbo. Therefore, please allow me to try and tell you what useful information we have. Exam boards will:

1. "Give students grades this summer which fairly reflect the work they have put in". **Note they say "have put in" rather than "are putting in", which seems to suggest to us that work to date is what counts, not work now (more on 'work now' latter in this letter).**
2. Ensure "grades will reflect performance as fairly as possible and 'be indistinguishable' from grades given to students in other years."
3. "Ask teachers to tell us the grades students would have got if they had sat exams. They can take into account evidence such as mock exams and non-exam assessment. We'll use the best available evidence, which could include assessments that students have completed." **Again, note this is all about your past performance, not the present (read on...).**
4. ...use data, such as prior attainment, to decide on a final calculated grade. You will get that grade by the end of July.
5. Reiterate that Universities have been encouraged to 'be flexible and do all they can to support students and ensure they can progress to higher education'.
6. Allow students to sit exams early in the autumn term, or summer 2021, if they are not happy that their grade reflects their performance. There will also be an appeal option to query process.



Whilst the above does provide some useful reassurance, it also leaves a lot of questions unanswered, and for me, the key question I as your headteacher have is "when will guidance be given to schools to ensure a fair and robust /reliable process?" For example, whilst your mock results were good, you might be worried they don't reflect your best performance, and I wouldn't expect your grades to be heavily based on your mocks. I think you may worry about your mocks, but I think you *should* try not worry them because: you can't change them now; but perhaps more reassuringly it is the case in all schools that mocks aren't final results, or even close to final results, and the Government is fully aware of this and how it would not be fair to have your mock grades dictate your final outcomes. Remember also that our robust St. Mary's data re your performance across Year 10/11 & Year 12/13 to date proves that you are on track to be an extremely high achieving year group, and I will not rest until that level of achievement is awarded to you.

What should you be doing now then? Well, one-size rarely fits all in terms of advice, and that's true never more so than now. Whilst I recommend you should continue to follow the work that your teacher has set you (though it will reduce in intensity a little going forward), your parents should help you decide what's best for you! They are with you now, not us, and they know you best and most importantly they are best placed to know how you are coping.

Going forwards I have two suggestions for you re work:

Year 11 – we will start preparing you for Year 12 A-Level studies at St. Mary's, as well as keep key GCSE learning alive. More info on that will come out early in the Summer Term if not before, but I see this as an opportunity to help you get ready for your Sixth Form, and we are utterly committed to taking the chance to get you further ahead and make your Sixth Form even more successful than it was already going to be.

Year 13 – as you can see above, you might opt to sit an exam in the autumn. It seems that you would only choose to do that if you weren't happy with your grade. However, in that unlikely event, you would not thank us in future for stopping our assistance and direction now, thereby leaving your skills to fade. Therefore, teachers will change their tasks to more overview-type tasks to help you keep your subject knowledge alive, and we recommend you complete those tasks, subject to your parents now being in the best position to work with you on what seems best for your wellbeing.

My final word is on how we can help you this week and next. If you are in any way anxious and would like one of the teachers to call you, please can you email Mrs Massey, cc Miss McHugh and myself if you are in Year 11, and email Mrs Lumby, cc Miss McHugh and myself if you are in Year 13. Depending on how many calls are requested, we will then put those calls into a rota and assign an appropriate teacher to call you and your parents on your home landline. Please do not hesitate to take up this offer.

I hope this letter is helpful for you, and I trust that you can see we are giving you all the information we can. I will be in touch again as soon as we have more detail, and in the meantime as I tweeted alongside your 'end of year' photos – we could not be more proud of you, and I thank God for the years we have had together. Stay safe, pray, talk to your parents, be kind to them – they are probably very stressed too, look after everyone you can, and continue to be the kind caring, energetic, charismatic and inspiring people that you are.

See you for the Prom and happier times to come. May god bless you all.

Andrew Celano
Headteacher