

12<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope this letter reaches you and your families in strong health - body, mind and spirit. First, I wanted to recognise the positive developments we have made regarding our remote educational provision, which has enabled all students to receive some continuation of normality regarding their education, especially critical for our Y11 and 13 students.

The purpose of this letter is to outline the assessment arrangements for the Spring 2 term, as well as provide some guidance about arrangements for later in the academic year. I felt this important in the absence of DfE announcements regarding the plans for our Y11 and 13 students.

### Spring 2 assessment arrangements:

- Year 11 & 13 students will complete a “**diagnostic exam**” for all subjects that has an examination element to their course. This will be a maximum of **1 exam paper per subject**, which will be selected by the Head of the Department.
- This diagnostic exam is **not a mock exam** and **will not be graded**. Students will receive diagnostic feedback.
- The purpose is to identify **certain knowledge gaps** related to the GCSE or A-level curriculum and provide valuable **examination practice**. It will also enable some evaluation of the learning they have completed remotely since returning in the new year.
- Students will complete these diagnostic exams week commencing **15.3.21**. If students do not return on 8.3.21 or by 15.3.21, **students will complete these diagnostic exams remotely**. We have opted for a plan that can be easily managed in both scenarios.
- Feedback will be given before the Easter holidays that will enable students to focus further on their revision.

Unfortunately, we are yet to receive finalised plans from the DfE regarding how students will be awarded their GCSE and A-level grades, which is potentially causing some anxiety. Although, we cannot provide exact plans, it is important that we put plans in place that we believe is right for our students.

Furthermore, it is most likely that whatever system is put in place for awarding grades this academic year, will require students in Y11 and 13 to take an additional set of mock examinations or “mini-exams”.

Consequently, we have decided that the following will take place in the summer 1 term, after students return from Easter.

- Y11 & 13 students will complete a final set of formal internal examinations
- There are several reasons for these formal internal examinations
  - Help ensure our students stay focussed and motivated on their GCSE/A-level courses
  - Provide our students with some form of validation for their hard work this year in the absence of formal examinations
  - Help to enable us to support students to make the right post 16 and post 18 choices for their future. This is especially important for students in Y11 selecting INA 6<sup>th</sup> form, as it’s a key priority to ensure students are placed on subject courses that are suitable for.



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- Provide valuable data on student performance that will help inform what GCSE/A-level grades they are awarded

Hopefully, we will learn in the coming weeks about the plans for GCSE/A-level students from the DfE and Ark, which will enable us to communicate specific plans and timelines. However, I hope this information provides some guidance regarding our plans.

Lastly, I wanted to highlight some key points regarding Y11 and 13 achievement. Although attendance has been impressive to live lessons, consistently being above 95%, I have experienced some concerning moments whilst observing live lessons and feedback from staff. These are the issues that I wanted to raise with families and students:

- Work completion data is not at the level I expect. This will unquestionably make teacher evaluation of the overall learning much more difficult. It is critical I stress that every piece of work expected to be submitted is building our evidence bank, which will be used to form our overall evaluation of performance and potential performance in each subject.
- Student participation and active engagement in live lessons requires improvement. I have been surprised regarding the low levels of active participation in both Y11 and Y13 lessons, especially how many students are unwilling to use their cameras or provide verbal responses. Feedback from other Ark leaders has provided me with comparisons across the network, whereby I believe that our students are not performing as well as those in other Ark schools.
- Several very concerning behaviour incidents that have arisen during live lessons with Y11 classes. Therefore, I felt it necessary to stress that those students who have disturbed the learning and failed to meet our professional expectations will face severe consequences for their actions, which would lead to them being removed from our community.

I acknowledge and appreciate this is a challenging time for our students to be learning in. It is for this reason that we have been determined to rapidly improve the remote learning provision from what students experienced in Y10 and Y12 during the first national lockdown. I am highly confident we have delivered significant improvements here and our provision is far better than what most schools are delivering. Consequently, we must have far higher standards and expectations regarding Y11 and Y13 learning than we have experienced this half term. Lastly, our constant drive to always improve rests solely on the belief that our students have the potential to achieve great things and we want to know we have done everything to help make this happen.

I hope you all have a positive half term and look forward to seeing the return of our Y11 and Y13 students in the Spring 2 term.

Yours sincerely

Morgan Haines



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Principal