



Smithdon High School

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Re: JHi/AGi/LT

7 January 2021

Dear Parents and students of Year 11

I hope you had a good Christmas holiday and are having a good start to the New Year, albeit a very different one than the one we had all planned.

It was with a heavy heart that we heard in the Prime Minister's broadcast on Monday that GCSE exams have been cancelled this year. We are immensely proud of our Year 11 students who, so far this year, have made significant progress towards their planned GCSE exams. Students adjusted well in their return to school after such a long time absent last year and, since returning in September, they have worked hard to get on track to complete their courses and make the progress so many of them deserve. Teachers were becoming increasingly confident in the learning taking place and the overall maturity our students were displaying. We were, and are, expecting an excellent set of results in 2021.

The Secretary of State for Education announced on Wednesday 6 January that student grades this year will now be based upon Teacher Assessment. We await guidance on what that actually means in practice! What he did make clear, though, was that algorithms would not be used and that teachers would be trusted to recommend the final grade, as was eventually the case last summer. I can assure you that teachers at Smithdon will continue to act professionally, with transparency and with integrity, when making the final judgement on a grade a student should receive.

What is different from last year, however, is that students will return to school and will continue with their education. I cannot stress enough how immensely important it is that students complete their education, ensuring that they continue to give their best efforts to learn the knowledge and develop the skills they will need when they move on to post-16 education and training. As a school, we will make every effort to ensure that each student is not disadvantaged in anyway and has the opportunity to continue on to their first-choice post-16 destination.

It is incredibly important that each student recognises what an opportunity they are now presented with: their teachers want them to succeed! For success to be forged, however, students must engage fully in online lessons over the next few weeks and participate willingly in face-to-face lessons when they return to school after February half term. Attendance both online and in school when we return must be an absolute priority. Teachers will need to evidence their judgements carefully and any gaps will become increasingly more difficult to fill over the next few months as we move nearer to the end of the year. I am confident that our students will recognise this opportunity and continue to apply the effort and dedication towards their studies that they demonstrated before Christmas, probably with renewed vigour.

When the government notifies us of their expectations, we will write again to communicate with you regarding the assessments that will take place in order to evidence our Teacher Assessment grades.

Finally, I want to reassure all parents and students not to worry. I remain confident in both the teachers' and students' ability to continue to excel and that we will be celebrating Year 11 students' successes in the summer, when I hope the world will have returned to normal.

Please take care and stay healthy.

Yours sincerely

Mr J Hirst  
Headteacher

The Cambridge  
Partnership

Graduate Teacher Programme



Maths &  
Computing



Healthy Schools  
Norfolk