



# Venerable Bede Church of England Academy

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DAI/TCG

16 January 2017

Dear parent/carers

As you know, we have recently issued our Y11 pupils with their Mock GCSE exam results following the exams which they sat last term. I thought that it would be beneficial to share some thoughts with you, as well as outline the ways in which we will continue to support our pupils as they progress toward their GCSE exams.

I think that the first thing to consider is that this will be the first time most pupils have been tested on all of the work which she has covered from the beginning of their GCSE course in Y10. There will be topics which they have not looked at for over a year. The performance of the pupils in the mocks helps to identify the areas which they do not understand / have not revised well enough. Teachers are then able to target specifically these areas once the remainder of the content of the GCSE course has been covered. Pupils are guided to study those areas where they need to revise the most. They are told by staff what they got right, and what they did not. They are told where their greatest areas of need are, and these should be studied at home as well as in school. It is often not until after the mocks that the pupils realise what task lies ahead of them. This can be a bit scary for them, but we are here to help.

We have already taken the decision to remodel Y11 tutor groups so that the pupils focus on English or Maths each morning, in groups with other pupils of similar need. This means that the revision can be targeted to the specific needs of that group. The pupils will rotate weekly between English and Maths. I am confident that this will have a positive impact on pupil performance.

Last term we delivered some study skill/support lessons to the pupils. We will continue to do this this term. This should help the pupils to understand what to do to maximise the impact of their revision, and which techniques will work best for them. We intend to provide some further information / resources for each pupil to take home so that parents can support too. It has to be said, revision at home is the single most important factor which determines how well a pupil performs in written exams. Most pupils think that if they revise for a couple of weeks, that is enough. We have tried to dispel this myth throughout Y10 and into Y11. Pupils need to be starting their revision for their GCSE exams approximately 16 weeks prior if they are to fulfil their true potential. This means that they should be revising whilst they are still completing the remainder of the GCSE. Don't worry, we have been explaining this to pupils throughout this year, and we will continue to do so. We will also give parents "reminders" about what pupils should be doing as this year unfolds.

Heads of subject are currently looking at which pupils are needed for specific targeted intervention/support after school each evening. This will be centrally coordinated so that a pupil is not required to attend intervention in two different subjects on the same evening. We will be giving each pupil a bespoke intervention / support timetable. This intervention will begin in a couple of weeks. I must point out that pupils should not think that if they attend intervention that this is enough for revision. Intervention helps pupils to understand aspects of the course which they have not as yet grasped. They still need to do adequate revision at home on all other topics so that they can answer questions on them in an exam too.

Pupils will also have the opportunity to revise together with staff, both in class and after school, nearer the exam once the syllabus is completed. This often helps cement understanding for a pupil as they have the member of staff to ask questions of if they need to. I strongly recommend that all pupils participate in any revision offered to them. Again, a timetable for revision will be managed as far as possible by school so that all subjects are not asking for all pupils on the



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same night. We also run intensive revision sessions for pupils in Y11 during the Easter and half term holidays. It is essential that pupils are revising during these "Holiday" times in Y11 as the GCSE exams are so close. It is important for them to be revising at home as well as at school during these times.

Staff will be continuing to focus on controlled assessment in those subjects where this applies. Pupils need to understand the importance of controlled assessment and should ensure that it is at least at their target grade, if not one grade higher. If pupils go into their exam with good controlled assessment, it gives a greater likelihood of being able to achieve to their full potential.

Another key factor for success is a pupil's attitude toward their learning and determination. Revision and exam preparation is tough going. Pupils often convince themselves that they are working hard, when in reality they are not. Whilst they may spend 3 hours a night "revising", how much time is wasted checking Facebook or Instagram, and communicating with friends? Pupils need to focus fully on their revision and be honest with themselves about how much work they are doing, and how much effort they are putting in (in my experience, this is where parents can help too). Sometimes pupils find it easier to say "this is too hard" or "I can't understand" and give up without really trying to learn the topic. What needs to happen is that they keep working at the topic - not giving up. Each pupil will find many things difficult. Staff can show them how to do something, but it is the pupil who needs to practice over and over until they can do it without any problem.

Attendance and punctuality are key factors to success. The more lessons a pupil misses due to absence, the more learning is lost. Attendance needs to be viewed over the full GCSE course. Topics / lessons missed in Y10 will be equally as likely to come up on the GCSE exam paper. Every day counts. This also reinforces the importance of revision. If a pupil identifies an area which they have missed and do not understand, revision is essential to make up this lost learning. Teachers are there to support too, but pupils need to let them know that they need extra help. Learning is not a passive act. Pupils not only need to be physically present in the room, but they also need to switch on to learning and focus on what they are doing, giving it 100% attention. If pupils chat amongst friends, discuss what is happening that night or at the weekend, valuable time and learning are lost. No one said that lessons were going to be easy. 5 hours working in class each day is hard. It takes a determined effort to remain focussed throughout. What is true is that the more a pupil tries to do this, the better they get at it and the easier it becomes. Finally, parents evening is coming up. Pupils should come along to this too and listen to the advice of their teachers. They should note down all specific advice so that they can look at it again, after parents evening, to remind themselves of what they need to do. Above all, pupils should not panic – even if they have not achieved as highly as they want to. These were mock exam results and not the real thing. I am confident that if a pupil follows the advice given they can fulfil their potential at GCSE.

Lastly, if you are worried about a particular subject, please feel that you can pick up the phone and contact the teacher about your concerns. Remember that most staff teach all day, so it is unlikely that you will be able to speak to them at that point, but they will return your call as soon as practicable.

I found this article on the internet about mock exams. Please take the opportunity to read it as I think that you will find it interesting as well as reassuring.

<https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2015/dec/03/practice-makes-perfect-why-mock-exams-students-brains>

I am confident that by working closely together, in what is the last 6 months of your child's Secondary journey, we can achieve the best possible outcomes.

Yours faithfully



Head of School

