



Malbank School and Sixth Form College



Rejoice in being the best that we can be

Year 11 Exam run-in and study leave 2024 (19/4/24)

Dear Parent/Carer,

As we approach the first weeks of Y11 exams, I just wanted to say a massive well done to Year 11 for their effort to this point. We saw some really pleasing improvements between our Wave 1 and 2 exams and it is clear that many students have worked hard over the Easter break to ensure they are prepared.

As I said to Y11 in assembly on Monday, now is the time for sacrifice, commitment, and relentless positivity from everyone. In around three weeks' time the exams will begin in earnest and trust me when I say that they will be over and complete far quicker than any of us expect – this period will fly by. As such, it is a small sacrifice for our young people to prioritise themselves and their potential for success above anything else in this final push to the finish. Whilst in an ideal world I would love to hear that every Y11 student has been revising consistently since the start of the academic year, I know for some that was always going to be unrealistic. The key however is to embrace the fact that right here, right now there is still time to make an enormous difference. Committing to solid, nightly revision at this stage will have an incredible impact on their outcomes and as a result - their futures. I always talk about not wanting them to be one of the people I meet in town 10 years after they leave telling me they wish they had listened, or how they wish they could go back and try harder. I do not want regrets for any of our young people and this next period is the key moment in time for them to ensure they get to look back in the future and no matter what the result – know they personally did all they could in the run up to be the best they could be.

As a school we also continue to keep looking for ways to do anything we can to support year 11 in this final phase. Many will find themselves taken to do some short interventions, particularly in coursework subjects to ensure they achieve their very best. We are continuing our exam support on MS Teams and encourage students to make the most of some of the brilliant online services we have such as Seneca and GCSE Pod. We are also looking at trying to set up alternative arrangements for students who find the final moments before exams a little stressful in a bid to take them away from the hustle and bustle and collective chatter and speculation that is inevitable before exams. We equally appreciate that there may be moments for some students on the morning of an exam when they feel overwhelmed and parents may need our support in getting students to come to school. We have staff that will be ready to come and help – to come to the home and support the process where needed. All we ask is that you reach out and ask for this help as early as possible so we can plan accordingly and act in time to get the young person here before the national cut off time for the exam. In another attempt to make the start to exam days more effective we are also pleased to announce starting on May the 7th we will be providing free breakfast for Y11 students throughout the exam period to ensure all students have the fuel they need to embrace the challenges put in front of them. We will explain how this will work in forthcoming assemblies with the students.

We have also made the decision to purchase enough scientific calculators (and really good ball point pens) to modernise our exam packs if students do not have their own equipment. As a side note – please do all you can to support your young person in having their own pen, calculator and other relevant equipment, not because it solves a problem for us (as the investment has already been made) but because having equipment they know and feel comfortable with is incredibly important psychologically in terms of them feeling calm and prepared for what they will undertake. On a personal level, I would never ever want to write an exam with a pen that was not one of the ones “I like” – maybe I’m in the minority...but it is certainly something we can control about the experience!

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It is also at this point that we need to carefully consider attendance to lessons in school. I know that other local schools will start to publish their approach and I wanted to make sure you were well informed as early as possible. As was the case last year, I feel that as a year group who had a lower school experience of disruption during COVID, keeping them and helping them until as late as possible is the morally right thing to do. In making this decision I have consulted with other Headteachers in Cheshire East to try to find a consensus, particularly with Mr Cole at Brine Leas and can confirm that the decision we have made matches the overwhelming majority of Cheshire schools and is the same as our Nantwich neighbours.

I fully accept that revision is something that is very bespoke to each individual. Some students need us and want to be told exactly what they need to know until the minute before the exam. I also accept that others would benefit from being able to revise from home and would do so far more effectively. I know from considering my own children that it is likely I would want two totally different approaches for both of them – one would be best served in school whilst the other would be better at home.

As such there is a natural break point in the exam season at half term (Friday May 24th) where a significant number of exams will be complete. It is at this point that I would like to put the ball for making that decision in your hands as a family. We will be here, ready to teach and support in every lesson up to the end of exams. We will continue to run our drop-down sessions before exams wherever possible and a timetable for these sessions designed to support students before they sit an exam is attached to this letter. (N.B The attached document shows all sessions until half term and will be followed by another discussing arrangements for after half term in the next week or so.)

If as a family you decide your student would be best served at this point revising at home, can I ask that you email ks4@malbank.cheshire.sch.uk to let them know that you give permission for your child to leave after an exam if they have no more exams that day. Students taking up this offer would then have to sign out – we would not be able to allow them to exit unless you have given permission. For clarity – this offer is only available after May 24th, and only if your child wishes to revise at home – they are very very welcome to be here! This does not also have to be an “all or nothing” model. We are more than happy for students to choose to leave on some days and stay in for our revision sessions on others – in other words they can do what fits best for them daily after the 24th.

Thanks for all your support for us as a school and most importantly for the students in this final phase of year 11. I do not underestimate how their pressure translates into pressure for you as a family and as such I genuinely appreciate everything you have done to help them at home and will do to keep them motivated, positive and confident as the exam season begins.

If you have any queries or concerns about the forthcoming exams, or optional study leave after half term, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours,

John Harrison
Headteacher - Malbank School and Sixth Form