

18 January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

I thought it would be helpful if I resume my Monday Parent Update - this will also be published on the school website as a weekly blog.

Firstly, I wanted to say once again how well our students are doing....every day I get emails from teachers saying how engaged and enthusiastic their classes are. I know this is no substitute for coming to school and having real lessons as opposed to 'live' lessons but I think the infrastructure is now in place to get us through to February Half Term. If lockdown continues through to March, or we have a staggered return, I will write to you as soon as I am made aware by the DfE.

From today, we are tracking attendance in each lesson and tracking participation. If you do have any IT issues please let your child's form tutor know. Equally, if you have any connectivity issues, please contact our IT helpline itsupport@birchwoodhigh.org.uk. We are also keeping to our interim report and parents evening schedule (done on-line). We will shortly be writing to you with a short Survey Monkey questionnaire to find out what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

Year 11 and 13 update:

If you have a child in Year 11 or 13, following the Government's decision that GCSE, AS and A level exams would not go ahead as planned later this year, the Secretary of State for Education has asked Ofqual, the exams regulator, to consult on alternative arrangements for the award of these qualifications.

The overarching expectation is that, this year, GCSEs, AS and A Levels will be based on teachers' assessment of the performance of their students (and that there will be no algorithm used to determine grades at national level).

Ofqual has now published the consultation on the proposed 'alternative arrangements', detailing suggested processes and systems required to award grades fairly and consistently in summer 2021. The full set of proposals can be found [here](#) and responses can be made online [here](#) until January 29th 23:45pm. There is a connected and complementary consultation on the arrangements for vocational, technical and other qualifications, which will be covered in a separate letter.

The key proposals for GCSEs, AS and A Levels are outlined below and cover the assessment expectations and arrangements, the timescales involved, quality assurance processes, results days and appeals.

Key proposals in the consultation:

- A student's grade in each subject should be based on their teachers' assessment of the standard at which they are performing.
- The grade recommended should be evidence-based and that evidence will need to be retained for exam board sampling.
- The final assessment should be informed by a breadth/combination of evidence, but there may be limits on what schools can use to inform their judgements.

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- To account for time missed as a result of the pandemic, assessment should focus on the content students have covered (but there will be a minimum proportion of the overall subject content that will need to be considered).
- Exam boards should provide a set of papers (either compulsory or optional) to support teachers in assessing their students' work; these will be marked by teachers.
- Non-exam assessment should be taken into account in the final assessment.
- Final assessment should be made towards the end of the academic year, at about the time students would have taken their exams and will involve internal standardisation and moderation.
- Grades would be submitted to the exam boards by mid-June and results would be issued to students in early July, after the exam board had undertaken quality insurance (including sampling of work).
- Students would not be told the grade their school has submitted before results day.
- Students would be able to appeal but a grade would only be changed if it is found not to represent a reasonable assessment.
- A Level students would be informed of their results before universities (to allow for an appeal process) to support fairer admissions decisions.

Once Ofqual publishes its final decisions on the process for assessment, we will, of course, keep you informed of the outcome and next steps. This will include further specific guidance from the exam boards on particular subject expectations.

For now, it is essential that students, who were expecting to take exams later this year, continue to work hard so that they are well prepared for whatever assessment process is expected of them and their teachers – the evidence to date shows that are doing this extremely well.

Sixth Form applications update:

Having received a record 150 applications from our Year 11 students and 120 external applications, we will be contacting you shortly to arrange a 1:1 interview on line to discuss your application, expected GCSE levels and any career aspirations.

How to support your child at home:

Finally, I thought I would share five top tips for supporting your child with home learning from a recent BBC review:

- 1 Keep to a routine:** We are keeping to a routine at Birchwood of delivering normal lessons as per timetable without setting homework (unless you are in the Sixth Form). This should allow your child to register with their form tutor, have five on-line lessons including two 30-minute breaks and finish at 3.00pm so they can get some fresh air or do what they want to do.
- 2 Be organised:** Not having to pack your bags the night before should mean that students have time to check their timetable for the following day and make sure they have enough stationery, essential equipment, charged headphones and charged mobile device if required.



- 3 Listen to your children:** If your child is sticking to their timetable from 8:45am to 3:00pm, then allowing them space or time out is a fair return. If they are struggling or not keeping to their timetable, research shows that it is best to try to listen to them rather than tell them off in the first instance. Some students struggle with on-line learning whilst others thrive. They may have other issues or concerns and please contact your child's Form Tutor or Head of Year if you feel they need additional support.
- 4 Don't let a lack of space or resources hinder you:** This may sound like an odd 'top tip' as its easy to think that having a big desk, a quick computer and space are prerequisites for success but actually eating well, trying to get a good night's sleep and fresh air and exercise are more important.
- 5 Cut yourself some slack as a parent:** You're doing an amazing job. It's also, hopefully, a once in a lifetime opportunity to have your child(ren) at home doing so much school work. Give them some slack to give yourself some slack – secondary school children are, on the whole, very good at working independently with the help of 'google'.

Yours sincerely

Chris Ingate

Dr Chris Ingate
Principal