KS4 Parents’ Forum
GCSE’s 2016-18
Introduction

The next two years are very important and very challenging ones. Your child will be doing a lot of growing up and will be studying for their first formal qualifications in 2018. Their performance at GCSE will influence the amount of choice they have at 16+ so we’re going to be working extremely hard to allow your child to make as much progress as they can during this time.

This booklet is designed to give you a record of the information about the courses and advice about effective studying that we will share with you at the KS4 Induction mornings. Keep it handy for future reference! We will put a copy on our website too of course.

Experience has taught us that young people perform best when parents and school work in close partnership to support learning and when the pupils get off to the best possible start in Year 10. We’ve learnt that from our work mentoring Year 11 underachievers: we’d much rather get everyone into good habits now than try to crisis manage next year. We already know the pupils who worked extremely hard and made excellent progress at KS3 and those who perhaps didn’t push themselves hard enough during the past 3 years because we’ve been monitoring their progress very closely. This very close monitoring will continue with even more intensity at KS4. This is a fresh start for everyone now though and with the right approach every child can make progress over the next two years.

Your child’s Head of Year team is now Cathy Harrison with Ian Higson. They are your first points of contact if there are any problems you wish to discuss and they will be looking after your child throughout their GCSE years, monitoring their progress closely and providing lunchtime study support so that they can get to know more about your child as a learner. They will contact you if there are any concerns or ways we think you can help too. They are supported by two Assistant Heads, Lisa Longley and Phil Houghton who are also there to assist you and your child on a daily basis in school.

Thank you for your continued support of your child’s learning; they can’t do it without you!
Overview of Year 10

**Autumn term**

September  
KS4 Inductions  
Identification of pupils who needed to make more progress at KS3

October  
Effort grades and comments

December  
Effort grades / Predicted, target & DfE grades

**Spring term**

February  
Effort grades  
Subject review afternoon

March  
Year 10 Assessments

April  
Effort grades  
Assessment results  
Updated PG / TG  
Academic review

**Summer term**

June/July  
Mock interviews  
Awards ceremony  
Work experience week  
Effort grades and comments  
Identification of pupils who need mentoring in Year 11
Overview of Year 11

This is a draft based on this year’s programme.

**Autumn term**

October  
- Assessment Window  
  Assessment Grades and updated PG / TG  
  Effort grades and comments

November  
- Academic Reviewing

December  
- Effort grades

**Spring term**

January  
- Sixth form open evening  
  Subject review afternoon

February  
- Mock exams  
  Effort grades

March  
- Interviews for sixth form

April  
- All controlled assessment – final deadline  
  Mock exam results  
  Effort grades with comments  
  PG/TG sent home

**Summer term**

May  
- Awards ceremony  
  School Based Revision – exams begin!

August  
- Results day
Linear Courses

Your child will be taking all linear examinations. That means that all of their exams will need to be taken in the final summer term of Year 11. This presents a very particular set of challenges that we all need to bear in mind from the outset:

- Students will need to make clear, full notes throughout their courses and to store them safely for future reference. Make sure there is somewhere at home for the safe storage of revision materials that will start to accumulate from day one.
- Regular attendance is absolutely vital now. Please avoid taking your child out of school for any reason and let us know if there is an unavoidable absence so that we can make sure your child gets the right support to catch up on learning they miss.
- Students will need to consolidate learning as they go along - it’s no good hoping to cram at the last minute as the understanding and skills won’t be there. Look at the section on Good Study Habits for a simple daily routine that ensures effective consolidation of learning.
- Students will need to develop real stamina as they prepare for around 20-25 hours of exam writing in a short time span - of particular significance will be their core literacy skills of planning, presentation, expression and revision. Successful students treat every day as a training opportunity for this writing marathon, taking care to do their best when writing in every lesson and for each homework.
- We will need students to take the 3 sets of internal examinations very seriously indeed. These formal assessments need to feel like the real thing and revision needs to be undertaken most conscientiously.
- We know from our research that effort grades of mostly 4s are what it takes to succeed at GCSE. An average of 3.82 is the magic figure! Have a look at what it takes to get a 4 for effort - the grade criteria are on page 24 of the KS4 Planner – and make this your minimum expectation.
Controlled Assessments

Most courses have significant controlled assessment and/or coursework elements in them. It’s really important that each piece is the best possible standard your child can achieve at the time, so again attendance and 100% effort from the outset are crucial.

There are 3 categories of controlled assessments:

Low Level: you can work on the task set outside the classroom.

Medium Level: you can work on the task under supervision (in class but discussion can take place with other pupils).

High Level: you write up your task in a supervised classroom environment (exam conditions). You should treat this like an exam.

The controlled assessments are worth a varying percentage of your GCSE depending on the subject. E.g. ICT is 75% and Resistant Materials 60%.

Most of the pieces will be done in school time. This means that students will need to use their time very carefully at home for developing their understanding and reflecting and building on their learning: in other words home LEARNING as opposed to home work.

Pieces for assessment need to be submitted on or before the deadlines set by staff. Make sure that your child has their deadlines written clearly in their planner and use the planner to help your child to manage their time and do the best they can.

The examination boards are very strict about the work being the candidates’ own. We’re allowed to support most of the work with discussion, feedback, advice about ways to improve work and help with understanding but we’re not allowed to do any of the work for them….and neither are you!

The boards are on the alert for plagiarism: it’s actually very easy to spot pieces of writing pasted from the internet. Everything must be in the candidate’s own words.
Controlled Assessments

The most successful candidates plan pieces thoroughly, write high quality first drafts that they check thoroughly themselves before submitting them for feedback and respond conscientiously to suggestions for improvement, allowing time to do the work properly at each stage.

The least successful candidates start working on a piece far too late, don’t have the right materials and information with them while they’re working, dash off a half-hearted first draft that they don’t even read through themselves but expect their teacher to virtually rewrite (they shouldn’t!) and make very few changes – if any – in response to feedback.

Another way to get it wrong is to over work assignments though. A well planned first draft and rewrite or a well-planned and steadily developed practical project should do the trick.

If there are any problems with controlled assessments, teachers are only too happy to help and support, provided they get asked in enough time. Telling someone a couple of days before the deadline is leaving things a tad late!

The secret of successful controlled assessment is therefore to start early enough, attend all the sessions in school, use the home learning time properly, plan carefully, make it your best work and check things carefully before submission.
The KS4 Tracker

Throughout KS4 we track the progress of your son/daughter. Towards the end of September we produce predicted and target grades for each pupil using data gained from the DfE. The data shows national progress from the KS2 average points score to each GCSE grade in each subject at the median (progress made by the top 50% of pupils) and the upper quartile (progress made by the top 25% of pupils). The grade shown as DfE predicted grade is the median grade and the DfE target grade is the upper quartile grade.

At four stages during KS4 we collect predicted and target grades from staff for each subject. These are collected in December and April in Year 10, October and March in Year 11. Also on the tracker is the result for each subject in the Year 10 and Year 11 mock exam. We compare the predicted and target grades from staff and the Year 11 mock exam grades with the DfE grades and any discrepancies are investigated by the pastoral team.

Also on the tracker are shown the effort grades and teacher comments for each subject throughout KS4. As with the predicted and target grades any deterioration in effort by your son/daughter can quickly be seen and again investigated by the pastoral team. Effort grades are produced by staff at the end of each half term and comments in October and June of Year 10 and October and April of Year 11.

Glossary

DfE - Department for Education
Predicted grades - what we think your child will get if their current performance level continues
Target grades - what we think your child could get if they work harder or smarter
Everyone learns in different ways so it's really difficult to give you a description of the ideal way to study. It is important though that all our KS4 pupils work out a way to learn effectively. We can give them lots of advice and guidance but the real work starts at home with you and this is one of the most important of your contributions.

One tip is to think about working smarter rather than harder: more hours slaving over textbooks is not necessarily the best way to improve learning.

Learning happens in the brain: it's basically a process of laying down new neurological pathways and there are simple things we can do to help this process along. One way is to have a routine which enables you to revisit learning briefly a few times over a period of a couple of days. It goes like this:

1. Get home from school, unpack your bag and look at what you learnt in each lesson today.
2. Write down the 3-5 important things you learnt that lesson. Store your notes in a revision folder. They'll be brilliant revision notes later.
3. Look at your planner to see what lessons you've got tomorrow. Read through the revision notes you made last time for all these subjects.
4. As you approach each of those lessons the next day, remind yourselves of your previous learning: this puts you in the “zone of proximal development”, in other words you are ready to add new learning to a solid base of what you know already. These are the best conditions for learning.
5. In each lesson think of one question to ask about what you are learning: it should help you to concentrate!

This takes minutes rather than hours, but you get a massive return in terms of brain training! It's a case of making the brain focus and work harder rather than making the pen or the word processor write more. It's more active than just re-reading and hoping some of it sinks in. It takes discipline though, which is where parents come in.

We need to get KS4 pupils to start thinking in terms of home learning rather than homework and regarding any learning they do at home as something they do for their own benefit and not for the teacher. The above system means that there is no such thing as “no homework” of course.

We will give lots of advice about revision during the preparation for exams. The important thing to remember from the outset is that your child will need something to revise from. They need to be making good notes and keeping them safe from now on.
Making good use of the Library and the internet

The effective use of varied resources is key to obtaining good grades in all areas of study at GCSE. We live in an 'information age' in which many students feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information available to them, and consequently need help to navigate pitfalls such as plagiarism, finding relevant and credible data and evaluating their sources. This is where the Library and Library staff can help.

The key to achieving good grades when doing academic research at this level is planning. Many students will leave things until the last minute, do a quick Google search and then copy and paste the information into a Word document, adding the occasional sentence to make the work seem like their own. At no point will this get them top grades, and the amount of learning they have managed to achieve from the exercise is limited.

Students need to plan their work effectively by working out how long they have to do the work, and by knowing exactly what their end product is supposed to be. Teachers will give students the research question and the assessment criteria at the beginning of a piece of work, so that students know what they need to work towards. They then need to work out what exactly it is they need to look for.

In the first instance, students are encouraged to access the Library where they will find both online and offline resources. A search on the Library Catalogue, or digital Library resources such as Credo Reference, will produce information that is specific to the question they have been asked to answer. All of these resources have advanced search options where you can combine keywords in order to narrow down or extend a search. Students are encouraged to use the Internet, but it is important they are aware of who has produced the site and their qualifications. The Library Catalogue not only shows you books, but also hundreds of pre-approved and regularly updated websites, so this is a good place to start. Wikipedia appears to many students to be a great source of a wide variety of information, but many of their entries have huge mistakes as it is an open source which can be amended by absolutely anyone. A quick tip is that if there is no evidence of who produced the information or how long ago, you may want to look for a more credible source.

Once students have found the information they need, they must learn how to use it appropriately. Cutting and pasting from the internet, or photocopying and then typing in chunks from books is not the way to produce effective results. Reading the information, understanding it, then quoting or paraphrasing with the appropriate citations and bibliographical references, will help them avoid the very serious issue of plagiarism. This will also produce a better understanding of the material, and therefore better grades.

The Library staff offer advice and guidance to students as required on all aspects of the research process. Please speak to Mrs Holman or Miss Sosnowsky, our Librarians, if you require more information.
Using the planner properly

The planner should be used for PLANNING!!!! Whilst this looks like we’re stating the obvious, in actual fact the vast majority of pupils just use it for writing down the homework that’s been set that day. Using it properly will help enormously with coursework, deadlines and revision though. Here’s how:

1. Write in the dates of controlled assessments, tests, mocks and external exams.
2. Decide on an earlier date at which revision or preparation for these should start and write in “Start revision”.
3. Draw up a revision plan and write the topics for revision each day into the planner.
4. Write in the deadline dates for controlled assessment preparation.
5. Write in early dates for assessment tasks as soon as you get to know them.
6. Write in the periods when you will be undertaking medium and high level assessments and plan your home learning activities (e.g. think about….., find out about….., discuss……., reflect……., learn…….)
7. Write in major commitments out of school or even ones in school like tournaments, productions or visits etc and assess how these will impact on work completion and study. Make provision for early completion or catch up and write the times this will happen in the planner.

Remember the 4 P’s! Planning Prevents Poor Performance!
The contribution parents make to learning

Creating the right conditions for learning at home takes a bit of planning too. It’s a good idea to talk to your son or daughter and establish some ground rules that they accept. Issues to decide on are:

- When will your child do their 2 hours an evening? – this time needs planning around extra-curricular and family activities. Each day could well have a different pattern but it is important that you work as a family to find the time.
- Where will your child work? – ideally this should be in a warm, well-lit environment with a work surface at the right height and a comfortable supportive chair. Crucially, there should be no TV or intrusive noise: we wouldn’t recommend listening to any music apart from very soft music without words - it’s far too distracting otherwise. Make sure that everything needed for studying is close to hand to avoid the need for lots of avoidance tactics!
- How will your family provide a supportive learning environment? – think about whether it’s fair to have lots of other noisy activity going on, including TV watching. Can you agree to support the learning process by reading quietly or completing important paperwork or other quiet chores whilst all-important learning is taking place?

There are some pitfalls for parents to watch out for too:

- Homework hounding: avoid the nagging and go for lots of encouragement and praise instead. Ask your child to tell you what they’ve done well and what they’d like to improve rather than criticise.
- Learned helplessness: when your child has got themselves into a state because they have forgotten something or have missed a deadline, don’t run around trying to compensate for them. Ask them how they are going to deal with the problem and avoid a recurrence. It’s better for them to face the consequences of bad habits or poor organisation in the short term and learn to be independent and self-reliant in the long term.
- “I haven’t got any homework” This is never actually true. There is usually coursework to be getting on with and there is ALWAYS consolidation of learning to do. (See the section on Good Study Habits)
- Cyberslacking: some pupils give the impression of furious typing and high levels of focus when they’re actually chatting to their friends on-line. Check out the task bar at the bottom of the screen!.....oh, and it’s best to have mobiles switched off during study time.
A parent’s guide to exams

Pupils at QES receive a wide range of advice to help them to prepare for exams, from PD lessons on how to learn, how to put together a revision timetable and revision techniques to individual subject guidelines and revision guides.

But school is only the half of it. Support at home does make a huge and very positive difference. Revision for exams does have to be done and it demands discipline, organisation and structure. It’s not easy and therefore pupils need to be encouraged. It is important for them to know that there is someone at home who is interested in what they are doing. Sitting in their bedroom with just a pile of books for company can feel very lonely. Pupils need to know that they are not on their own so the most important thing parents should give is their time.

Parents should have a very active role in helping their child to organise their revision, testing them and offering support when the going gets a bit tough.

Parents should help by:

- Working with their child at the planning stage – you can reduce stress and anxiety by helping them start their revision early and by making sure that all subjects can be covered. Create a revision planner by making a list of all the topics that need to be revised with a mix of subjects each evening.
- Encouraging their child to work in short bursts of 20 to 30 minutes followed by a break. Look at the notes that have been made at the end of each 20 to 30 minute slot, that way children know they need to have something on paper.
- Checking that they are revising actively rather than sitting passively reading through an exercise book, by making lists and diagrams and covering the walls with mind maps.
- Helping them to use memory retrieval techniques such as mnemonics or phrases e.g. 30 days hath September.
- Actively testing them on topics.
- Watching out for revision programmes on TV and also on the internet.
- Making their child’s bedroom/study area an effective revision environment and that means free from TV noise, loud music and text messaging!
- Ensuring they get enough of the most essential ingredient – sleep. Staying up until 1am revising means something is wrong. They need to get a good night’s sleep during revision and the actual exams.
- Checking that they have breakfast and eat sensibly: it gives them the energy to learn and improves concentration.
- Allowing quality relaxation time – remember ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’!
Risky Behaviour

We are committed to working with you in order to keep your child out of harm’s way. We know that it is increasingly difficult for parents to know what the boundaries should be as more and more parents allow their 14-16 year olds a great deal more freedom than they had at that age.

We can help by sharing information about the risks with you and we are just a phone call away should you ever wonder if you're doing the right thing letting your child go to this party or that sleepover.

If you err on the side of caution and never let your child go out unless you know where they’re going, what they’ll be doing, who they’ll be with and which adult will be responsible for their safety you won’t go far wrong. Young people of this age should never be allowed to wander aimlessly about in the evenings: they’ll be exposing themselves to all kinds of risks.

It’s also very important to monitor your child’s e-safety. You can find out more about the risks and how to protect your child on the e-safety section of our web-site (under QES Info).