

Saint Ambrose College

State-funded Independent Catholic Grammar School

Principal: Mr D. Rainey B.Ed (Hons)



Year 11 Students

25th March 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

Thank you for your continued patience and understanding.

I thought I would take the opportunity to update you on our current situation and plans as well as addressing some of the questions that are being asked.

We are aware that accessing MILK during school hours has been problematic. We have been in regular contact with the MILK team and their latest update is that *'Our engineers are currently adding another web server instance to our infrastructure and configuring load balancing to cope with heavy user loads.'* Although MILK continues to be our primary platform for distanced learning, we are continuing to train staff on Microsoft Teams and our internal shared area should we need to change our systems. Some departments are already using alternative platforms but we are keen to limit what we use to allow everything to be manageable. We will keep you updated.

Understandably, last week's announcement about exams has resulted in some queries about what to do in terms of completing work set on MILK, continuing with GCSE content and looking ahead to A levels and other courses. I will try to state our position as succinctly as possible but I'm sure there will be further questions as time goes on.

In the assemblies with Year 11 last week, students were told (even before we knew how grades would be arrived at) that at the very least they should be prioritising the GCSE content in the subjects (including reserve subjects) they wish to study at A level. Students cannot begin an A level course if there are gaps in skills and knowledge. Even if GCSE courses have been completed, the A level courses are still more than 5 months away and therefore structure and routine in applying themselves to these courses now is going to be critical. Students were told that we might look at a system of asking students to take an exam in the subjects they want to take at A level at some point before September. The purpose of this approach is to ensure that students can demonstrate/evidence that they have the necessary knowledge to make the transition and ultimately be guided correctly on to the correct courses to ensure successful outcomes at Key Stage 5. We feel that this would be a responsible approach. Therefore, they should be focused and committed to their studies between now and then.

We are also looking at transition work and projects which will also help bridge the gap between GCSE and A level courses. Subject leaders will be looking in to what would be suitable at the end of the Easter holidays but the focus until then should be securing GCSE content, knowledge and skills and students certainly have plenty of materials to access including through external sites such as GCSE Pod and SENECA. Transition materials will follow when ready and I will circulate contact details of Subject Leaders at that point.

You will have received a Parentmail earlier today from Mr Groves regarding reports for your son with an explanation that the reports were written before the changes to the exams. It is important to note that although much of the content in reports may not now be relevant, the data and written comments might still be useful in closing gaps and directing next steps in your son's learning.

Hale Barns, Altrincham, WA15 0HE.

t: 0161 980 2711 f: 0161 980 2323 e: office@st-ambrosecollege.org.uk www.st-ambrosecollege.org.uk

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As mentioned in a letter earlier in the week, please refrain from contacting staff about predicted grades. For clarity, although teachers will have significant input, external regulators will apply the final grade. The following bullet points help shed light on the process:

- Exam boards will then combine this information (teacher predictions/data) with other relevant data, including prior attainment, and use this information to produce a calculated grade for each student, which will be a best assessment of the work they have put in.
- Regulators and exam boards will be discussing with teachers' representatives before finalising the approach, to ensure that it's as fair as possible. More information will be provided as soon as possible.
- The aim is to provide these calculated grades to students before the end of July.
- In terms of a permanent record, the grades will be indistinguishable from those provided in other years.
- Exam boards also aim to ensure that the distribution of grades follows a similar pattern to that in other years, so that this year's students aren't disadvantaged.
- Students will be able to appeal their grades if they don't believe the right process has been followed.
- There will also be an option to sit exams early in the next academic year for any students who wish to. Students may also choose to sit exams next summer.

We are responding to the government's request to remain open during the scheduled Easter holidays but this will continue to be for vulnerable students and children of critical workers tackling COVID-19. With the guidance stating that people should stay at home if they can, we don't envisage the need for any Year 11 students to be in school over the Easter fortnight.

I will continue to update when necessary and appropriate.

Take care, stay safe and look after each other.

Yours faithfully

Mr D Rainey

Principal

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