

Dear Year 10

It is now an incredible nine weeks since we finished school back in March. When we finished that day we really didn't know what the summer would be like but of course we now understand the huge effect this virus has had on everything we know as normal. When unexpected things come to challenge us we do our best to overcome them, but this is unlike anything any of us have ever seen. I have not known a situation that has fundamentally changed the way we go about our daily lives to this extent, and right now cannot wait for us to return to what we knew.

If things were normal, Year 11 would be into their exams and would be about to start their study leave tomorrow, making you the senior year group at school. You would all be in summer uniform and enjoying the good weather and the little things that come with it like being able to enjoy the school field during lunch times. You would be getting really close to Work Experience, which I am incredibly disappointed to have had to cancel. Primary school pupils would start to appear for visits as part of their induction to our school, looking forward to their time as high school pupils.

Can I say I have been incredibly impressed with the way most of you have gone about the whole home study thing so far. Teachers report to me that most of you have worked incredibly well and have clearly been able to work independently. This is great, well done. Producing five hours of good quality work when at school with a teacher leading and explaining is hard enough on its own, so to do this entirely by yourself is a real challenge. Some of you have struggled I know, but it is important you keep going. In lessons and at school normally you get lots of interaction and feedback from your teachers in every lesson, and we know whatever we have tried to provide online cannot fully replicate that. But, keep doing what your teachers ask you to and you will be ok. Teachers are finding this way of working very time consuming, and we are always considering ways of improving things. Some have considered attempting face to face 'lessons' on Teams or Zoom, as have teachers we know at other schools, but they present other issues and so far we think they are unsatisfactory and unsuited to a typical Year 10 GCSE lesson, resulting in more work for teachers and frustration for pupils. Although I will not ask your teachers to attempt these as an expectation from me, if any of them want to try it they are welcome to.

Some of you will feel you are working hard but will be worried that this is going to affect your GCSE performance and final grades. Don't worry, and be reassured that this cannot be allowed to happen. What you need to do is carry on doing your best and working hard. When we get the chance to return to normality your teachers will be ready with a plan to

get you all to where you need to be. The fact is that every Year 10 pupil in the country is in the same position as you right now, and although this has not been addressed yet, it is simply impossible to accept that an entire year group across the country are disadvantaged because of the current closure of schools. Fairness and the elimination of disadvantage is a key principle of schools and education, and please just trust that your hard work and efforts will not go to waste; you will get what you deserve. Keep working hard and if you have a friend or two that you feel are beginning to lose motivation, be a great friend and keep in touch with positivity and optimism for them; hopefully they would do the same for you if they felt you were losing energy and drive.

Normally this term is when we really start to work with you on forming your plan for what you will do once you have finished your GCSEs, with a series of Career related events, so that you can do your Work Experience and then spend the holidays pondering life after Year 11. We will do all this in September, but it might be we decide to kick start this process by sending you relevant stuff online for you to look at. If you have time, why not look at the websites for Reepham College, City College Norwich, Easton College and Apprenticeships Norfolk, just to get you started? This will allow you to see the sort of courses available to you, and will explain the GCSE grades you will need to get onto a course. We will build upon this next year.

Finally, you may be aware that the school is considering ways in which we can start to get you back in. I wrote to your parents yesterday about this. Although there are many conditions that need to be met yet, I hope that some time between half term and the end of term we are able to get some of you in for some face to face support. I imagine this will not be anything like a normal school experience, because there will be restrictions to ensure your safety and that of your teachers, and will involve fewer pupils being in any classroom as well as probably having the same teachers for an entire day, but it will be a chance to focus on the work you have done and are doing, to reassure you and help you. It certainly will not be full time and indeed might even be only a day or two per week, but we'll figure that one out and let you know.

Believe me, all the staff here simply cannot wait to get back to normal school life, and it will be a special day when that is the case. I hope you are all OK. I hope you have found a way to make this work. Do not lose your motivation. Keep in touch with each other and support each other. Look after others in your family. Try to see this as an opportunity rather than a lack of opportunity.

I look forward to having you all back in school.

Mr Gibbs