



## **Pensby High School**

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Headteacher: Mr K Flanagan

8 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to you now as we are due to begin writing Year 11 reports. I am going to postpone these reports and we may well cancel them for this year. I have also taken the decision not to send mock grades home to you or share these formally with students. Hopefully this letter will make clear my rationale for this.

Gavin Williamson as Secretary of State for Education has announced that there will be changes to the way that grades are awarded for the 2021 examination series and that 'examinations' as we know them will not continue this summer. Currently there is no plan as to how grades will be awarded and the timeline would suggest that if all goes well we should have the outline for how they will collate, and award grades by the end of February or early March at the earliest.

You may recall that I have written a number of times previously with regard to how we would gather evidence across this academic year for just such a scenario. We predicated this process of initial tests, mocks before Christmas, and mocks at the end of February on the evidence we were asked to collate when the 2020 examinations were cancelled. I am reluctant to commit report comments and grades on paper until we see both the process that Department for Education agrees for the awarding of grades, and how this process takes into account the variation of lost learning across the country. The advisory group on differential learning loss that the government promised to set up last year, has still not met or to my knowledge even been formed. Equally we need to understand the plans for the safe return of students to school and the potential further impact on Year 11 attendance. Our Year 11 students have already been disproportionately impacted upon in terms of their attendance, both in terms of time missed this school year and also when compared to previous Year 11 students.

I find it astonishing that there is not contingency plan for awarding GCSE grades, but then this is the government that told us as parents on Sunday that schools would be open and then closed my son's primary school on Monday evening. We need to try to protect our students from the consequences of a lack of planning by the DFE as much as we possibly can.

My fear as we started the academic year in September was that we would not be able to run the summer examinations and our assessment system for Year 11 was therefore grounded on seeing improvement through each stage of our assessment process. However, we have Year 11 students that have been asked to self-isolate for 14 days on four occasions in the first term of this academic year. Every single Year 11 student has been impacted at least once by self-isolation and the impact of absence at these rates is not just as simple as 'days lost' to learning. It is impossible for students

and teachers to maintain impetus when content needs repeating again and again to cover for the absences. This is obviously compounded by both the lockdown in March through to July and what seems likely to be the minimum of getting on for two months that we will miss this year.

In Year 11 I ask staff to ensure that all the subject content is taught by the end of February and we normally begin a process of consolidation of learning and development towards examinations. We have in effect lost more than the entire time we spend on the curriculum content of Year 11 to lockdown. To therefore measure performance via GCSE paper sat by previous cohorts and expect our current students to have the same level of knowledge and development of skills is unfair, so whilst we will continue to assess, we will not publish grades using previous grade boundaries. This is tantamount to punishing a student's, efforts, commitments and performance for factors well beyond their control. Our collation of student's progress across their time at this school will be reviewed once we know how the DFE require the school to evidence progress and achievement. To commit to publishing some form of equivalent GCSE grades would I feel be potentially damaging to our students' outcomes as awarded to them by the examination boards in the summer. Equally we will not commit to written comments on a student's current performance as ascribed to them as a result of our assessment process as this reflects loss of learning as much as it does the student's own efforts.

There are three main things need to continue and we need your support with them please:

1: We will continue with assessments and papers, but we will not grade, rather we will rank students and keep that as internal data, we will not share this ranking with you or the students. We know that on the last set of examination results published by the DFE in 2019, our students performed a third of a grade better than their peers nationally and over half a grade better when compared to other secondary moderns. We know that students in this school made better than average progress across all Ebacc subjects.

There is no reason to think that the current Year 11 would not have performed at least as well in their examinations as their peers in previous cohorts and that is the message that we will be seeking to take forward for our students to the examination boards.

We need your support though in ensuring that your children understand that the level of effort that student's individually give, attendance to learning and completion of work is what gets them their progress. As teachers and parents, we facilitate their learning, they do the learning and they need to demonstrate their learning!

2: A huge part of previous student attainment and progress in this school has been each student's commitment to their own learning. We have good staff, we have parents that support their children to achieve, but the key to all of this is your child and what they put into their learning. Evidencing this commitment may well be important in any system put forward by the DFE. We need to get everyone to fully engage with their TEAMS lessons and we will report commitment and effort to you via class charts. Please push for the highest level of engagement at home. I know it is difficult, I have decided to let my Year 8 and 9 boys stay at home and every day I pop home to check on their work, and every day I regret my decision, but we do make a massive difference as parents, we really do. There is no right or wrong here, but your encouragement and interest, despite my own experience of grunted feedback, does makes a difference and every bit of evidence shows that the better we engage with our children and their education, the greater their outcomes in the end.

3: There is a danger that all of our children currently in school, will leave school in Year 11 knowing less and having had fewer opportunities to develop their skills than their peers from 2019 and 2022. Whilst we do not offer post 16 courses and we are not responsible for the education and training of students when they leave us. I want them to be able to close that gap so that they are better able to move forward with the next stage of their lives. To that end we are going to offer Year 11 lessons right through to the end of the summer term and I would ask that you please support us with this. It might not change their GCSE grade, but it will mean that we can finish their subjects and they will have that knowledge and skills to move forward and build on. Whether this is for A levels or writing applications for jobs or calculating their pay, they deserve to have the same opportunity to have the same curriculum as others have had.

Even as a school that sits in the top third of all schools in the country in terms of progress, that is in the top 10% of similar schools, nearly 1 in 4 children leave us struggling to get a standard pass in English and mathematics. My Mum left school at 13 and struggled with aspects of functional literacy and numeracy all of her life. Mum was born in 1934, it is a scandal that we still have children leaving school struggling with these skills, we need your support to get everyone back until the end of the year. Regardless of what they are doing next, your children have a right to have a chance to acquire this knowledge and skill, for their lives going forward.

I will write to you to confirm how the awarding of grades will take place as soon as I am able to.

Thank you again for all of your support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Flanagan', written in a cursive style.

Mr K Flanagan  
Headteacher