



21 January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

**General update – Covid-19 including lateral flow testing, Safeguarding and mental health, Year 9 Options week, Examinations 2021, Sixth form applications, Personal Development Day 2 February, PE wellbeing and health challenge**

As we approach the halfway mark of this half term in the oddest of circumstances, I hope my latest letter finds you well and bearing up in lockdown.

**Covid-19 including lateral flow testing**

The Government has today released a position statement regarding daily contact testing in schools from Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace.

This statement recommends that schools & colleges cease one element of the DfE's testing protocol. This is element 3, the offer of daily testing, for 7 days, of pupils, students and staff who are close contacts of a positive case. From now on, any close contacts of positive cases in the school community **should be required to self-isolate for 10 days**, and not offered daily testing as an alternative to this.

It should be noted that once the testing of pupils on return to school has been completed, the only on-going element of testing is now weekly testing of staff. There will be no weekly testing of any students attending the Academy.

After such a stressful period over Christmas to arrange this, prepare the building and staff training, this further u-turn has wasted much time and public money. Frankly, I am uncharacteristically speechless.

If any parents have any other concerns related to Covid-19 in school, please contact us at the Academy using the email address [COVID@srpa.co.uk](mailto:COVID@srpa.co.uk).

**Safeguarding and mental health**

With the continued lockdown and understandable anxieties around Covid-19, there is an increase in cases of anxiety and poor mental health in students nationally. Attached is a list of support organisations to help with a variety of issues, some of which parents and carers may find useful. In addition, on FROG there is a self-reporting tool where students can mark themselves on a scale of 1-5; from 1 (not feeling good) to 5 (everything is ok). Any student with

a low score would be contacted by a member of staff to check on their welfare and support in the best way possible.

The NSPCC offer some really sound advice for parents on how to support a young person struggling with the current situation.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/depression-anxiety-mental-health/>

The NSPCC site also offers help with:

- Getting mental health support for your child
- Speaking to their GP
- Talking to your child about Childline
- Getting help from your child's school
- Asking about a referral to CAMHS

With an increased focus on online activities, young people may also need support with E-safety. We have a range of resources collated on our Safeguarding and E-Safety page on the SRPA website under the **Parent** tab, **Safeguarding and E-Safety**.

It is a difficult time for everyone and we are here to support you and our students.

## Year 9 Options week

Our Y9 Options microsite goes live on Monday 25 January 2021. This will be accompanied by an R2L assembly on Monday morning to launch to students and a letter which will be sent home to parents.

During the week itself, staff will be available by email and to discuss their subjects during lesson time and there will be a follow up live Q&A session on Wednesday 3 February to answer any remaining questions or to deal with any concerns.

The application form is available through the FROG microsite along with copies of all other information. The deadline for a completed application will be Friday 5 February 2021. Any questions should be directed through to [options@srpa.co.uk](mailto:options@srpa.co.uk) where the options team will pick it up and be able to deal with your enquiry.

## Examinations 2021

I promised that I would add further detail with regard to the above once the consultation was published. The links to the Ofqual consultations with parents, students and educators regarding the process are now live.



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Please find attached the link to the consultation document for GCSE and A levels:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/953000/6743-1\\_GCSE\\_AS\\_and\\_A\\_level\\_grades\\_should\\_be\\_awarded\\_in\\_summer\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953000/6743-1_GCSE_AS_and_A_level_grades_should_be_awarded_in_summer_2021.pdf)

Vocational qualifications can be found here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/953003/6743-2\\_2021\\_VTQ\\_alternative\\_arrangements\\_consultation\\_15JAN21.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953003/6743-2_2021_VTQ_alternative_arrangements_consultation_15JAN21.pdf)

Having had the opportunity to properly consider the proposals in the consultation, the key points about the suggested process are that:

- Grades will be based on teacher/centre assessment. Examination boards will provide advice on a standardised approach between schools, what evidence should be collected, and how schools should quality assure internally. Grades will be submitted as late as possible to maximise the time for catch-up teaching and ongoing assessment.
- Teacher assessment will be based on the current, ongoing performance of students; rather than a hypothetical prediction of what students may have got had exams run as normal; or what students would have got had the pandemic not disrupted their learning. It's not clear how evidence will translate into a grade.
- Examination boards may provide some external assessment tasks, which would be based on examination paper questions. DfE and Ofqual are consulting on whether these should be mandatory or not, whether teachers could set their own assessments instead, the percentage of the course that the tasks should cover, and the timing of the external assessment.
- Schools and colleges will be expected to provide internal quality assurance, with support and advice from the examination boards.
- Examinations will also provide external quality assurance, both during the process of determining grades, and once grades are submitted. If the examination boards are satisfied with the internal quality assurance of a school's or college's judgement, it is unlikely to change grades. A formula or algorithm will not be used to standardise results.
- Students will have the right to appeal grades, which is currently being proposed as being led by schools and colleges in the first instance, before being escalated to examination boards.

My current feeling is that this is a broadly sensible approach, given that examinations have been cancelled. However, I have questions and concerns about what evidence schools should be collecting, how this will be standardised within and between schools, and how this will



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translate into a grade. It is not clear whether external assessment will be compulsory, what form it will take and how it will be marked.

For vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs), the approach is broadly the same as the approach outlined above for GCSEs and A levels, but recognises the different ways in which VTQs are assessed usually. The broad principles are:

- For examination-based assessment in VTQs, the same approach should be applied as is confirmed for GCSEs and A levels
- Non-examination assessment should continue where possible, although candidates should not be disadvantaged if they are unable to complete NEA due to Covid-19.
- The Extended Extraordinary Framework already gives examination boards a lot of scope in how to change the assessment of VTQs; this continues.
- Because VTQ examinations happen throughout the year, with different dates of certification, no candidate will be penalised whether or not they were able to sit an examination. All candidates expecting certification in 2021 should be able to receive a grade.

As with general qualifications, the broad approach seems sensible, especially how examination elements will be assessed. I am also pleased that the government has recognised the value of VTQs by releasing this consultation simultaneously as the general consultation, rather than as an afterthought.

I have already responded on behalf of the Academy and look forward to the final outcome with interest. As ever, the devil will be in the detail....

### **Sixth form applications**

Sixth form applications remain open for a short while longer for current Year 11 students. Should your child wish to consider this, please contact [sixthform@srpa.co.uk](mailto:sixthform@srpa.co.uk) for more information.

### **Personal Development Day 2 February**

We have recognised the importance of health and wellbeing as part of our upcoming PD Day so we have dedicated half of the day to a health and wellbeing focus – more information to follow next week.

### **PE wellbeing and health challenge**

I hope you have seen Mr Fell's PE Health and Wellbeing monthly challenge. If not, please find it attached again. I encourage all youngsters to get involved and to post their photos to their



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House Frog sites. This is an excellent way to keep active during the winter months and during this current lockdown.

It remains too early to tell what the next few weeks hold in store for us in terms of schools reopening and I have learned not to second guess the current thinking. At times like this it is easy to wish time away and not live in the moment. In the words of Sir Winston Churchill, "It is a mistake to look too far ahead. Only one link in the chain of destiny can be handled at a time." I hope you are all managing during this stressful time and taking it a day at a time. I hope it won't be too long before we look back at this whole pandemic with nothing more than a nostalgic glint. In the meantime, we have got this together.

I will write again soon.

Yours faithfully



**Mr D Hardy**  
**Head Teacher**



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