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Dear Students, Parents and Carers

RE: GUIDANCE AND WORK TO SUPPORT YEAR 11 STUDENTS IN PREPARING FOR A LEVELS (ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL)

I hope this letter finds you all safe and well and we continue to remember in our thoughts and prayers anyone suffering as a result of COVID-19.

As mentioned in Mr Foster's letter earlier in the week, we will now begin to provide work and guidance for Year 11 students intending to pursue A Levels when school reopens. Given that the government and the exams regulator OFQUAL are clear that there is no need for Year 11 students to be completing further work to influence the grades that will be eventually determined, we feel that a much more meaningful focus for students at this time is to begin to prepare for their upcoming A Levels. This will ensure that, when school does reopen, students are able to make a purposeful and successful start to their A Level studies. It will also hopefully provide students with a very positive focus over the coming weeks and enthuse them about their upcoming studies. There is also information later in this letter regarding support for those students who will not be returning to Sixth Form and instead plan to follow a different pathway, as well as some suggestions for all students to support their health and well-being.

The information that follows gives details about a **5 week study programme** that will take Year 11 students through until just after May half-term, comprising 1 week of study skills development followed by 4 weeks of subject specific introductory work in preparation for A levels. This subject specific work will, in essence, be a 4 week 'bridging' course between GCSE and A Level in each subject. Thereafter, students will be provided with some further 'summer work' to complete throughout the rest of June, July and August, as we would normally give to students, once the yearly 'study leave' period begins for Year 11.

Therefore, outlined below, is the plan for Year 11 students for the next 5 weeks:

Study Skills Development- Week beginning Monday 27th April

During this week, students should work through the **Study Skills Booklet** that will be uploaded onto the school website by the end of Friday 24th April. This booklet will be saved in the 'Students' tab on the website, in a sub-tab named 'Study Skills Booklet'. This booklet includes a wealth of information about different study skills that are needed to support successful study at A Level and degree level and it will help prepare students to be more independent learners, a key requirement of study at this level. Students will have begun to develop some of these skills throughout their GCSE and vocational courses, whilst other skills may be new to them. However, all of the skills outlined will be very much needed for their future study of A Level and indeed, any future study at degree level.

The booklet offers guidance on key study skills such as note-taking, time management, researching and boosting your memory. The booklet gives students key information on these skills and then there are tasks to complete, to allow students to put what they have learned into practice. It is designed to be a resource that students can work their way through now, and then use as a source of reference once their courses are underway. **Therefore, students should work through this booklet at a reasonable pace, completing as many of the tasks as possible.** Please do not worry if there are any parts of the booklet that students find more challenging than others, as all of these skills will be further embedded in lessons, once students return to school. We expect that the vast majority of students will want to use and complete this booklet electronically, however, if any student needs a hard copy of the booklet, please email the school at admin@st-marys.newcastle.sch.uk and we will post one to you.

Subject Specific Introductory Work- Weeks beginning Monday 4th May, Monday 11th May, Monday 18th May and Monday 1st June

For the next 4 weeks, students will complete **subject specific work** to help them prepare for future A Level study. At the start of each week, subject specific work for that week will be uploaded onto Office 365. I am sure that most students will know how to access Office 365 as they are used to doing so regularly, however, by way of a reminder, there is guidance regarding how to do this on the school website, in the 'Students' tab, in a sub-tab named 'Remote Access'. If there are any issues with this, please do not hesitate to give us a ring at school or email in and one of the admin team will get back to you to sort any issues. Once students have logged on, they should go into to the 'Year 11' folder and all of the subject sub-folders will be able to be accessed from there.

This bridging course will aim to give students the foundations of knowledge for a specific A Level. It will also give students some experience of the depth of learning required and give them an insight into the ways of studying in different subjects. The bridging

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course will be chunked into 4 sections of work to support the students in planning out their work. **Therefore, at the start of each week, about 4-5 hours' worth of work per subject will be saved on Office 365 for students to work through at their own pace during that week. Students should complete the work for the subjects they intend to study at A Level. There is no need to complete work for any other subjects. However, students are also very welcome to have a try at a few of the tasks for a subject, if they are still unsure about their subject choices at this time. It will help give them a flavour of a subject and may help them to reach final decisions regarding A Level choices, later in the year.** However, ultimately, if a student then chooses to study a particular A Level when we return to school, all tasks in the bridging work will have to be completed before they begin the course next year.

Teachers will include all resources that students need to complete this work. During the 4 week period, about 4-5 hours of work will be uploaded every week, totalling about 16-20 hours' worth of work per subject by the end of the bridging work. However, students should not worry if, for any number of genuine reasons, they are not able to do the full 4-5 hours of work during any given week. Students should simply do their best and pace the work to suit their own circumstances. The work will remain on Office 365 throughout the summer and therefore, there will be plenty of time for students to catch-up and get through any missed work before their A Level studies begin, if this isn't possible within the 4 weeks outlined above.

Additional free 'Head Start to A Level' revision guides

Also, for your information, whilst we wouldn't recommend buying any published A Level study guides at this early stage, we have been informed that, due to the current national situation, the publisher CGP, who publish revision guides, are offering free downloads of some introductory revision guides called a 'Head Start to A Level'. These are currently only available for Maths, Chemistry, Biology and Physics. Any students interested in studying these subjects, may want to download these guides, to further support their preparation for A Level. They are free to download via the Kindle app and, as you will know, this app can be downloaded onto any tablet, phone, PC or Mac. We would encourage any students intending to study these subjects to take advantage of this offer and hopefully, more subjects may become available over time.

Students planning to take alternative pathways i.e. apprenticeships, employment etc

Whilst the majority of our Year 11 students are planning to stay on in Sixth Form to study A Levels, some students may be planning to seek employment, an apprenticeship or a course at another Further Education provider. If you feel that any of the resources outlined above would be useful to your future plans, of course, these resources will also be available for you to access. You may also want to further research potential employers, apprenticeship providers etc via their websites to find out more specific information about pathways you are interested in, including possibly getting in touch with them directly to find out more about any meaningful preparation you could be completing to support you further. We will also save some other useful information and suggested websites in the 'Students' tab on the website, in a sub-tab named 'Alternative Pathways,' this includes suggested work to continue to develop your maths and English knowledge, given that many employers/training courses require you to have certain levels of knowledge in both subjects, as well as links to the National Apprenticeship Service and the many excellent activities they provide for young people.

Guidance to maintain students' well-being whilst studying at home

Most importantly, whether a student is preparing for A Levels or another pathway, their well-being is paramount. Therefore, it is important that students take regular breaks from computers and don't try to do too much without such breaks. When at school, they have a break every hour, to move from room to room, and longer at morning break and lunchtime. This might be a good rule of thumb – i.e. not to do more than 50-55 minutes without then taking a 5-10 minute break away from where they are working if possible, including getting some fresh air, water etc. They should have a longer mid-morning break and a good lunchtime break.

There are various other challenges students face. Students don't have their teacher to call on, nor are they working in a social environment with classmates. Space might be limited in the home. Students may have to share a workspace with other family members. Computers might well have to be shared. Not everyone will have a computer. Students or family members may fall ill. The school recognises all of these challenges and we essentially want to reassure students simply to do their best, not to stress and not to worry about whether they are doing more or less than others. They need to look after themselves, first and foremost, support their families, stay safe and maintain phone/social media contact with friends in the light of social distancing.

Hopefully this information is helpful in outlining the planned approach for Year 11 over the next 5 weeks. We believe that both the more general work on study skills and the subject specific work that follows, will help to prepare students for the next stage of their learning. It will hopefully provide a really enjoyable and interesting focus for students over the coming weeks and, as mentioned, once the bridging work is complete, we will set some further 'summer work' after half-term. We will also continue to keep in touch regularly regarding all aspects of school life.

Very best wishes



Miss Patterson
Deputy Headteacher