



Year 10
A parent's guide to supporting your son
through his GCSE years

January 2016

Year 10 - supporting your son through his GCSE years

Thank you very much for taking the time to read through the information collated in this booklet. Your son has begun a critical period of his 11 years of compulsory education and my aim with this booklet is to try to provide you with the most helpful information to enable you to support him as best you can.

I write as someone who sat GCSEs back in the summer of 1990 and, although much has changed in education over the past 30 years, it is still the case that the end of year 11 is marked by a period of about 4 weeks when pupils sit exams across a range of subjects. It is also still the case that the grades achieved at age 16 are critical in terms of determining the range of choices that a pupil has. The importance of the GCSE courses and exams inevitably means that it can be a very stressful period for pupils and for those nearest and dearest to them! Securing the grades needed to access particular courses in the Sixth Form or at local colleges ensures that there is something significant at stake for everyone.

One of the recent shifts in education in England is the move away from coursework/controlled assessment and back to 'high-stakes' exams at the end of the course. Your son's final grade in some of his subjects will be determined entirely by his examination performance at the end of the course - but there remain subjects where your son's final grade will also be determined by controlled assessment and/or coursework. In the subject pages of this booklet you will be able to see how the final grade is determined and get a rough idea of when key periods will be in each subject area.

Subject specific information follows my general introduction, and for simplicity I have adopted a common format across the subjects and presented the information in table form. As with any guide of this nature there is a balance to be struck between providing enough information to be useful but not so much that you are overwhelmed! If you have any queries about a particular subject that are not covered by the information sheets please don't hesitate to get in touch. I've included the email address for the Head of Department for each subject to enable you to contact them directly. Equally, with any general queries or concerns, please send me an email at atitheridge@twbs.co.uk and I will come back to you as soon as I can.

Thank you again for reading this and for your ongoing support of the school and your son. Together with everyone at The Windsor Boys' School I wish your son every success in his GCSE years and beyond.

Mr A Titheridge

Succeeding at Key Stage 4 – some general advice

Better attendance equals better grades

An attendance figure of 90% doesn't sound too bad. But, in real terms, this equates to a whole day off school every fortnight. Across an academic year it becomes 4 weeks of school missed.

I appreciate that pupils are unwell from time to time, and that there can be exceptional circumstances for absences, but would ask that you think carefully about keeping your son out of school. There is a very strong correlation between positive exam results and good attendance (which is typically defined as above 95%).

Working Independently

In recent years, the school has invested significant time and money to try to promote independent learning. Our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is called Firefly – here, pupils can find an increasing amount of useful information about the subjects that they study at school. There is a tab to access Firefly at the top of the main school website at www.twbs.co.uk – it is called staff/pupil portal. From the main menu on the Firefly home page, they just need to click on 'Learning' and then will be taken to the subject menu where they can find subject specific resources. Your son has his own log-in details for Firefly that he will know.

Individual department/subject areas also subscribe to websites that pupils can use – MyMaths for Maths, for example. Your son will have been issued the log in details that he needs for these subjects – don't hesitate to get in touch with the relevant Head of Department if he needs support with this.

For most pupils, the best approach to independent study is 'little and often'. There is limited value in your son sat staring at a book or screen for hours on end; unless he is an unusual individual he is unlikely to be taking much in. As with revision for exams, short, focused sessions of about 30 minutes are usually really helpful.

One of the ways that you can really support your son is in trying to help him create an environment where he is able to work effectively at home. Ideally, somewhere that is clean and tidy, well lit, free of clutter and relatively quiet. I am well aware that this is not a description of an average teenage boy's bedroom! Of course, in many households (particularly with younger siblings) this is tricky but by helping your son to find or create this space you are removing a barrier to him sitting down and working independently.

Another way that you can support your son to work independently is to help him to manage his time. There are more distractions than ever for pupils now and most of them are more attractive than knuckling down to complete some homework or independent study. Conversations about balancing school work and leisure activities have the potential to escalate into arguments quite quickly so I think the key is to negotiate a regular timetable of homework and/or independent study that still allows your son plenty of time to socialise, play sport, social network, play video game and so on.

Thinking Ahead - Beyond GCSEs

There are a range of options available once pupils reach the end of year 11 but whichever pathway your son ultimately chooses, it will be true that the better his GCSE grades, the more choices he will have. Pupils at TWBS tend to follow one of these pathways:

Remain at TWBS for the Sixth Form. At the time of writing we offer a range of A Level courses and a smaller number of BTEC courses. Generally, B grades or better are required for studying A level subjects (although there are some exceptions to this).
Go to one of the local colleges (typically East Berks, BCA or Bracknell and Wokingham) to follow a vocational course or A levels.
Go to a Sixth Form attached to another school locally.
Take up an apprenticeship.

Although it's not a decision that needs to be made yet, it is something worth starting to think about as your son progresses through year 10 - not least because year 11 is so busy and pressurised with the build up to the final exam period. Prospectuses are available on line and we also keep a stock of college prospectuses for the boys to look at and/or take away in Pupil Services. Bear in mind that the prospectuses may change next year.

Keep in Touch

We're keen to maintain very open channels of communication with parents so that you never feel in the dark about how your son is getting on at school. The simplest mechanism for this is the school diary that we expect your son to bring with him to school every day. This is signed by your son's form tutor on a weekly basis and we ask you to sign it too. There is a space to drop the tutor a brief note on the bottom right of each page. More formally, we upload information about your son's progress throughout the year to the parent portal. There is information about how to log in and access the information here

<https://firefly.twbs.co.uk/useful-information/parent-portal->

You can also view your son's up to date attendance and punctuality information via firefly.

Year 10 form tutors are as follows:

Allen – Mr Miah – smiah@twbs.co.uk
Burgess – Miss Kelly – jkelly@twbs.co.uk
Burnett – Mr Parry – mparry@twbs.co.uk
Ford – Miss Hague – chague@twbs.co.uk
Lambdin – Mr Kilkelly – ckilkelly@twbs.co.uk
Ottrey – Miss Lansley – klansley@twbs.co.uk
Warwick – Mr Fatania – rfatania@twbs.co.uk
Woodland – Miss Hare – chare@twbs.co.uk