

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

Dear ALS pupil,

When you left school on the last day of term before Christmas with plans for the holidays (hopefully it included something like a revision schedule) and the prospect of your mock examinations in January, I don't think any of us expected to have found ourselves in the position that we are.

I had hoped that setting up the Covid-19 Lateral Flow testing in school (we've got that up and running...I've been tested four times now and it's not that bad) would mean that we could get you in to school. Sadly, that wasn't to be. Instead, we're in a national lockdown again and you're completing your studies remotely. I know none of this is a surprise to you.

The main purpose of this letter is to tell you, unequivocally, how proud we are of you. Your teachers, Mrs Bottrill, Mr Owen and I have been really impressed by your ongoing commitment to your lessons, how seriously you've taken mock examinations and your resilience in difficult circumstances. I really couldn't have asked for more from you. You can't control what's going on with the lockdown or your examinations but you can control how you react to it and you've reacted to the very best of your abilities. Well done.

I also want to try to explain the situation with your summer assessments. It won't be a short letter so stick with me! Since lockdown was announced, there have been mixed messages about what your assessments will look like. The Education Secretary, Mr Williamson, suggested that the summer examinations were cancelled. This was then backed up by the words from the Prime Minister. It very much intimated that examinations would not take place and that your assessments would be completed by teachers. Since then, there has been the introduction of the possibility of 'mini-exams' to take place in school at some point in the Summer Term 'as late as possible'. It's unlikely these assessments will be later than June otherwise there wouldn't be time for them to be marked.

Ofqual, the body that oversees qualifications in the UK, are pushing for you to sit some formal assessments in school. Ofqual are about to open a consultation (where they ask for feedback from people in education) on the idea that schools would be given a series of externally set tasks that you would then sit in examination conditions in school. Teachers would then formally mark these and then have some of the marking moderated externally.

It sounds like they will look a little bit like a controlled assessment that you may have completed in your subjects so far or the 'old' style coursework. Your results from this 'mini-exam' would then be a factor in your teachers' decision on your grades that we would submit. Teachers would look at your work so far throughout Year 10 and Year 11, your mock results, the standard of your work over the next few months and the grades from the 'mini-exam' to come to a judgement on your most likely grade.

Don't panic if you're not at the grade you want just yet. Keeping aiming for the grade you're hoping for. It's very normal for pupils in Year 11 to hit their stride in the months to come and improve their

# ARNOLD LODGE



4 - 18 yrs Co-educational Independent Day School

grades a great deal. We won't just hand you these grades, mind; you have to work for them and show your teachers you've earned the grade. Whilst the format for the assessments in the summer isn't in your control, the work and effort you put in over the months to come is – do your very best in every lesson (online or in person) and I promise you'll put yourself in the best possible position to achieve your very best outcomes in the Summer.

We won't know for certain what the assessments look like this summer for at least a few weeks yet. Given how much Ofqual has mentioned mini-exams (and how Mr Williamson is mentioning them now, too), I would expect you will have some sort of assessment to work towards in school for the summer. The very moment I know for sure, I'll make sure you know, too.

I wish we could make it all 'fixed' for you and you could return to school. I wish we could force some sort of sensible answer out from those making decisions about your GCSEs this summer as quickly as possible. We can't do that. What we can do, is promise that whatever your summer assessments look like, we'll make sure you are supported to get your best possible grade and that you are then helped to prepare for the next stage of your learning.

If there is an assessment late on in the summer term, we'll prepare you as much as possible so that you're able to take your assessments with confidence. If the assessments are completed earlier, we'll help you to begin to prepare for your transition to Sixth Form so you can start your A Level or BTEC courses for September 2021 confident that you're on the right track.

There's a lot of uncertainty for you right now. Will there be exams? How will your grades be awarded? When will you be allowed to come back to school? What will your grades be? When will lockdown finish? I don't underestimate how much this will be playing on your mind and I really am sorry I can't give you the answers right now that you deserve. However, I can tell you that, whatever happens, we'll look after you and make sure it's ok. Remember that you can only control what you can control and you can't change the rest.

Your job isn't to worry about all that stuff outside of your control. Your job is to do your very best in your next lesson. Then the lesson after that. And the lesson after that. Leave the worrying about the other stuff to us.

Remember, if you need anything, just reach out to your mentor, Mrs Clarke, Miss Crisp, Mrs Bottrill, Mr Owen or me. We're here if you need us.



David Preston  
**Headteacher**