

English and Maths GCSE

There are now rules in place that state students have to continue to follow courses in English and Maths until they leave Main School education if they do not secure a Grade 4 at the end of Year 11. Wherever students continue their education and training they will have to re-sit English and Maths GCSE until they secure a Grade 4. The best opportunity they will get to secure a Grade 4 will be during Year 11 where they have specialist staff and fully timetabled lessons to enable them to do the best they can. This may not be the case in Post 16 education.

New AS and A Level Qualifications

There are also new specifications for AS and A levels that came into effect from Sept 2015. For most subjects students will sit an exam at the end of a course. This means the Summer of Year 13 for A Level students. AS levels no longer exist as part of the full A Level qualification. AS levels are still available but only as stand-alone courses and they will not contribute to the full A level qualification. Students may sit the AS qualification at the end of Year 12 in some subjects.

Students will be applying to University at the beginning of Year 13 with their GCSE results as the only record of their achievement and potential and so GCSE results are taking on increasingly more importance and significance.

Parents and students need to be fully aware of the changes that will affect them in the future and the implications of these for their future pathways.

Common Frustrations for Parents

There are millions of websites so how do I know which ones are good ones?

Surely she shouldn't be going out again with exams coming up?

I don't understand about controlled assessment, grades, tiers, targets, BTEC, – it is very different from when I was at school.

I can't stand the arguments and the stress. I tell him exams are really important and that he needs to work and he says it's his life and slams doors.



He always leaves everything to the last minute. One minute he has heaps of time and then it's all stress and stops because it has to be in tomorrow and he doesn't have all the stuff he needs so he can't do it.

I didn't do GCSE's so how can I help?

She always has an excuse - I don't know what to believe

She gets really panicky in exams and then doesn't do her best and I don't know how to help and it ends in a slanging match and I just get her even more stressed.

How can Parents Make a Difference?

Parental support is **eight times** more important in determining a child's academic success than social class, according to a new study. The Campaign for Learning found that parental involvement in a child's education can mean the difference between an A* and an "also-ran" at GCSE. (Times Education Supplement)

If you find the examination year of Year 11 very confusing you are **not** alone. The exam system has changed a lot over the last few years and is continually changing, so sometimes it feels as if it is best just to leave it up to the school.



Your involvement in this very important year can make a huge difference – the difference between a '4' grade and '5' and '7' grades; the difference between getting "good" grades or not.

The **good** news is that you do not have to be an expert in any subject and you don't have to be a "super-parent" and put your life on hold. You do need to know how best to spend the time you have at each stage of the process and how to enter into a partnership with school to ensure your son/daughter achieves the best possible outcomes.



But surely it's the school's job to get them through their exams?

Yes, the school has an important role to play and will provide the resources and the expertise so the students acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding to do their best. You don't need to be an expert in Maths, Science or Media to help them.

What does the school expect of them?

- Being self motivated and responsible for their own learning – attending and making the most of lessons



- Asking teachers when they do not understand



- Develop the ability to overcome problems and strategies for persisting when it becomes challenging
- Organising themselves – notes, worksheets, handouts...



- Working independently and completing work unsupervised by the deadline
- Planning and organising work over longer periods – coursework/controlled assessment

- Understanding how each piece of work fits into the complete picture and how their exam grade will be determined.
- Planning and organising revision
- Working on exam technique



EXAM-BUSTING TIPS

How to pass exams the easy way



Your support, interest and encouragement can make an enormous difference to your son/daughter's motivation and ability to cope with the academic and organisational demands of the exam year.



So what do you do as a parent?

What follows is a guide and as each student is different some of these will apply and others not.

You *may* need to be

- Attendance officer – making sure they get to lessons and understand the importance of making the most of them
- Partner with school and student – going to parents' evening, asking questions, finding out what you can do best to help.



- Provider of tools – for homework and revision – a quiet space, a toolbox of pens, pencils, paper etc.



- Banker – paying for the revision aids, and toolbox of equipment.



- 'Studybuddy' – show an interest, help and test when they ask you but don't do the work for them—find the time.

- Entertainments Officer – find out anything relevant to what they are doing – TV programmes, theatre visits, exhibitions, films
- Advisor – help to break tasks down so they are manageable, keeping an eye on progress and celebrating successes. Helping to find a strategy for a positive way forward when things are not going so well.
- Project Manager – “agree” the rules for working at home – discussion is better than imposing them. Balancing the social life and the school work.



- Go-Between – between student and school when necessary – noticing problems early and asking questions that they can't or won't ask.
- Information provider and Interpreter – helping them with websites and exam practice and research.

You are the person who cares most. You are the champion of their needs and the admirer of their successes and they need to know that you will be there whatever happens.

The **SECRET** of good exam results

It is not a matter of luck and what happens on the day. The result has been determined well before they sit the exam.

The secret is getting things right in learning the content first time round; revision, and the exam itself.

What can go wrong:

Learning the content

- Not attending lessons of subjects they don't like
- Not liking the teacher – or the teacher's style
- Not having any interest in the subject
- Finding the work difficult and giving up
- Deciding they are no good at the subject
- Messing around in the lesson
- Getting behind with work



Revision

- Not doing any
- Not having a plan
- Not knowing what to revise
- Being unrealistic
- Revising the right things in the wrong way
- Not knowing where to start
- Not using revision lessons and extra sessions



THE EXAM ITSELF

- Getting the wrong place or the wrong time
- Arriving late
- Revising for the wrong exam
- Not knowing how the exam structure works for each subject
- Not having the right equipment
- Panicking
- Answering too many or too few questions
- Not reading the questions or misunderstanding the question
- Spending too long on one section and not having enough time for another section



Coursework/Controlled Assessment

- **Encourage and praise.** Show an interest by talking about what they are doing.
- **Make sure they attend lessons** – a missed lesson means key information or an introduction is missed. Starting out behind often results in not understanding and frustration, disagreements with teacher, and giving up.
- **Make sure the work space and the “toolbox “are suitable**
- **Put key dates and deadlines on your calendar** or in your diary so you can support before the panic stage is reached.
- **Agree “check-in” times** when you can discuss the progress of controlled assessment and help to plan next steps.
- **Get in touch with subject teachers** if you need more detailed advice – what percentage is this controlled assessment worth? How many marks for each section?
- **If they are likely to lose handouts**, help sheets etc make a copy and keep it safe for them so you can come to the rescue at the appropriate time.
- **Find out** if there are TV programmes, CDs, exhibitions or theatre productions that could help, and that you could get involved in together.



Help with research on the internet and help them to **avoid plagiarism**, as the amount of information can be overwhelming.

- **Let the school know** if there are particular difficulties with any coursework as soon as possible so that they can get help before the deadlines.
- **If there are reasons that deadlines may not be met** eg: illness, family bereavement etc *please let the school know* – there are ways sometimes for us to be a bit more flexible if we know the circumstances.





When the going gets tough.....

- Try to keep to the agreed work and social life balance although there will be times when you may need to be a bit flexible – a special occasion etc.
- All students will feel demotivated or overwhelmed or struggle at some time during the year – threatening and berating will not achieve the best results and you and they will both become *even more* stressed. Letting them talk the problem through and trying to understand the difficulties will help them and may lead to you finding a solution together. Try to help them prioritise, and contact the school if necessary.
- A reward structure may work for some students – this is not bribery – it is like a bonus scheme for working when you don't feel like it! It does not have to be financial or a big thing. Talk to them about something they would value – an extra night out, getting out of the washing up, a takeaway. Little and often is more motivational than a very big reward at some time in the future.
- Stay flexible – if they are sticking to what you agreed 80% of the time they are probably doing ok.
- If they say they have no homework in this exam year - they are lying!! They can always be doing some revision or redrafting or responding to feedback. It would be very unlikely that they have nothing to do.

Some excuses:

- My work is all on the computer at school
- We didn't get any homework because the teacher was away
- I'm working with a friend and they have the book
- I have got plenty of time to do that it doesn't have to be in for ages
- I need to do the work at school and I'll do it tomorrow
- *Mr X* never gives us *any* homework



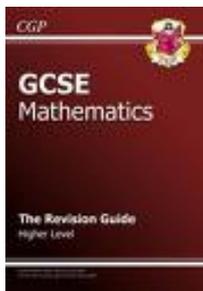
SOME STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH THEM....

- Keep track of what excuse and when and for what subject – they will forget but *you* won't
- Agree that *you* see the completed work tomorrow
- Follow up anything you don't believe – phone school and ask if *Mr X* doesn't set any homework
- The aim is to get the work done not win points – make sure there is a way for them to save face and try not to back them into a corner.
- Help them to see difficulties in perspective – “I've messed up this essay - I might as well give up now – I'm never going to get a good grade” They often see things as “*all or nothing*”

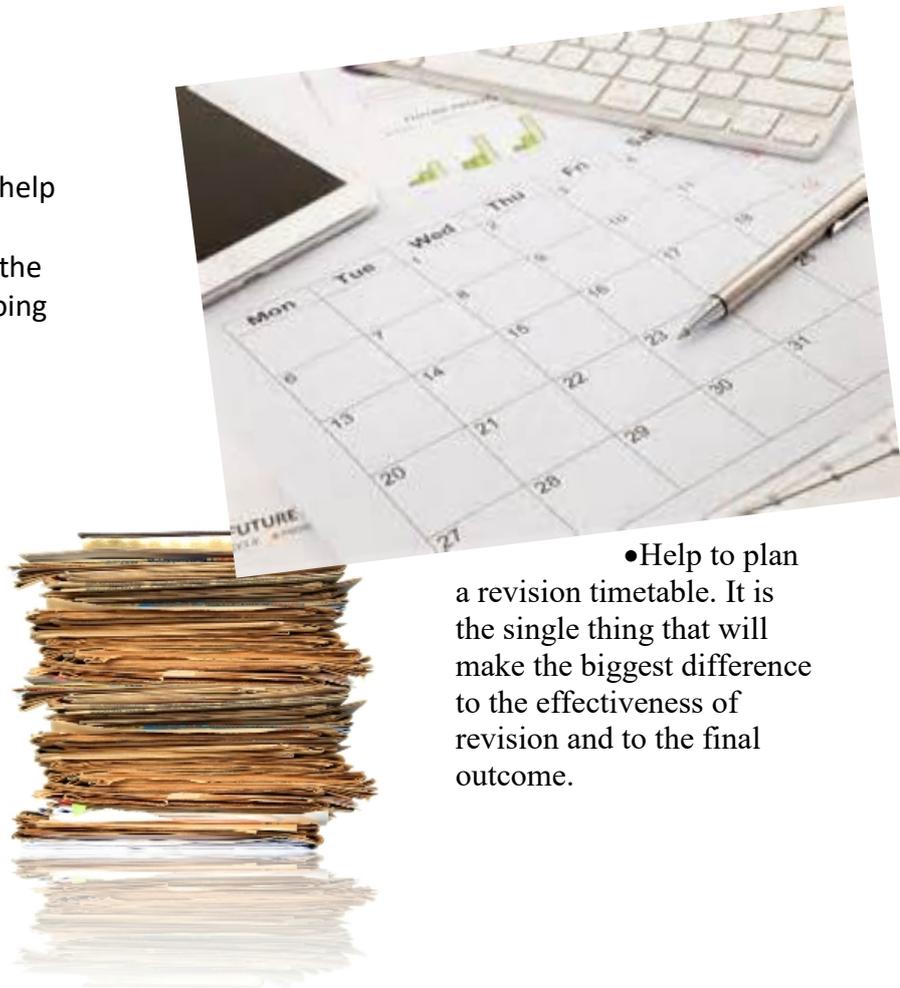
REVISION

Setting it all up:

- Talk about what you can do to help and support them
- The simplest things may get in the way of getting started – “I’m going to get some folders” may take weeks! Be banker and provider again and go shopping
- Encourage them to empty their bag daily and file all the handouts and help sheets (they will probably also find the letter they should give you). There will be important information sheets with exam details, dates and contact numbers which may be buried under a mountain of other bits of paper.



each subject – or a website where they can practise exam questions – it is time and money well spent and the school will provide some advice and guidance with this. Ask at parents evening if you need to.



- Help to plan a revision timetable. It is the single thing that will make the biggest difference to the effectiveness of revision and to the final outcome.

Support in doing the revision:

- Help them to stick to the revision plan and to the start and finish times – you may need to use the rewards again but don’t threaten.
- Top up the “toolbox” again as exam time approaches – don’t get wound up by “lost” items - is 50p really worth the stress and the demotivation?
- Be a provider of snacks and drinks – they need to stay healthy above anything else.
- Be flexible – if something comes up and they want to go out on a revision night rearrange the timetable and both agree to it.
- Be sensitive to the pressure that they are under – some deal with it better than others. If they are not up to revision on an odd day it isn’t the end of the world. Reflect on the good revision they have done – it’s the big picture that matters.

- Use check-ins every few days – and try not to nag in between. Help to reschedule if problems arise.
- Keep your perspective – it may not be how you would do it or when or where but as

long as they are doing it and it works for them that's fine.

And when it goes pear-shaped...



Subject related:

The “*all or nothing*” thinking of a teenager often leads to exaggeration of the importance of a situation and extreme strategies to deal with it – from giving it all up, running away, to door slamming and shouting – all in an effort to solve the problem. Emotions are running high and strategies for dealing with the problems are limited.

- Try to get them to talk about what is actually going on and don't underestimate the seriousness of the problem for them or “you don't understand” is the result
- Most problems are not permanent - try to talk to them to make the problem more manageable
 - Try to get them to be specific – what is the particular difficulty.
 - To find out how long the problem has existed
 - Find out what they want to happen or what would make the situation more manageable
- If there does seem to be a problem that is not just a hiccup then contact the school and be prepared to hear both sides of the story and work together to find a solution – the partnership again.

Controlled Assessment

- The best advice is to catch the problem early – not when the deadline is very close or worse still-already gone. If this is the case you will need to work with the school to try to come to a solution.
- Don't resort to “*I told you this would happen*” as this will not lead to a solution.
- If you need to talk to the school and a solution is reached then make sure you know when the new deadline is and exactly what is needed to be done. Help to draw up a new plan to achieve it and praise when they do it!

Revision

I've left it 'too late' to revise!

- One of the biggest mistakes students make is not leaving enough time for revision and consequently becoming demotivated and thinking there is no point in doing anything as the task is too big
- It is never too late until you enter the exam room – a little knowledge is better than none and could be the difference between pass and fail.
- A damage limitation plan which prioritises and puts tasks into manageable chunks will help. Focus on subjects they are likely to pass and identify key areas which they can revise as thoroughly as possible.
- Remind them that they can cope as they have in the past, and that the exam period will be over soon.

STRESS

- Some stress is normal and actually necessary for successfully tackling exams.
- Symptoms of stress are
 - Difficulty getting to sleep or waking up
 - Tiredness
 - Poor appetite
 - Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy
 - Headaches or unexplained aches and pains
 - Irritability and frequent angry episodes
- If they are stressed encourage some time out doing something they enjoy. Exercise is good as hormones are released that counter stress. Eating well and being there to listen are important.



THE EXAMS



It is a very stressful time for them so encourage a positive perspective – they will soon be on the other side of the exam mountain. If you are concerned about their level of stress, then contact the school.

They will push you to your limit so try not to rise to the bait – they will be very challenging at this time as none of us behaves our best when under stress. Try to shelve the battles if they are not of importance now. Does it really matter if the bedroom is untidy for the next 3 weeks?

Ensure that they have all they need to take into the exam room and you and they know when, where and what it is.



Try to keep routines the same and the home situation as stable as possible. This includes bedtime, getting up time, eating times including breakfast.

Before exams remind them that you care and value them whatever happens and you know they will do their best. Keep yourself calm and positive and wish them luck.



After the exam, try not to do a long post-mortem, but listen if they want to tell you about it. They will be dealing with it all in their own way. If things have gone badly, then try to adopt the positive approach, that tomorrow is another day.



Further help and support

Copleston's web site has a lot of helpful revision materials under the Student menu

Subjects also make available their own revision materials to students on FROG.

Exam Boards

www.aqa.org.uk

www.edexcel.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

www.wjec.co.uk

Notes: