

A REVISION GUIDE FOR PARENTS AHEAD OF EXTERNAL EXAMINATIONS

There is a whole host of material available that claims to offer guidance on the most effective revision strategies for students approaching GCSE and A Level examinations – and we are in the process of giving our best advice to the boys in the run-up to the Easter holidays - but very little exists to reassure parents and to point them in the direction of the practical things they can do to alleviate the inevitable stresses placed upon their sons as we head towards the examination season.

The first thing to accept is that a little pressure is a beneficial thing. Terminal examinations inevitably carry their share of unavoidable anxieties and there are no ‘quick fix’ solutions any more than there is a substitute for hard graft. As film director Sam Goldwyn commented well before the various sports stars to whom the words have been attributed: ‘The harder I work, the luckier I get’. So the next few weeks will not and should not be easy!

YOUR APPROACH WILL HELP HIS...

- Encourage without pressurising.
- Take an interest, without suffocating your son with reminders about the proximity of his exams.
- Offer drinks and snacks, surprises or treats to break up revision.
- Encourage him to attend revision sessions and use the School for private study even after Study Leave.
- Know which exams he is sitting and when, and together create a revision schedule or timetable which reflects this.
- Respect his growing independence – he may not want you to revise with him and may find working with a ‘study partner’ advantageous; it is not always the distraction parents assume.
- Trust him –if he feels he has earned a break or a day out, don’t assume he is merely trying to postpone work.

REVISION: ORGANISATION COMES FIRST

- Help your son to find a quiet, comfortable place to work - somewhere to write and file materials easily. This may be his bedroom but a light and airy ‘neutral space’ is often preferable
- Don’t assume that silence is golden - if your son learns better with background music that is usually fine. Do ensure that the television/computer/mobile phone are not sources of distraction, though.
- Box files, folders and plastic wallets are useful organisers and things boys rarely think to acquire.
- A highlighter pen can make a big difference in selecting key ideas, passages or dates.
- ‘Post – its’ dotted round the house can help too. So can revision cards, especially if they’re colour coded or in diagram form.

MAKING REVISION EASIER

- Revise for an average of 1½ hours a night, over the course of a week. Ensure the schedule for the Easter holiday period builds in chunks of productive time during the day (some believe that the hours between 10am and noon are the most effective for concentration) as well as significant breaks within and across days.
- Short bursts of revision (20 - 30 minutes), with short breaks (5 - 10 minutes) make best use of our concentration spans.
- See that your son spends an evening, soon, sorting their revision notes out - this helps save last minute panics.
- Encourage your son to revisit topics regularly. This helps move ideas from the short term to the long term memory.
- Suggest variety in revision, like cassettes, CDs, going to the Library, computers, TV or even going for a walk.
- Make sure that the rest of life gets a look in! Build in time for socialising, exercise and plenty of sleep.
- Offer help with testing - and test in imaginative ways.
- Remember that ‘passive’ revision – in other words just reading through copious notes and texts books – is often wholly ineffectual; it is far better to be ‘active’ in redrafting notes, highlighting, cutting and pasting, using diagrammatic aids or simply working towards a set question.

CLOSER TO THE EXAM

- Using old exam questions, check that your son is familiar with question styles, mark allocation and question interpretation.
- Encourage them to talk through exam planning techniques.
- Help them to do timed questions or essays in exam conditions. The real thing isn’t so terrifying if it is familiar already.
- Be the stopwatch.
- Pin up the exam timetable at home.

· Check that they are properly equipped - pens, pencils, erasers, rulers, sharpeners, calculators, a protractor, dictionaries and so on.

Of course, the School itself should remain a focal point for revision and I would urge you to have your sons make the most of the experienced, well qualified teaching staff, all of whom are very happy to offer subject-specific advice and further revision material.