

A GUIDE TO STUDY AND REVISION SKILLS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS



Do not forget to visit the school's website:

www.notredame-high.co.uk

A couple of useful, independent GCSE Revision websites are:

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize

www.projectgcse.co.uk

A GUIDE TO REVISION AND STUDY SKILLS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

With the final examinations only weeks away, we offer this guide to revision and study skills to our Year 11 students and their parents. It may be that part of what follows is already understood and practised by you. Nevertheless, the value that we all place on partnership between the students, the home and the school is strengthened when we share a common approach to important issues. The following pages summarise what all Year 11 students are learning about revision and study skills in the Spring Term. They have participated in a tutorial programme focussing on effective learning and revision, which will continue to be supported in the coming weeks by the work of their teachers.

THE G.C.S.E.

Many G.C.S.E. subjects have different tiers, to match students' abilities. The tiers are usually named Foundation, Intermediate or Higher. Additionally, all G.C.S.E.s are examined by a mixture of coursework and a final examination, each of which contributes to the final grade. Some subjects also have modular tests, as early as Year Ten, and these also contribute to the final mark.

G.C.S.E.s are graded from A* to G, with a U (unclassified) grade for those who do not achieve the lowest grade available. A - C grades equate, roughly, to the old "O" Level pass, with an A* grade marking out exceptional performance. Higher level courses in Further Education, such as "A" Levels or GNVQ Advanced courses usually require an applicant to gain 5 G.C.S.E.s at grade C level or above, as do most Modern Apprenticeship opportunities. Grades D - E are required for entry at G.C.S.E. re-sit level or for G.N.V.Q. Intermediate courses. Most colleges of Further Education also run courses for pupils who do not achieve this level.

THERE IS LIFE BEYOND EXAMS

The most important thing you can do to help your son/daughter is to be supportive. The exams are important, but they should not mean that the rest of life disappears. Try to find a middle way between pressuring them and letting them become complacent.

Try to have realistic expectations. You want your son/daughter to do well, but you also want them to be happy.

Academic achievement may seem vital for ensuring security in the future, but your son/daughter may suffer considerably if expectations are unreasonable. If they worry unduly about failing, reassure them that there are other options.

Your son/daughter will have been taught to recognise the signs of stress, and will have learned methods of coping with it - but this is sometimes easier said than done!

Do not underestimate the amount of stress your son/daughter may be feeling. If things seem to be getting too much, try to see that they don't bottle things up. Perhaps contact your son/daughter's tutor or another teacher (or a mentor if your son/daughter has one). Talk things through, and try to help them get concerns back into perspective.

HELPFUL THINGS YOU CAN DO

- Encourage without pressurising
- Take an interest, without asking what everyone else in the class does
- Offer drinks and snacks, surprises or treats to break up revision
- Encourage them to attend revision lessons (details to follow in May)
- Know which exams they are sitting and when, and get them ready in good time on exam days
- Help them keep life in perspective
- Respect their growing independence
- Help to plan revision, if appropriate
- Above all, keep calm yourself!

KEEP IN TOUCH ... BUT KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

- If your son/daughter is worried about a subject, suggest they see their tutor or the subject teacher. If the problem continues ask the school for extra help; a couple of sessions is often enough to boost flagging confidence.
- Make sure the school knows about any problem your son/daughter is being affected by, especially in cases of illness. In extreme cases, like bereavement or serious illness, alternative arrangements can be made to sit exam papers. A medical certificate is essential in the case of illness.
- Teachers often provide revision notes, and all departments provide revision details (see the school website for a summary). There are also special after-school revision sessions for specific subjects. Please encourage your son/daughter to attend.
- Give them space to control their own work. Let them find their own solutions as much as possible.
- Trust them. Don't find excuses to knock on the door to see if they're really revising or just talking on the 'phone (unless you can hear them)! If you are worried, check their progress with the school.

REVISION: ORGANISATION IS HALF THE BATTLE

- Help your son/daughter to find a quiet, comfortable place to work - somewhere to write and file materials conveniently.
- Keep things quiet if that's the way they like it. But if your son/daughter learns better with background music or lying on the floor, respect that too.
- Box files, folders and plastic wallets are useful organisers.
- A highlighter pen can make a big difference in selecting key ideas, passages or dates.
- 'Post - it's, dotted round the house, can help too. So can revision cards, especially if they're colour coded or in diagram form.

- Encourage realistic revision timetables, with targets that are "SMART", ie. **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**imed.

MAKING REVISION EASIER

- Revise for an average of 1½ hours a night, over the course of a week.
- Short bursts of revision (20 - 30 minutes), with short breaks (5 - 10 minutes) make best use of our concentration spans.
- See that your son/daughter spends an evening, soon, sorting their revision notes out - this helps save last minute panics.
- Encourage your son/daughter to revisit topics regularly. This helps move ideas from the short term to the long term memory.
- Suggest variety in revision, like cassettes, CD's, going to the Library, computers, TV or even going for a walk. Your sons/daughters will have been encouraged to find out their own "Preferred Learning Styles". Find out what they are, and encourage him/her to use them!
- Make sure that the rest of life gets a look in! Build in time for socialising, exercise and plenty of sleep.
- Ensure that the school's practice exam questions, revision guides and revision sessions are used.
- Offer help with testing - and test in imaginative ways.

EXAM TALK

There are some practical ways in which you can help nearer to the exams:

- Using old exam questions, check that your son/daughter 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.
- Make sure that your son/daughter has checked their "Statement of Entry" (issued by the school). Keep it safe. They need it on each exam day.
- Pin up the exam timetable at home, when it is published - not just to check, but also so that you can say, "Good luck!"
- Check that they are properly equipped - pens, pencils, erasers, rulers, sharpeners, calculators, a protractor, dictionaries and so on.

HEALTHY BODY - HEALTHY MIND

- Try to ensure that they eat sensibly - especially breakfast on exam days.
- Avoid too much coffee (for your son/daughter, not for yourself!) - caffeine can make stress worse.
- Make sure they take regular exercise. Mental stress is eased by physical activity. Indeed, research links physical exercise with improved intellectual ability.
- Try to ensure that they get enough sleep, especially the night before an exam. Burning the midnight oil can be very counter productive. We advise students to revise for two hours a night, and no more.

AND FINALLY ...

Your son/daughter, you and the school all want the summer's exams to be a success, and we all hope that (s) he copes well with the pressures involved.

Please feel free to contact the school with any concerns, and may we take this opportunity to wish all our students the best of luck.