

Dear all,

I hope you are well.

Given the unusual circumstances we are all in, I wanted to jointly write to our students and their families to reflect on the events since the start of the term.

I think we have all become immune to words like *unprecedented*. We are facing a pandemic on a scale that has not been seen for at least 100 years, and managing a global event not seen since WW2.

That being said, in all that has happened over the last 10 months, the last two weeks will not be forgotten in a hurry. A new lockdown, schools becoming testing centres, uncertainty about exams – not just in the summer, but for the vocational exams this month...the list goes on!

I can understand why all of this may cause you and your families some confusion and possible worry. That is why I thought it would be useful just to share a couple of thoughts and principles that I and my colleagues have held onto in recent days to help us address the situation we are in.

### **1) Do not feel alone**

Things at the moment can feel intensely personal. Please remember, however, that the issues we are facing are not specific to us. The communities of every secondary school and college from Cumbria to Kent will all be having the exactly the same conversations that we are having.

The Government will need to learn from last summer to produce the fairest possible guidelines to support hundreds of thousands of young people who all share similar worries and concerns. Once the details of the plans are known, we will support you every step of the way.

### **2) Moving forward, partnership is key**

The reality is that examinations and assessment will be different for the foreseeable future. To a large degree, we support Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs). The guidance and rules around them are, however, evolving. The level of scrutiny is increasing and there are calls for schools and colleges to base CAGs on current performance on topics that have been covered – not our predictions and projections on what students *could* achieve across a whole course.

This change is critical. It means that educators have to have tangible evidence to set CAGs. Every piece of work counts more than ever before.

I am not highlighting this to add worry or concern, only to stress that we all need to work closely together so that we can provide the best possible support for our students; academically, pastorally and also logistically. We have shown time and time again that collectively we can achieve a great deal, and we will need to do so again.

### **3) Assume nothing**

The one thing that we can all agree on is that it is impossible to assume anything at the moment. Even when a plan has been agreed, there is every likelihood that things will change again.

We can't control that, but the best way to prepare for uncertain is to keep trying our best. Whether it be planning for a testing centre or exams, preparation, hard work and focus will put us in the best position to respond to whatever challenges and opportunities we are faced with.

#### **4) Quite simply, thank you**

We are acutely aware that we are continually placed in a position where we have to ask students and their families to do things that are not “normal”. Home learning, lateral flow testing, asking you to self-isolate, making decisions about attendance at exams – none of these are things that any of us have ever really had to do before.

Do not underestimate how much your support, feedback and understanding means to our teachers, leaders and wider college staff. I speak for us all when I say a huge thank you.

With the vaccination programme rolling out, I am increasingly hopeful that we are closer to the end than the beginning of this pandemic. I know that we are all looking forward to the day when our colleges are full again.

There are, and will continue to be, hurdles for us to jump and challenges to respond to – so please continue to work with us so that we can support you in the best possible way. We are a community. While we may not be together physically, that does not take away from how dedicated our staff continue to be to support our students to flourish.

Thank you once again.

**Nikos Savvas**  
**Chief Executive.**