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Dear Parents and Carers of Year 11 Pupils,

I am writing as we face the run-up to the GCSE examinations. There are in fact only 32 school days left before the first formal exam takes place on Monday 15th May, some of our students will have already sat Art and Drama exams before this!

As a school we recognise that many of our students are working well in this final stretch towards the exams. The vast majority of students have used their mock exams in January to help close gaps in their subject knowledge. As I walk around the school, I am very proud to see the excellent attitudes that most of our Year 11 students are showing towards their studies, with many also seeking the assistance of their teachers during lunch and break times as well as attending additional sessions after school.

However, there are a small minority of students who require additional support from home and we would encourage you at this stage to talk to your child to ensure they are using their time effectively to prepare for the formal exams. As a recommendation, we would expect that on average, a student would be working for 2 hours a day outside of their lessons.

I have summarised some of the key messages that crop up frequently at this time of year for parents.

1) For the minority of pupils who haven't started revising in earnest, they can still make a difference to their grades. For those who have but are not running at 100%, it can still make a difference if they begin now to 'crank it up'.

2) All students should be making excellent use of their lesson time and opportunities with subject-specialist teachers, including after school sessions. It is vital that they embrace anything extra that is put on. In a small minority of cases, staff are missing students from extra sessions that would make a huge difference to them.

3) The way that you revise makes a huge difference. Working in quiet conditions, such as those in an exam room are essential in order to prepare for long stints of concentration (some exams are 2 hours in length). Having your mobile phone with you, or near you, decreases concentration – it is literally impossible to concentrate on two things at once. If your child has a quiet working space and you can remove distractions for a couple of hours (e.g. phone/Wi-Fi/tablet/tv) this will make a huge difference to how well they can concentrate.

I have shared below some key findings from cognitive science. Much of this was taken from this excellent article in the Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/apr/19/students-revise-exams-revision-science>

- Pupils have eaten a good breakfast that day.
- They start early and spread topics out (an hour a day on different topics is better than cramming for several hours on one topic)
- They frequently test themselves, or are tested by peers or parents. They teach someone else (here I suggested 'teach your parents!').
- They avoid highlighters – these tend to isolate pieces of information making them difficult to remember – better to take more condensed notes than to highlight notes.
- They don't listen to music – there is quite a lot of evidence music actually harms revision and no evidence that it helps.
- They should plan in time to get fresh air and exercise.
- That sleep is really important; students should not stay up too late.
- They should be revising now, **every night**.

We have updated our school website to help students/parents with the revision process <http://www.meridian.herts.sch.uk/curriculum/year-11.php> where you will find revision timetable templates, revision guidance and study skills tips.

Finally, some reminders of key activities that are taking place in school in these final few weeks before the exams.

Mocks: Maths and English exam papers – a final sitting of papers and assessment will take place in the week beginning 20th March. The feedback from these will be used to help direct your child to key areas to focus on for the final exams. Business – mock exam papers will take place on Friday 31st March.

Equipment: In addition to the usual black pens, pencil, ruler, rubber needed for most subjects, for maths students also require a geometry set and scientific calculator (usually Casio fx83) and to be familiar with the calculator so that they can use it to answer questions!

Extra sessions

Computing	after-school sessions on Tuesdays for investigation task controlled assessment help/catch up time.
Drama	essential coursework catch-up in J2 Monday after school until 4:30 and Thursday lunchtimes.
GCSE PE & Sports Science	catch-up sessions are taking place every Tuesday and Thursday in the Learn Centre. 3.30-4.30pm
Art/Resistant Materials/ Home Economics	all controlled assessment materials need to be completed before Easter holidays. Teachers are available for after-school catch-up, please speak to individual teachers
English	catch-up is on a Thursday after school in H2 and H5. Students can also see Mr Smith at any lunch or break to go through the exams, texts or work.
Maths	Mondays after school (general help) Thursday after school (by invitation)

Thank you for your support with your children. These final few months can make all the difference to their opportunities in the future.

Yours sincerely,



Zoe Andrews
Assistant Headteacher