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Ian Ralston – Head of Middle School

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To all Fourth Form Parents

Dear Parent

As your son has recently started his GCSE courses, I thought it might be helpful to provide you with some brief notes which answer some of the more general questions about GCSEs and the particular demands of the syllabuses. Two years ago there was an important change to the GCSE curriculum. The science exams became modular and your son will take some exams this school year in November and March (see further note about science). The results of these examinations will count towards the final GCSE exams. Your son is likely to be entered for the three separate, single science GCSE's rather than the dual award as in previous years.

It is important, at the outset, for boys to appreciate that the GCSE courses are no longer two years of preparation leading to the final examination. In some subjects there is a coursework element which may extend throughout the Year 10 and 11 curriculum. Coursework is a compulsory part of the assessment procedure and may consist of written or practical work, projects or oral tests. Individual subject teachers will give ample warning, plenty of time for the work to be completed and will set the deadlines clearly in advance. It is absolutely essential that these deadlines are adhered to. Where work is wholly or partly done at home, realistic deadlines will be set to ensure that all pupils are treated fairly and equally. If a candidate hands in work late, without good reason, he will be penalised. It is unfair on those pupils who have met the deadline.

The detailed regulations for GCSE vary from subject to subject and from one examination board to another but the following rules generally apply:

1 Assistance with Coursework

Subject teachers will, of course, provide all the necessary initial preparation and guidance required but, your son and his teacher will have to confirm that the coursework is the pupil's own work. The penalties for cheating are severe. No parental assistance is permitted.

2 Presentation

Subject teachers will indicate any specific requirements but it should be stressed that untidy and inaccurate presentation will be penalised.

3 Absence

If a pupil misses a piece of coursework through absence, it could result in marks being lost. If the absence is the result of illness, for which evidence (such as a parent or doctor's note) will be required, then the teacher concerned will make every effort to enable the pupil to do the work at a later date. However, it must be realised that in some circumstances, e.g. fieldwork visits, this may not be possible. Pupils will be informed in advance of the main coursework dates. If parents arrange holidays in the school term during the fourth and fifth years they must understand that the School cannot accept responsibility for the completion of coursework or internal assessments.

4 Marked work

Marked coursework will be discussed with pupils so that they can learn from their mistakes and improve with the next piece of work. In some subjects assessed work has to be retained by the School, in others by the candidate. In either case, it must be available for inspection by the Examination Board until the October after the results are published.

5 Differentiated papers

In a few subjects, a choice of papers is available for pupils of different abilities. In general we shall expect pupils here at Lancaster Royal Grammar School to sit papers appropriate to the upper ability range. However, it should be understood by boys that work during the course will be taken into account when the final decision is made about which exam paper is appropriate.

6 Transfer to another school

Pupils who have to move school during this two-year course will need to take a folder of their work with them to the new school.

Specific details of the GCSE work in each department are given below:

Art and Design

40% examination. 60% coursework.

Pupils select work for exhibition, which is internally assessed and externally moderated. It is important that pupils keep to deadlines to avoid falling behind. Projects normally last about six weeks and are undertaken throughout the course.

Design - Technology Resistant Materials, Graphical Products and Systems control

40% examination: 60% coursework

The boys will be provided with coursework deadlines at the start of Year 10 for project work which will be undertaken during Year 10 and Year 11. This work is due for **completion** and handing in before the Easter holidays in Year 11.

Classics - 100% examination in both Latin and Greek.

English - Language

60% examination 40% coursework (4 pieces of written coursework plus three orals)

English - Literature

70% examination 30% coursework (3 pieces of coursework)

Some pieces of coursework can be used in both Language and Literature and so the usual requirement is 5 pieces of coursework. These pieces will be done periodically during normal homework over the two-year course, much of it in the fourth form.

Geography

75% examination (2 papers) and 25% coursework

The coursework consists of a single individual study ('geographical enquiry') based on fieldwork, carried out by the pupil himself. The coursework will be teacher led in the choice of topic. Some lesson time will be provided for 'writing-up'. Fieldwork must be completed by the end of the summer holidays before the start of Year 11, with the study completed by half term in the Michaelmas term of Year 11.

History

75% examination (2 papers) 25% coursework (2 pieces of coursework are done in the first two terms of Year 11).

Class time and resources for coursework will be provided, but boys should be prepared to use local libraries and to undertake personal research. Boys are prepared for coursework in class, individual research and writing up is done at home. Boys are encouraged to discuss their coursework exercise with their teacher before it is written up.

Mathematics

100% examination. All boys are entered at the higher tier and will take two 2 hour papers.

Modern Languages

The examinations in French, German and Spanish are divided into the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (25% each). There is no coursework component - all skills are assessed by end of course examination.

Music

Coursework consists of 30% performance (instrument or voice) and 30% composition. All pieces are to be completed by Easter in Year 11.

Religious Studies

100% examination.

It is hoped to take students on a number of visits throughout the two-year study period.

Biology, Chemistry and Physics

All boys will be entered for three separate science GCSE's. In order to gain three separate GCSE awards in Biology, Chemistry and Physics it will be necessary to take modular level 1, level 2 and level 3 examination papers in each subject. This year your son will be entered for the level 1 examinations (B1, C1 and P1). Each module comprises two multiple choice papers taken in November and March. In addition each boy may undertake an assessed practical (ISA) in school time that counts towards the final GCSE result.

In Year 11 your son will continue with exams at level 3 in the three separate sciences.

TIMETABLE

Subject & Code	Date & Session	Duration in Minutes
Biology BLY1AP	Thursday 19 th November 2009 a.m.	30
Chemistry CHY1AP	Thursday 19 th November 2009 a.m.	30
Physics PHY1AP &1BP	Thursday 19 th November 2009 a.m.	30 + 30
Biology BLY1BP	Wednesday 3rd March 2010 a.m.	30
Chemistry CHY1BP	Wednesday 3rd March 2010 a.m.	30

As you can see from the timetable, the first exams are imminent and there is no time for a slow start to the year. Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information. A copy of this information is also on the School web-site.

Please find attached a summary of coursework in Year 10 and 11.

Yours sincerely

Ian Ralston
Head of Middle School