



HILL HOUSE SCHOOL

KJ/vm

21 June 2019

Dear Parent/Guardian

Year 10 GCSE English

Before we break up for the summer, I will meet with the current Year 9 pupils to discuss their transition into Year 10. We will cover a number of issues, from the English Language and Literature GCSE syllabus to the 9-1 grading system to what they can proactively do now to help their grades come two years' time.

There are a couple key points I wish to share with you, in the hope that they may be emphasised at home to help with this transition.

Firstly, I wanted to make clear that everything your child does in English, from now, counts towards their GCSE grade. We undertake the Cambridge IGCSE for Language (0990) and Literature (0992), which has a significant coursework component to it and, as such, the work that your child does will have an equally significant bearing on the final outcome. After the summer internal exam, your child will work towards a first draft of their descriptive writing coursework – the first of three pieces that will constitute 50% of the final Language GCSE grade. It is important that they take this work seriously, working to the deadlines set by their teachers.

Secondly, all the skills that we practise, revise and hone through the Language and Literature coursework and exam responses – those of clear, sophisticated oral and written communication and analysis – are vital to potential university admissions officers and employers. These are the skills they want in abundance and are the skills that we in the English department work assiduously to teach and sharpen. This is important for the pupils to bear in mind despite what their personal opinions may be regarding what we read.

As such, the one activity that your child can do now, that will have a positive impact on their learning and development in English over the next two years, is a simple one: read. In GCSE Literature, we will read a set prose and drama text, along with an anthology of poetry. Moreover, pupils will choose amongst a variety of non-set texts to write a piece of coursework. However, anything they read in addition to these texts will only help them practise their reading and comprehension skills – and the speed at which they do that – which are vital to the exam component of the course.

For the Language exam, they will have to read two unseen pieces of non-fiction, on which they will answer a series of comprehension and language analysis questions. In this case, the more your child can read journalist non-fiction – newspaper, magazines, online blogs – the better. Supporting your child by providing access to, for example, the weekend editions of newspapers such as *The Guardian* or *The Times* (which have the weekend magazine), or current affairs magazines such as *The Economist* or *The Week*, will help expose them to the types of texts they may encounter in the exam.

Again, the more exposure they have to these types of texts, the more they can internalise and refine their reading comprehension skills – as well as their understanding, usage and appreciation of professional, academic-minded writing, vocabulary and viewpoints.

A final point I wish to address, in general terms, is the issue of setting. Moving from three Year 9 sets to three Year 10 sets may lead to changes to existing groups. While these changes will only be considered once the Year 9 exams are marked and moderated – and in consultation with the Senior Management Team – I would like to gently rebuff some misconceptions that placement of set for your child limits their access to high-level learning or their ability to achieve. In English, we aim to provide challenge, passion and progress for all pupils to work towards their potential – and stretch them beyond. Although performance in the Year 9 examination bears some significant weight in determining initial sets for Year 10, work from throughout the year, both in class books and in assessed pieces, is likewise a factor. As such, setting often has more to do with finding sets of pupils who share a rough synonymy for the pace of a lesson and of learning than with grade attainment.

It is worth reiterating that English sets will not delimit opportunity for achievement, but help us provide a holistic approach to addressing similar skills issues and challenges that appear across a group of pupils.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you in preparing your child for the challenging, but nonetheless exciting – and dare I say enjoyable – transition into GCSE English Language and Literature.

Yours faithfully

Dr Kurt A Johnson
Head of English