



These are strange times.

Mr Cawley is currently unwell. I spoke to him on Monday and Wednesday of this week. He is very disappointed not to be here. He sends his absolute best wishes to each and every one of you within Year 11 of our St James' family.

As of yesterday, another 29 people with coronavirus have died, bringing UK deaths to 137.

On Wednesday our Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, said it was clear that education and children's social care settings were increasingly finding it difficult to continue as normal, as illness and self-isolation impacts on staffing levels and pupil attendance. We have seen at St James' a decline in the number of staff and students attending school. Our attendance figure for Thursday was 83%, it is normally 96%, that's around 136 children across the five-year groups off. Mr Williamson announced that schools, colleges and early years settings will be closed to everyone except children of key workers and vulnerable children from Monday, as part of the country's ongoing response to coronavirus.

It is important that you as students understand that examples of these workers include NHS staff, police and delivery drivers who need to be able to go to work. Vulnerable children, including those who have a social worker and those with Education, Health and Care Plans, can continue to attend school if they are fit and well and do not need to self-isolate.

The government have also said that, where possible, they would encourage settings to stay open throughout the Easter holidays. The level of commitment of your staff at St James' has been phenomenal with numerous staff wanting to support each and every one of you.

As it currently stands, we are living through a period of history. In 40 years, GCSE examination questions will ask students what took place in 2020? The Queen yesterday said the world was entering a period of great uncertainty and that every individual had "a vitally important part to play".

As a Year 11 student you will be acutely aware that examinations have been cancelled for May and June of this year. To demonstrate just how unprecedented this situation is. It is the first time the exams have been cancelled since the system was put in place in 1888. This means that examinations were even sat during World War 1 and World War 2. These are indeed strange times.

Mr Williamson confirmed that assessments and examinations will not go ahead. He has said that he will work with the sector and Ofqual to ensure children get the qualifications they need. The government continues to say that you will not be disadvantaged.

Rumours are never a good part of any school however I feel this is an opportunity for me to indulge in such things. Before I detail these rumours the government is supposed to be announcing what will be happening at 5pm this evening so I would encourage you to watch the news tonight.



There are three predictions I can foresee detailing what will happen for you as Year 11 students in your examinations.

1. You are awarded your mock grades
2. You sit your examinations in September when you start at your next education provider
3. You are awarded grades which are predicted by your teachers

To my mind the first option is very unlikely. As a boy who achieved numerous D and E grades during his mocks, to come out with a much better suite of qualifications in the real examinations, this would be harsh. I know having spoken to many headteachers they are of the same opinion.

The second option would be difficult from a logistical point of view. Examiners will be unavailable, papers not ready and time would not allow for this to take place.

Therefore this leaves option three. How this would work is unclear. It may be that your teachers have to predict what grades you would have got based on your work ethic over the last few months and based on your most recent assessments. I hope you are sitting there asking yourself the question - was I nice to my teachers?

Before I end by discussing how you will finish your time at St James' there are a number of students who receive free school meals. In this part I speak directly to you. The government has said it will be sending free-school meal vouchers home but it has yet to release any details. Therefore, we have taken the decision as a leadership team to post home vouchers which you can use to buy your lunch from a supermarket as if you were in school.

This is not goodbye to our class of 2020. This is not the way we want to end our time with you. We will be providing the opportunity for you to celebrate the end of your time at St James' properly. Myself, Mr Scott, Mr Cawley and Mrs Harrop will be discussing ways to formally end your time at St James'. All options are still on the table including a leavers' breakfast, leavers' mass and prom. Leavers' Hoodies are still available to buy through the Monkhouses website

As a year group you will always have a very special place in my heart. My first interaction with you was in July 2018 when I was appointed to the position of Headteacher. Three year 9 forms had to endure my assembly during the interview process which featured Lionel Messi. There was one young man who volunteered to be blindfolded during the assembly and to him I am ever grateful!

I would ask you for calm and patience at this time and remind you to continue work at home. This is extremely important as when you start your next stage at college or on an apprenticeship you do not want to have not done any work for many months otherwise you will be behind your peers.

I wish each and every one of you success in the future.



**ST JAMES'**  
CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

### **Message from Mr Cawley**

Dear Year 11

I wish I could be with you now to say this in person but as I think you're aware, I've not felt very well this week. I've almost been as green as one of my fetching suits. Don't worry though I'll be absolutely fine in no time. I hope you are all well.

As I said in last week's assembly, these are strange times- one in which we've never experienced before. It does not yet seem clear how you are going to get your qualifications but I would encourage you to keep learning even if your exams don't happen. Learning shouldn't just be for the sake of exams. Learning helps you to challenge and better yourself. You never stop learning and there is always something new to learn, as shown by the doctors and scientists working so hard around the world trying to cope with this virus. You've matured so much this last year and you are all a credit to the school. Look after yourselves and those around you.

I look forward to seeing you all again.

Take care  
Mr Cawley