

A message to parents of students taking Public Exams this Summer

By D P Cassidy (Headmaster)

As students taking public examinations this Summer approach the Easter Holidays, what support should parents provide their children with? Well this is a very relevant question for me as my eldest daughter will be sitting her A Levels and hopes to go up to university in September. But what advice do I give parents in this position every year and is it realistic?

Well firstly and most obviously be supportive. Your son or daughter will be under a good deal of self-imposed stress, so they do not need parents making unnecessary demands on their time or indeed emotions.

Secondly, ensure that they have somewhere quiet to study away from distraction and certainly try to keep younger siblings quiet around the house. Ensure that they have a desk and that they realise that studying is almost certainly not lying on their bed simply reading notes. Study needs to be active and engaging and almost always involve a mixture of writing, recital and problem solving.

Thirdly, encourage them to begin early. The first day of the Easter Holidays should establish the routine which continues throughout. It may be that at the beginning of the holiday they complete just a couple of hours per day and build this up. They should avoid burn out: it is all about timing, in musical terms a crescendo so that they peak at the right time.

Fourthly, ensure that they get plenty of rest and exercise. A well oxygenated brain is a healthy brain and is more likely to perform better than one which isn't – it's simple biology! Also ensure that they eat a good diet, avoiding high sugar content foods in favour of foods containing complex carbohydrates and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Bananas were once thought to aid brain function owing to their high potassium levels but nuts are also rated as being great 'brain food'.

Fifthly, try to encourage them to have time away from electronic communication: a pen and paper are the raw materials required for revision and don't let them tell you otherwise. However, there are some excellent on-line tutorials available on You Tube which can be a great help with understanding. There are also some excellent online notes to supplement class notes in many subjects, just try to ensure they're not switching windows into social media etc which is an obvious distraction.

Finally, be flexible. Allow them to work at their rate and don't confuse time spent revising and quality. These are just a handful of simple everyday tips to provide the home structure to support learning. I'm not suggesting it's an easy time for families and I must remember to accept this advice as well!