



The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP  
Minister of State for School Standards  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BT

Our Ref: CW/VP32898

28 January 2021

Dear Nick,

Over recent weeks I have spent a lot of time speaking to the secondary school headteachers in my constituency including The Warriner School, Whitelands Academy and The Cooper School. I would be grateful if the following comments could be considered as part of the ongoing consultation into arrangements for exams this summer. I write as both the Member of Parliament and as the parent of a child who should have been sitting her A-Levels this year.

The headteachers I have spoken to share my disappointment that children will not be able to sit their exams as anticipated this summer. I have always felt that every effort should be made for them to go ahead given that exams provide a fair and accurate representation of a student's performance. However, I recognise the unprecedented circumstances we find ourselves in and accept that some alternative arrangements must be considered.

This past year has been difficult for students of all ages. They have faced immense pressure to adapt and continue to learn in an unusual environment. Many have faced significant challenges while learning from home. I am concerned by the proposal for grades to be awarded to students which reflect the standard at which they are performing, rather than how they might have performed had the pandemic not occurred. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between schools during the past year (particularly during the first lockdown) and the impact this might have on grade variation worries me. It also strikes me that this will lead to a significant decline in the pass rate which could have detrimental consequences for this year's cohort.

When conducting their assessment, it seems important that a teacher uses evidence of the standard of a student's performance from throughout their course, rather than at one point in time. The proposed timeline for assessments and the submission of grades appears reasonable.

It strikes me that the provision of papers by exam boards to support consistency within and between schools and colleges might be sensible. I am concerned about the additional burden of work on teachers conducting the assessments, as well as the psychological pressure they may face in making objective decisions about their students. Many of our teachers have worked extremely hard this past year with very little respite. It is critical that they are supported in their work and can rely on clear and coherent guidance and training from the exam boards. External quality assurance arrangements are essential.

The proposal to bring results day forward seems practical. I would hope that it provides students with a clear understanding of their next steps after a year of so much uncertainty. It should also allow sufficient time for appeals to be processed. I have no strong preference as

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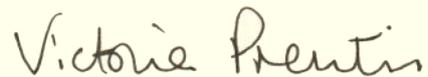
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to whether it should be for schools to oversee appeals or for exam boards to be responsible. It strikes me that schools would either face more work over their much-needed summer break or exam boards would have to make a decision with no real foundation for re-assessment. In my view there is no easy solution. My hope is that any decision that is taken provides for a fair, efficient and balanced appeals system.

Finally, I am concerned about a possible divide emerging between state and independent schools, with the latter encouraging those pupils to sit iGCSEs where possible. To ensure all students have a fair chance regardless of their background, I remain of the view that some sort of exam should be undertaken in conjunction with a teacher assessment.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Prentis". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

**Victoria Prentis MP**