



Our Ref: SLA/DK

8 March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

### **Grading of GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications in summer 2021**

This week our students in Year 11 and 13 are back in school where they belong, receiving their lessons from their teachers. We are keen that they return and fall back quickly into good habits for learning where they can be supported by our staff in terms of both their well-being and their learning. We are currently planning to make sure they are well prepared for their next destinations whether that is moving on to university, sixth form or employment. They will, in most subjects, be consolidating learning from January and February and settling back into our normal routines.

Many of you will undoubtedly be worried about the awarding of grades for this year and we would like to reassure you that we want the best for them and will use a broad range of evidence to inform our decision making. We will be looking carefully at what comes from exam boards, when it is published at the end of March, in relation to mini assessments and set papers that will allow them to demonstrate what they do know to give a credible grade. We are working as hard as possible to ensure that no child will be disadvantaged by the circumstances we have all found ourselves in. The information below may answer some of the many questions that have crossed your mind over the last few months.

#### **How will grades be awarded this summer?**

Grades for GCSEs, A levels, and most other qualifications including applied generals will be based on a process involving teacher assessment against national standards, internal quality assurance, and external quality assurance by the exam boards.

The national process defined by the Department for Education and the exams' regulator, Ofqual is as follows:

1. Teachers will **assess students against a national standard**, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break.
2. Subject departments will submit grades which will be **quality assured by the school**. This internal quality assurance process will have to be signed off by the Head of Centre to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards.
3. Our school results will then be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards which will include random sampling and checking of our school's evidence.
4. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, **then the exam boards will award students their final grades**.
5. If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to appeal.

#### **So, do teachers award the grade?**

Simply: no. The grade students achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. This is against a nationally defined standard, not the teacher's own opinion. This assessment is then subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the final grade is awarded by the exam body as usual.

#### **Does this mean grades are decided by an algorithm?**

No, unlike last year, students' grades will not be changed by a formula. The internal and external quality assurance measures will all be done by humans, not an algorithm. There is no limit on the achievement of students, providing we have evidence that they are working at that grade.

#### **What about loss of learning/impact of Covid?**

This year, teachers will only assess students on content they have been taught – because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means students will not be disadvantaged if they individually, their whole class or whole year group have been unable to complete their full course. However, grades can only be

submitted on the basis of the evidence we have of students' performance, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Students who would usually have extra time in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessment.

### **Will grades be different between different schools?**

No, the standard against which teachers will be assessing students is set nationally by the exam boards. This is the standard that will be used during external quality assurance and appeals to ensure consistency and fairness across the system.

### **What evidence will be used?**

Teachers can draw on a range of assessment evidence from across a student's study of the course, up until Friday, 28 May 2021. The exam boards are producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter. Different departments may use different sources of evidence, and there is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used – it is about a performance across a range of evidence.

### **The exam boards are only giving out past papers, how is this fair?**

Most of the assessments provided by the exam boards will be drawn from past papers, although there will be new questions as well. There is significant research that even if students have seen assessments questions before, it does not reduce the validity of the assessment. Furthermore, exam board questions are only one of the many pieces of evidence we will use to assess students this summer.

### **Can students and parents make the case for why a student should get a higher grade?**

Our teachers are already using their professional expertise to assess students on the content they have been taught. Teachers are unable to submit higher grades for students unless they have the evidence that they are consistently working at this level. If teachers submit higher grades without evidence, they are committing exam malpractice.

In 2020, any undue pressure by student or parent who placed undue pressure on teachers to increase grades was also considered exam malpractice. It is likely to be the same for 2021. If students or parents are found to be putting teachers or leaders under undue pressure to increase grades, then this matter will be referred to the exam boards and an investigation into malpractice may ensue. This may result in the student's certificate being removed entirely if malpractice is deemed to have taken place.

### **Can students discuss their grades with teachers?**

Teachers will be able to discuss which evidence they are using to inform their judgement with students, including marked or graded pieces of work.

However, we are not allowed to disclose their final submitted grade we give to the exam board.

Students should not attempt to second-guess the grade submitted, as teachers will be using a range of evidence to inform their final judgement. Students must not pressure teachers to reveal the grades they are submitting, or to increase the grades, as doing so may be considered exam malpractice.

### **What should students do to improve their grades?**

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.

We are really looking forward to working alongside your children and are committed to ensuring they achieve their own personal best this summer. If you wish to discuss anything relating to examinations and the process, please do not hesitate to contact me at school.

Yours sincerely



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