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where everyone can succeed



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26th February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

RE: Government plans regarding how GCSE, A Level and vocational grades will be decided in summer 2021

I hope you and your families are safe and well.

Yesterday, the government outlined plans for how GCSE, A Level and vocational grades will be determined in summer 2021. As you know, as a result of the disruption students have faced over the last year due to the pandemic, the government decided at the beginning of January that examinations would not take place in the summer. They have now shared the detail of how grades will be decided for our Year 11 and Year 13 students.

We all fully understand that the last year has been extremely challenging for all of our students, given the impact of the pandemic on education and life more widely and, of course, it has been particularly unsettling for students in our examination year groups. Therefore, it is good to finally have the detail from the government about grading in the summer and I wanted to outline the key points from the guidance published yesterday by Ofqual, the government's exam regulator, to ensure you are fully informed. I hope you will find this information reassuring and we will keep you updated throughout the year, as Ofqual and exam boards share further information with schools.

The key message about the grading is that **students will receive grades determined by teachers and the school and no algorithm will be used.** This is very good news. We know our students and their progress and abilities very well and we are certainly best placed to make such judgements, rather than an algorithm. **Also, very importantly, grades will not be based on one piece of evidence i.e. one mock examination result. To ensure that this grading is fair to all students, teachers will be able to draw on a broad range of evidence from throughout the course when determining grades.** This evidence can include class work, homework, mock exams, coursework, non-exam assessment (NEA) or other work completed as part of a student's course, such as essays or in class-assessments. Schools will also be able to use optional questions provided by the exam boards to form part of this broad evidence base. The exam boards have not provided these questions to schools yet but, to support teachers and schools in making their judgements, exam boards will be providing detailed guidance to schools, including these optional questions and mark schemes, before the end of the spring term.

Furthermore, schools will not have to submit grades to the exam boards until the 18th June 2021 and this is to allow as much teaching time as possible before we determine the students' grades. Therefore, despite the disruption caused by the pandemic during this school year, when students return to school from the 8th March, there is still much time left for students to continue to work hard in their subject areas to produce work and to complete assessments that will contribute to the range of evidence that will be used when determining grades. It will be important that students give their full effort towards every aspect of their studies. Our excellent teaching and support staff team will also continue to give students superb support so that all students are able to reach their full potential this year.

Results' Days will be a little earlier than usual this year. The government have outlined that A Level results will be received by students on 10th August 2021 and GCSE results will be received on the 12th August 2021. Ofqual have also assured schools that vocational students should also receive their results no later than the students who are studying for GCSE and A Levels.

All schools, including St Mary's, will have robust **quality assurance** in place to ensure there is consistency of judgements and to ensure that the correct processes are followed in school. Please be assured that this will be very robust and every grade determined by the 18th June for students will have gone through many layers of monitoring and evaluation in school, to ensure that the grades submitted are fair and accurate. Exam boards will also put in place quality assurance arrangements to make sure consistent judgements are being made across schools.

Following the results being published in August, **every student will also have the right to appeal their grade**. A student unhappy with their grade would submit an appeal to the school, so that the school could check whether an administrative error had been made. If a school does find an error in the grade submitted, it can submit a revised grade to the exam board. If a school does not believe an error had been made, a student can ask the school to appeal to the exam board on his/her behalf. The school will submit the student's appeal to the exam board and provide the evidence on which the school's judgement was made. The exam board will then consider if the grade reflected an appropriate exercise of academic judgement.

The following link takes you to a government document, 'How qualifications will be awarded in 2021'. It has been produced specifically for students to explain the process to them. Therefore, I would recommend that students take some time to read this, www.gov.uk/government/speeches/how-qualifications-will-be-awarded-in-2021

I hope this information has provided reassurance. As outlined, we fully understand how challenging this year has been for our students and we will continue to provide excellent support throughout the year.

I would ask that parents and carers, and students, do not try to discuss with teachers what grade a student may be given in a particular subject in the summer. As explained, these decisions will not be made until June, when we have to submit the grades. There is much teaching and learning to take place before then. Therefore, the most important focus for our students should be to continue to work hard and give their absolute best to their studies over the next 3 months to ensure that they are able to reach their full potential over the coming months, producing work that will contribute to the range of evidence that we will use to determine the final grades.

We will keep you fully updated, as any further information comes into school from the government or Ofqual. I have summarised in this letter, the information currently available from the government. As we progress through the next few months, if you have any further queries about the grading process, you should get in touch with Dr Stanton, Assistant Headteacher (Year 11) and Mr McKeating, Assistant Headteacher (Year 13). Further to this, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your child's Head of Year, if there is anything further we can do to support.

Most importantly, please reassure your children that we will continue to do everything possible throughout this year to support them fully and to ensure that they receive the grades they deserve, so that they can progress successfully on their chosen path to Sixth Form, university, training or employment.

Thank you very much for your continued support.

Very best wishes,



Miss Patterson
Headteacher