



# St Mary's Catholic School

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Dear Parents and Carers

## RE: GCSE, A Level and vocational grades in summer 2021

I hope you and your families are safe and well.

Further to my letter of 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021, when I shared information from the DfE and Ofqual, the government's exams regulator, about how grades would be decided for Year 11 and Year 13 students in summer 2021, I wanted to share a further update. Very frustratingly, schools have still not received further guidance and support materials from the exam boards. We are expecting this guidance to come into school next week, given that the DfE and Ofqual have assured schools that we will have this information by the end of the spring term. Therefore, we have put together a draft plan in school and we will finalise this plan once further guidance is received. In the information below, I have included a few reminders of key points from my previous letter, as well as some further information about our plan.

### Overview

- Students will receive grades determined by teachers and the school.
- 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.
- Grades will be based on students' actual performance and not a judgement of what they might have achieved in the summer examinations (as was the case in 2020).
- Schools will assess their students' performance, only on the content that has been taught to students by their teachers.
- The Government has stated that, overall, it will be no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years.
- Schools will not have to submit grades to the exam boards until the 18<sup>th</sup> 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, there is still much time left for students to continue to work hard in their subject areas to produce work and to complete in-class assessments that will contribute to the broad range of evidence that will be used when determining grades.
- All schools, including St Mary's, will have robust quality assurance in place to ensure that the correct processes are followed in school. Exam boards will also put in place external quality assurance arrangements (QA) to evaluate each school's internal QA process and, in a sample of schools, to review the evidence for one or more subjects. Exam boards will process the grades submitted by schools only after completing, and being satisfied with, any external QA.
- Results' Days will be a little earlier than usual this year. A Level results will be received by students on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 and GCSE results will be received on the 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021. Vocational students will also receive their results no later than the students who are studying for GCSE and A Levels.
- Following the results being published in August, every student will also have the right to appeal their grade. A grade that is appealed could go up, stay the same or go down as a result of the appeal.

### St Mary's draft plan

Since Year 11 and Year 13 students have returned to school, teachers have continued to lead high quality teaching, learning and assessment with students, encouraging students to give their very best to all work, to continue to complete work that will contribute to the broad range of evidence we will use when determining final grades. Teachers have continued to teach any appropriate course content and completed ongoing in-class assessments. At the same time, departments have been considering existing evidence, as well as planning the teaching, learning and in-class assessments that will take place over the coming weeks until May half-term. For your information, it is likely that the final day in school for our Year 11 and Year 13 students will be Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May, as we break up for May half-term. However, this is still to be confirmed by the DfE and therefore, we will confirm this with parents and carers as soon as a decision is communicated to us.

Over the next couple of weeks before Easter, teachers will be talking to students about their current level of achievement and where appropriate, outlining what students can do to further improve their achievement. This information will help parents to support their child's revision and work over the Easter break, as well as helping to focus students' work and effort in lessons after the break. In many cases, students will already be working at their full potential and therefore will be making excellent progress in their subjects. For some students, departments may feel that with increased effort and further evidence gathered over the next couple of months, a higher level of achievement might be possible. As you know, Parents and Carers recently received an Achievement 1 report from school, which outlined their child's current achievement. If your child is now working at a different level in a particular subject, to the grades outlined on this report, their teacher will share the updated grade with your child before the Easter break.

Teachers will continue to gather evidence from assessments, classwork and homework, both before and after Easter. We will not be having any period of mock examinations for our Year 11 and Year 13 students, instead students will be completing ongoing, shorter in-class assessments. A period of mock examinations would disrupt the timetable and take up too much teaching time and instead, we want our students to be well-settled in lessons, with as much teaching and learning time as possible, to give them the best possible chance of success. Also, the main purpose of mock examinations is for students to 'practise' for the summer examinations and, of course, these exams are not going ahead this year. Most importantly, in our experience, students perform much better in smaller assessments than they do in extended, full mock exams. Therefore, by completing shorter and more regular assessments in class, we will be giving all of our students the best possible chance of achieving well, to contribute further evidence towards their final grades. This will also avoid any potential stress that a period of mock exams may cause for our students, to ensure that we can support our students and keep them calm, safe and well, so that they can continue to give their best to the remaining weeks of Year 11 and Year 13. We will ensure that any students who are eligible for extra time in exams, also get this additional time for any in-class assessments.

For all students, these assessments are an opportunity to consolidate the evidence we currently have and potentially provide additional evidence to support a higher grade. These assessments will cover a sample of content and are not intended to cover the whole of a course. In the lessons leading up to the assessments, students will be supported to prepare for them and they will be given guidance to allow them to undertake focused preparation. As I have mentioned, until we receive further guidance from the examination boards, we will not be able to finalise the exact nature or arrangements of these assessments. While we need to wait for exam board guidance before finalising our plans, we will ensure that any assessments take place in a way that is fair and consistent for all students.

These assessments will be completed by Friday 21<sup>st</sup> May. The time between this point and the deadline for submitting grades to the exam boards on the 18<sup>th</sup> June is needed for internal and external quality assurance to take place, which will ensure the validity of the final grades. Other ongoing teaching and learning will continue through until Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May, when students are expected to leave school. For vocational and other subjects with 100% coursework, evidence will continue to be gathered throughout the half term after Easter.

**Please find attached a FAQs document that you may find useful to look at together with your children.**

I hope that this letter gives you a good idea of our plan moving forward, subject to the Exam Board guidance next week.

I know that there may still be some anxiety amongst our students and so again, my advice is that the most important focus for our students should be to continue to work hard and to give their absolute best to their studies over the coming weeks to ensure they are able to reach their full potential, producing work that will contribute to the broad range of evidence that we will use to determine the final grades. If they give their best to all of the work they complete between now and May half-term, this will give them the best possible chance of success. As we progress through the next few months, if you have any queries about the grading process, you should get in touch with Dr Stanton, Assistant Headteacher (Year 11) and Mr McKeating, Assistant Headteacher (Year 13). Furthermore, 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 your child.

Thank you again for your understanding and support.

Very best wishes,



Miss Patterson  
Headteacher

## Grade Awarding 2021 Frequently Asked Questions

### **Is the grade I am currently working at the grade I will be finally awarded?**

Not necessarily, it is an indication of what the evidence we currently have says. Teachers will continue to gather evidence which could mean that your final grade is higher. We also need to wait for exam board information to be sure our grading judgements are in line with their guidance.

### **What should I do if I am disappointed with my current 'working at' grade?**

Your teachers will have explained your grade and what you need to do to improve your grade further. Don't worry too much and focus on doing as well as you can from now on. If you are able to provide evidence of working at a higher grade from now on, there is a good chance that your final grade will be higher.

### **Will in-class assessments cover all of the course?**

No, they will be a sample of the course that will allow you to demonstrate your skills, understanding and overall level of performance. Departments will also make sure that the areas included in the assessments were covered well during the course.

### **What work should I do over the Easter holidays?**

Although the assessments after Easter will not cover all of the content and you will be supported to prepare for them in lessons, clearly if you have practised your skills and increased your knowledge, you will be in a better position to do well. We would advise you therefore to continue to revise and practise skills as you would have done in a normal year. Remember your effort will never be wasted as it will also help you next year at university, sixth form, college or an apprenticeship.

### **If I make a mess of one of my in-class assessments, does that mean my overall grade will go down?**

Again, these assessments contribute to the final grade but they are not the same as exams. If one assessment goes badly compared to the other evidence we have, it is unlikely your grade will go down. Remember we will be using a broad range of evidence to decide your final grade, your grade will not rely on one or two exams like in a usual year. Therefore, one poor result will not make your overall grade go down.

### **Will I find out what grades I get in my assessments?**

As with all assessments you do in school, you will find out your results for in-class assessments and teachers will share feedback with the class as always. This will help you to prepare for further assessments.

### **What happens if I have to self-isolate or I am ill and miss an assessment?**

If you miss an assessment, as far as possible, your teacher will get you to complete the assessment at another time. However, remember that no one assessment will decide your final grade, we will be using a broad range of evidence to decide this. Therefore, missing one short, in-class assessment, should not cause any issues.

### **I missed parts of the course due to COVID-19 isolation that other students didn't. Will I be at a disadvantage?**

No. Departments will use assessments that will give all students the best chance of success. In a very small number of individual cases, the assessment evidence may need to be different, to ensure a student is not disadvantaged.

### **Will I find out my overall, final grade?**

No. After staff have considered all of the evidence, students will be assigned an overall final grade for each subject but this is not finalised until all of the quality assurance in school and externally from exam boards is complete. The exam boards will then carry out their processes and issue final grades in the summer on Results' Day. Therefore, whilst the results of in-class assessments will be shared with you, as well as the grade you are currently working at, your final grade will not be shared by teachers in school. You will receive this on Results' Day in August.

### **Can I ask my teachers what they think my final grade will be?**

No. Your teachers will tell you the grade that you are currently working at and what you need to do to improve that grade. Your teachers will talk to you about individual work or assessments but not about your overall grade, so please do not ask.

### **When will I leave?**

Unless we receive any different guidance from the Government, we expect most Year 11 and Year 13 students to leave on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May, as we break up for May half-term. There may be a very small number of courses that did not quite complete all of the content that departments feel is important for students, either at university or for starting A Levels, so some students may be invited to lessons after May half-term to complete this content.