



31st March 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope you and your families are safe and well.

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

Further to my recent letters regarding grading in summer 2021, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) and Ofqual, the government's examination regulator, published guidance for schools on Friday last week, to ensure that all schools have a robust process in place to inform the awarding of grades for Year 11 and Year 13 students this year. We have been waiting for this guidance from the government since 4th January, when the DfE cancelled summer examinations for 2021 and, therefore, we were very glad to finally receive this and have now been able to finalise our school plans, in line with JCQ, Ofqual and Department for Education (DfE) guidance. As part of this guidance, the JCQ has produced a document for students, parents and carers (link below, for your information):

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/JCQ-Guidance-for-Students-and-Parents-on-Summer-2021.pdf>

I will firstly outline the key points from this guidance and then confirm our plans at St Mary's for after Easter. Thankfully, as you will see, very little has had to change from our draft plans, as our plans were very much in line with the recently published guidance.

JCQ/Ofqual/DfE guidance

The guidance confirms that teachers and schools will determine grades based on a range of evidence and this may include:

- Records of student performance on the content they have been taught over the entire course.
- Non-exam assessment, often referred to as coursework or internal assessments, even if students have not fully completed it.
- Work students have produced in tasks set by their teachers that reflect the specification, format and marking of exam boards. This could include classwork, homework and internal tests or exams.
- Schools may also set assessments for students in order to gather further evidence. Teachers can develop these assessments or use assessment materials provided by the exam boards. Importantly, the guidance makes clear that these tests are not formal exams, nor are they designed to play the role of exams.

Overall, the guidance makes clear that no single piece of evidence will be more important than another and a range of evidence should be used to give an overall picture of students' performance over the course.

The guidance explains that teachers do not need to assess students on every aspect of each subject specification. They just need a range of evidence that shows student performance on the aspects they have been taught. The guidance also makes clear that, in most cases, the range of evidence that teachers use to inform an individual student's grade will be consistent across the cohort for each qualification. However, in a small number of cases, a school can decide that a slightly different range of evidence may be more appropriate to inform a student's grade, for example, if the student has missed significantly more teaching than other students in a class or there are other mitigating circumstances.

The guidance states that students should be told which pieces of evidence will be used to inform their final grade, so that students have the opportunity to raise any concerns about the evidence being used, for example, if the evidence was affected by personal circumstances, such as illness or bereavement. However, the guidance stresses that teachers will make the final judgement about which evidence is to be included. The guidance also stipulates that under no circumstances will a teacher be able to tell a student or a parent/carer the final grade submitted to the exam board.

Furthermore, the guidance outlines that once remaining work or assessments are complete, the final evidence to be considered will be selected and teachers, Heads of Department and the school will decide the final grade. The guidance states that it will be no easier or harder for a student to achieve a grade this year than in previous years. The guidance outlines that both internal and external quality assurance processes must be in place in all schools to ensure all grades are fair and determined consistently. All schools will have to devise a 'Centre Policy' which outlines such processes and this will be reviewed and approved by the exam boards to ensure that all of the JCQ guidance is met by schools. Schools have until 30th April to finalise this Centre Policy. The exam boards will also complete sampling visits in schools, as appropriate, to monitor processes and to monitor the evidence used to determine grades.

Finally, the guidance outlines that if students have special educational needs, and/or are disabled and require reasonable adjustments, the school should ensure these are in place when evidence was gathered. If appropriate adjustments were not in place at any point, when a child completed an assessment, teachers will take this into account when determining grades. The appeals process is also outlined in the guidance and JCQ have confirmed that a student's grade can go down, up or stay the same at any stage of the appeals process.

St Mary's plan

The most important thing to share with parents/carers and students is our commitment, as always, to support our students fully to reach their full potential and to achieve the grades they deserve in the summer. This commitment is at the forefront of all of our planning. We have given considerable thought to these plans to ensure that they are reasonable and fair for all students, as well as ensuring that they give our students the best possible chance of success. There is nothing we want more than for every student in Year 11 and Year 13 to achieve well in the summer and we will continue to give your child tremendous support as we move through next half-term.

As previously outlined, before the Easter break teachers will have shared with students what level or grade they are currently working at, as well as how they can improve, as appropriate. Teachers will also have guided students regarding any work they should complete over the break to support their progress when they return after Easter.

Teachers will then continue to lead high quality teaching, learning and assessment with students. All of this work, whether it is classwork, homework, or in-class assessments, is able to contribute to our students' final grades. Therefore, as mentioned previously, it is **essential that students give their best to all pieces of work, remembering that JCQ states clearly that no single piece of work or assessment will be more important than any other piece of evidence.** Therefore, whilst we will be completing some further in-class assessments next half-term, they are certainly nothing to worry about, given that a range of evidence will be used to determine grades, not one or two assessments alone.

During the first 4 weeks of the half-term after Easter, students will complete two in-class assessments in each subject:

- One assessment will take place between the 19th and 30th April.
- One assessment will take place between the 4th and 14th May.

Teachers will always give students a minimum of one week's notice of any assessment. Teachers will speak to students in lessons about any upcoming assessments and will also put a notice on Teams, to allow all students to prepare well and to ensure that any students who may be at home, for example, students who are self-isolating, will get the same notice about an assessment as students in school. We would kindly ask parents to support us with this, by ensuring their child checks Teams daily during term time to receive any important information from teachers. Students will also be told which broad topic areas will be covered in the assessment and this will really help focus their preparation for the assessment and keep things manageable for our students.

We want to keep a little flexibility with the timing of these assessments, within the timeframes above, to allow us to take extra time in lessons if needed, before an assessment, to make sure students are well-prepared and able to achieve their very best. As per the JCQ guidance, these in-class assessments are not formal exams and so we can use additional teaching time to the students' advantage, if needed. In other words, if by moving an assessment back a lesson or two we feel that students will achieve a higher grade, we will do so. However, please be assured that we have reviewed and evaluated the planned assessments across all subject areas in Year 11 and Year 13, to ensure that these assessments are spread out as far as possible to keep things reasonable for our students. The two clear assessment windows above, have helped us greatly with this and we will continue to monitor this closely next term. These assessments are not formal examinations and therefore, whilst preparation and revision at home will give students a real boost, all class work will be used to support students with this preparation as well, therefore students should not feel overly pressured to complete too much work at home. Furthermore, if any child is entitled to additional time for examinations, for example, due to a special educational need, we will ensure that they receive this time and/or this is fully taken into account when confirming final grades.

We still have several weeks of teaching and learning time left for students to contribute to their range of evidence and we will be using the first 4 weeks after Easter to continue with teaching and learning. Therefore, students need to continue to give their best efforts to all aspects of their work in school. In the remaining two weeks before May half-term, we will finalise the range of evidence we will use to decide students' final grades. As per the JCQ guidance, we will share the evidence we will use with students at this point, to allow them the opportunity to raise any issues about the evidence being used, for example, if they feel one of the pieces of evidence was affected by a personal circumstance, such as an illness or bereavement. If there are mitigating circumstances such as this, we will be able to discount a piece of evidence, if appropriate.

As the guidance states, in most cases, the range of evidence we select, should be consistent across the entire cohort of students in a particular subject. Therefore, we want to allow more teaching and learning to take place, before finalising which evidence we'll use as, of course, we'll want to select the evidence where the vast majority of our students have performed the highest and this may well be evidence that is produced in the weeks after the Easter break. Please also be reassured that some individual variations on the final evidence used is possible, should there be any genuine reason why another piece of evidence would be more appropriate for a student. As the guidance states, the final decision regarding what evidence to use to inform grades will be made by teachers, Heads of Departments and the school but, we will give students the opportunity to share any thoughts with us about the final selected evidence before May half-term and we will consider this fully before finalising and entering grades by the 18th June. We will also consider fully any special educational needs and/or access arrangements before deciding and entering final grades. As per the guidance, we are not permitted to share final grades with students or parents/carers.

We will be ensuring robust internal quality assurance is in place in school, in line with JCQ guidance. This quality assurance process will be approved by the exam boards, via the detailed Centre Policy we must have in place before any grades are submitted. We will be producing this policy in line with guidance by the JCQ deadline of 30th April. Once this has been approved, it will be uploaded onto the school website for your information. Internally, we will embed several layers of monitoring and review to ensure grades are fair and consistent and to ensure that all aspects of the guidance are applied fully. Exam boards will also complete reviews of evidence and sampling visits to ensure all schools have the correct processes in place. As part of this quality assurance process, schools have to review this year's grades against historical achievement data in the school. However, the guidance is clear that historical data should not in any way limit the grading process this year.

All assessments in school will be completed by Friday 21st May. The time between this point and the deadline for submitting grades to the exam boards on the 18th June is needed for the above 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 28th May, when students are expected to leave school.

We are very confident that the above plan will give all of our students the best possible chance of success. It is also fully in line with the JCQ, Ofqual and DfE guidance, as well as other Trust Secondary Schools. Again, my advice continues to be for students to continue to work hard and give their absolute best to every aspect of their studies over the coming weeks. We will continue to give your children our fulsome support.

Thank you again for your continued support. It is much appreciated. It will be very important that all of our Year 11 and Year 13 students have a well-deserved rest and a good break from school work during the Easter break, given that the vast majority of them have worked so hard over recent months. Therefore, whilst students should be completing some work over Easter to prepare well for next half-term, please do help your child to achieve a good balance, so that they don't work too hard. This has been such a challenging year for all of our students and staff, particularly for our students in examination year groups, and I really would like all students and staff to have an enjoyable and restful break from school over Easter.

If you do have any questions about any aspect of this information, after the Easter break, you should get in touch with Dr Stanton, Assistant Headteacher or Mr McKeating, Assistant Headteacher. Please also 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.

Very best wishes and have a lovely Easter.

Yours faithfully,



Miss Patterson
Headteacher