



SACRED HEART  
CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

17 March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

It has been wonderful to welcome back to school all of our Y11 pupils. We are delighted at how our pupils engaged with online learning and demonstrated their determined efforts to continue to make progress in their subjects. We are equally so proud of the resilience they have shown in such challenging circumstances as they wait for clarification around how their grades will be decided.

We do realise some of you may be worried about how grades will be awarded in 2021 but we want to reassure you that we are taking every step to ensure all guidance will be followed accurately and your child will be supported fully in the process.

Therefore, this letter outlines some key information about grading for the 2021 examinations. Although the exams' regulator, Ofqual, has issued guidance about the general awarding of qualifications, **the examination boards have yet to do so and we are waiting for full guidance for each subject.**

The following questions and answers are to provide you with the information we have so far:

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

Grades for GCSEs 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 pupils against a national standard**, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break.
2. pupils will be assessed only on what content has been delivered to them by their teachers, to determine the grade they should receive.

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3. 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 exam board to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards.
4. Our school results will be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school's evidence.
5. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, **then the exam boards will award pupils their final grades**.
6. If pupils do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to **appeal**.

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

Simply: no. The grade pupils 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, pupils' 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 pupils, **providing they have evidence that they are working at that grade**.

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

This year, teachers will only assess pupils on content they have been taught – because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means pupils 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 pupils' performance**, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Pupils who would usually have extra time in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessment.

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

No, the standard against which teachers will be assessing pupils 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 are able to draw on a **range of assessment evidence** from across a pupil's study of the course. This may include homework tasks, mock exams, and papers set by the exam boards. This may include evidence from before the second lockdown, as well as evidence from March 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's 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 pupils have seen assessments questions before, it does not reduce the validity of the assessment. Furthermore, exam board questions may only be one of the pieces of evidence we may use to assess pupils this summer. Use of these exam board support materials is not compulsory; they will be part of the range of evidence teachers could use to determine the grade.

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

Our teachers are already using their professional expertise to assess pupils on the content they have been taught. **Teachers are unable to submit higher grades for pupils 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.

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In 2020, any undue pressure by pupil 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 pupils 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 pupil's certificate being removed entirely if malpractice is deemed to have taken place.

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

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

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

Pupils 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.

### **Upcoming subject assessments in class**

As with any exam year, your child may be completing some assessments in some subject areas in their classes before the Easter break. This is standard practice building to any exam season. These assessments **will not be used in complete isolation to form your child's summer grade**. These assessments will be viewed alongside many other pieces of evidence to form your child's GCSE or other qualification grade.

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

The best thing pupils can do is to continue to attend classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. The only thing that counts in deciding your child's grade is the quality of the work they produce. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.

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Please be reassured we will do everything we can to support your child in the coming weeks. When we receive more information from the exam boards for each subject, we will write to you again with any relevant updates we have.

I hope reading this update gives you some reassurances that we are working as hard as we can to ensure your child is given the best possible chance to succeed in their studies in these challenging circumstances.

Your sincerely

Patrick Caldwell  
Headteacher, Sacred Heart

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