



Gillingham School

FOUNDED 1516

11th March 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Following the government's announcement cancelling the Summer 2021 examinations, you will be aware that schools have been tasked with [awarding students' GCSE, BTEC and A Level grades this summer](#). In this letter we aim to outline our rationale for awarding grades, and the next steps of the process.

When determining GCSE and A Level grades for students in 2021 we will be taking into account the following context. The current Yr11 and Yr13 have had a total of 22 term time weeks in lockdown. In addition, some students have missed additional time due to self-isolation. This means that of the 299 school days scheduled from September 2019, students have lost a minimum of 110 days – just over a third of their curriculum time.

Therefore, when attributing grades to these year groups, students cannot be compared fairly to previous year groups. Nor would they be in a position to sit the same exams as their previous counterparts. We recognise that exams alone, or work solely completed after 8th March 2021, will not give an accurate picture of a student's progress and attainment.

We are committed to ensuring that no young person is disadvantaged by this process.

Considering the impact of lockdown on learning

The gap between the most advantaged and the least advantaged students widened exponentially during lockdown. Students without access to the proper ICT equipment were delayed in being able to access online learning from home. Curriculum time was lost and therefore not all topics have been covered. Students with additional learning needs, who would have received additional support in school, did not necessarily receive this support, which in some cases made it more difficult to access learning. In addition, students who have worked hard through lockdown need to see this work being rewarded, to avoid feeling disenfranchised and disengaged.

Therefore, our method of allocating grades needs to be rigorous but fair – and take into account the learning time lost and the socio-economic factors that have had an undue influence on students' ability to progress, during lockdown.

Determining a fair assessment methodology

This year GCSE, BTEC and A Level grades will be awarded using a Portfolio of Evidence, focusing on a combination of 'coursework' (work done in class, assignments, coursework / NEA projects, homeworks etc.) and engagement with exam board materials. Students will only be assessed on the topics they have been taught.

There will not be any examinations. Departments will use some exam board materials, with tried and tested mark-schemes. However, these will be completed in class with the support of their teacher. These assessments will be an opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and competencies but *will not* be the sole basis of deciding a students' final grade. Students will be notified, in advance, of these assessments and they will form part of their portfolio of evidence for that subject.

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Common practice across the School

Prior to the Easter holiday, we will be issuing details of the modifications which have been made to each subject's curriculum, the detailed Portfolio of Evidence used to assess students' progress, and outline the process for moderating and quality assuring these assessments. We are also required to have this information checked and verified by each Exam Board prior to the school submitting Centre Assessed Grades.

Our moderation processes will include:

- confirming that all teachers have adhered to the identified Portfolio of Evidence,
- the subject leader attending Exam Board training re grading,
- departmental moderation, including an element of 'blind' marking to eliminate teacher bias
- a rank order of student results to check grade distribution compared to previous, and national, cohorts
- moderation with other North Dorset schools
- checking all grades, especially those regarded as anomalous, and the random sampling of students' portfolios of evidence by subject leaders and the senior leadership team

The next steps

Our advice to students remains to continue attending their lessons and engaging with all activities set, including homework. Quite apart from the grading process, this will prepare them for the next steps of their education, training or employment.

Students, and parents, will be issued with a Progress Report in the next few weeks - Year 13 in the week beginning 15th March, and Year 11 in the week beginning 26th April. Year 11 will also have an online Parents' Evening on 6th May. Whilst these reports will contain 'On Track For' grades, please note that these may be subject to change and can go up or down.

Teachers will be assessing student's progress throughout this term. To support departmental moderation, we have taken the decision to move the Staff Development Day from 19th April to 21st May. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

The final day of taught courses for Year 11 and Year 13 will be Friday 28th May.

Results will be issued to students in early August – Year 13 on 10th August, and Year 11 on 12th August. Further information will be sent nearer the time.

Malpractice

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. Any undue pressure by a student or parent on teachers to increase grades is also considered exam malpractice. 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.

Please note that teachers are not allowed to disclose their final grade submitted to the exam board.

Appeals

Students will have the right to appeal their grade if they feel that the school has made an administrative or procedural error. If we have made such an error and that, as a result, we submitted the wrong grade to the exam board we will explain the nature of our mistake and ask the exam board to change the grade.

If a student believes the school's judgement was wrong they can ask us to submit an appeal on their behalf to the exam board. We will provide the exam board with the evidence used to determine their grade, together with the school's justification for the grade, the student's concerns and details of the process used to determine the grade. Appeals are not likely to lead to adjustments in grades where the original grade is a reasonable exercise of academic judgement supported by the evidence. Grades can go up or down as the result of an appeal.

At the time of writing, we understand that students will have the opportunity to sit an examination for each subject in the Autumn Term if they wish to.

We understand that this is an unsettling time for some students but we want to reassure you that, under these arrangements, they will have many more opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and progress within a subject than an examination would provide. Assessment will be based on their progress across the full two years of their courses. It is our intention to make the process as humane as possible, and to ensure that no students are disadvantaged.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Nicholson', with a small dot at the end.

Paul Nicholson
Headteacher