



## THE BISHOP OF HEREFORD'S BLUECOAT SCHOOL

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MNH/AHW

Dear Parents/Carers,

I'm pleased to say that students have made a great return to school this week and have settled back into face to face learning very quickly. There is now some more information from the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the grading of GCSEs this summer that I would like to share with you.

I have split the letter into the most frequently asked questions, which hopefully will make it easier to read.

### **When will my child leave school this year?**

We are not yet able to answer this query. We are awaiting the decision from the DfE and hope this information will be with us as soon as possible so that we can confirm year 11's last day in school.

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

Grades for GCSEs and most other qualifications will be based on a process involving teacher assessment against national standards, internal quality assurance, and external quality assurance by the examination boards.

The national process defined by the Department for Education and the exams' regulator, Ofqual is as follows:

1. Teachers will assess students against a national standard, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break.
2. Subject 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 examination board to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards.
3. Our school results will be quality assured externally by the examination boards, which may include random sampling of our school's evidence.
4. If the examination boards are confident in our submitted results, then the exam boards will award students their final grades.
5. If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to appeal.

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

Individual teachers, do not award the GCSE grade. The GCSE grade students 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, students' 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 students, 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 students on content they have been taught – because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means students 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 students' performance, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Students who would usually have extra time in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements as they normally would in the teacher assessments.

### **Will the grading criteria be different between different schools?**

No, the standard against which teachers will be assessing students is set nationally by the examination 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 student's study of the course, up until the May half term 2021. This may include homework tasks, mock exams, and papers set by the exam boards. The evidence will be from the whole of the course during Year 10 and Year 11 during school and lockdown. The examination 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. We have taken the decision in school not to hold another week of mock examinations, but to provide students opportunities to add further evidence over the weeks until May half term by completing mini tests and assessments. All of this can add to the evidence we already have about a student. Any grades they have received on work before would not be a minimum grade they would achieve.

### **The examination 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 students have seen assessments questions before, it does not reduce the validity of the assessment. Furthermore, examination board questions are only one of the many pieces of evidence we will use to assess students this summer. We will be using all components that they have studied including NEA evidence. There are also many past papers that will not have been seen.

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

Our 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.

In 2020, any undue pressure by student or parent who placed teachers to increase grades was considered exam malpractice. It is likely to be the same for 2021. 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. This may result in the student's certificate being removed entirely if malpractice is deemed to have taken place.

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

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

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

Students 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.

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

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands. They still have time to improve the evidence that we have.

### **When are these assessments taking place?**

We are agreeing the dates for assessments at the moment. As soon as your teacher has a date for an assessment they will let you know what it is and we will be posting all dates in the same place for all subjects on our school website at this link:

<https://www.bhbs.hereford.sch.uk/page/?title=Dates+of+Assessments+%26amp%3B+Mini+Tests+2021&pid=139>

Access arrangements will be applied to these assessments where these are in place for a student.

### **How will I know my assessments are marked fairly?**

In school you will do assessments with your candidate number on your work and not your name, this means when it is marked it is not known that it is your paper and is marked against the criteria. It will also be moderated by other teachers in school and against other schools. There is a long process of internal and external quality assurance to ensure the process is fair.

**When will we know the results**

The results day has been moved this year to August 12<sup>th</sup>. We will communicate more to you about the format of this date when we have more information. For now, students should focus on doing the best they can in lessons and at home and completing their applications for the next phase of their journey.

As soon as more information is available I will share it with you.

Kind Regards,



Ellie Bunston  
Deputy Headteacher