

# St Matthew Academy

St Joseph's Vale, Blackheath, London SE3 0XX

Headteacher: Ms Miranda Baldwin

Head of Primary: Ms Joanna Chick



9 March 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

## **RE: Grading of GCSEs.**

As you will know, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, GCSE examinations have been cancelled for this year. The government has recently released information about how grades will be awarded, with more specific information to follow from exam boards in the coming weeks. We understand this is a very stressful time for Y11 pupils and their families, and we want to ensure that the process is as transparent as possible; as such, we have answered a series of key questions you may have below:

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

Grades for GCSEs 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 set by the Department for Education and the exams' regulator, Ofqual will be as follows:

1. Teachers will assess pupils against a national standard, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break
2. Departments will submit grades which will be quality assured by the school. This internal quality assurance process will have to be signed off by Ms Baldwin, as the Head of the centre, as well as the exam board, to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards
3. Our school results will be quality assured externally by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of evidence of pupils' work
4. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, then the exam boards will award pupils their final grades
5. If pupils do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to appeal

### **Will teachers award the grade?**

The grade pupils achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. These grades will be measured 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.

### **Will be grades 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 our pupils, providing they have evidence that they are working at that grade.

### **What evidence will be used?**

Teachers are able to draw on a range of assessment evidence from across the pupil's study of the course. Evidence may include classwork; coursework (where applicable); extended writing tasks; practise exam questions; homework tasks; mock exams and past papers. The exam boards are also producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter; these will include material from past papers and new questions which subjects may choose to utilise. Different subjects 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. Pupils will be informed about what evidence is being used in a particular subject. Should the exam board choose to randomly sample our school's results, then the evidence that has been collated will need to be presented to them.

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

Teachers will be able to discuss what evidence they are using to inform their judgement with pupils, however, they are not allowed to disclose the final submitted grade they 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. Pupils must not pressure teachers to reveal the grades they are submitting, or to increase the grades, as doing so may be considered exam malpractice.

### **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 that level. If teachers submit higher grades without evidence they are committing exam malpractice. 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.

### **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. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.

### **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.

### **Will the impact of Covid-19 be taken in account?**

This year, teachers will only have to 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.

As stated above, pupils must continue 'as normal' in the coming weeks and months, in the knowledge that everything they do in school and at home, can have a positive impact on their grades and it is their continued performance that will count the most. We have held an assembly with the pupils where they had a chance to ask questions about the process, and we would encourage you to discuss this with them at home. In the meantime, we will keep you updated as more information is released. Should you have any queries regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact the Academy.

Yours faithfully,



**Ms M Baldwin**  
Headteacher



**Ms C Heywood**  
Assistant Headteacher