

08 March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

It has been lovely to welcome all of our students back to school today.

This morning I spoke to all Year 11 students during form time about how we intend to use the next few months to make our judgements on their GCSE grades. I have explained that we will do our best to give them the best possible opportunity to demonstrate their success using work that they have completed previously and work that they will complete over the coming weeks. I gave them the chance to ask any questions and the feedback from students and form tutors suggests they have a good understanding of how we will assess them and of the processes we will use, which are explained below.

What Ofqual have said

Last week, The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) released the outcomes of their consultation regarding how Year 11 will be awarded their GCSEs. Schools have been given guidance and some flexibility of approach.

This is a summary of the main points of the Ofqual consultation.

- Students will only be assessed on what they have been 'confidently taught'.
- It is important that students have been taught enough content to enable them to progress onto the next stage of education or employment but there are no requirements for the assessment of a minimum proportion of overall content.
- Schools should enable teaching for as long as possible and should determine the grades as late in the academic year as is practicable
- Teachers should make a holistic judgement of each student's performance based on a range of evidence relating to the subject content that has been delivered by their teacher in a classroom or remotely
- Students will continue working on their Non Examined Assessment (NEA). NEAs will be marked by teachers and will contribute to the overall grade, whether or not it has been completed. Exam boards will not moderate NEAs.
- School can use evidence of a student's performance from throughout the course to inform judgement
- Exam boards will release exam materials by the end of March that schools can choose to use to assess students.
- Schools will ensure that they have rigorous quality assurance processes in place to ensure consistency of assessment and the marking of assessments is accurate and consistent. Every school will have a visit from the exam boards to check these processes.
- Assessment grades submitted to exam boards by 18 June
- Results issued to students 12 August
- Students will have the right to appeal.

How we have decided to determine students' grades at Millthorpe

We have already gathered information regarding students' progress throughout their course so far. Their most recent progress reports were sent home in December and those predicted grades took account of various different assessments completed and students' classwork.

Over lockdown we have also gathered additional information as students completed small assessments.

We believe that this next period of time is a significant window of opportunity for our students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills acquired over the course of their GCSEs.

We have completed a comprehensive review of the curriculum in each subject and are confident that we have taught students sufficient content to enable them to progress onto their next stage. Therefore we plan to use the next 10 school weeks (until May half term 28 May) to revisit, revise and assess their knowledge and skills. This is typically what Year 11 would do in the period leading up to their exams in 'normal' years. In the two weeks after May half term we will work with colleagues to complete all necessary documentation and submit our grades to the exam boards by 18 June.

In order to make this manageable for students and to protect their wellbeing they **will not** sit long periods of mock exams in the hall. This would also contravene our risk assessments during COVID.

Instead teachers in each subject will revise a topic, subject or particular exam style questions and then students will sit an assessment within their lesson. For most subjects this will mean four 50 minute assessments over the ten week period, at 2-3 week intervals. Some subjects, particularly English, Maths and Science who have more lessons, will set more assessments.

All students will know what topic, subject or style of question they are being assessed on, when they are being assessed and will receive consistent revision lessons in advance of the test. Homework will only take the form of structured revision.

By assessing students with shorter, more frequent tests, we are confident that should any student have to self-isolate the impact will be minimised. This also enables us to follow the recommendation to award grades as late as practicable and allows us to ensure coverage of the subject is as broad as possible, whilst ensuring assessment is only based on what they have been confidently taught.

We will only use assessment material from the exam boards and we will mark it according to their criteria and guidance to ensure the standard is accurate. All assessed pieces will be standardised by each department and undergo a rigorous moderation process to ensure that all marking is accurate and consistent and we will share this process and evidence with the exam boards.

We believe that this approach is the fairest as it enables all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills as late as possible. Whilst we do have the evidence from the rest of the course, we hope that this period of time – 10 weeks of teaching and revision – will give students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning over the whole course.

Any students eligible for access arrangements will still have these adjustments.

Please reassure your child that this is a one-off opportunity to demonstrate what they can do, without the extreme stress of the full exam series. They will have more time. They will have revision before they complete their assessments and they will be well prepared. It may be helpful to think of it as doing the same process of preparation and assessment as for normal GCSEs but over a longer period of time, with more frequent but shorter assessments and hence with less pressure on any single exam.

We are acutely aware of how challenging this year has been for all students and we want to ensure that this opportunity to demonstrate their understanding is done in a very considered manner and protects students' wellbeing as much as possible.

They will begin their first assessments w/c 22 March – this will ensure that we have collected an assessment in school before Easter should there be any changes to school attendance due to COVID. We do not anticipate this to be the case but would like to gather some information as a precautionary measure.

When each assessment has been marked and moderated, we will share the marks with students.

Please do speak to your child about how they feel about these assessments and contact school if you have any concerns.

Possible questions you may have

My child was given a grade 5 in their prediction in December, does this mean that is the grade they will get?

No, not necessarily. The grade that they will get will also depend on the work that they complete over the next 10 weeks and it may be different to their prediction in December. They could improve and will have more opportunities to demonstrate their ability.

Will the mock grade (PPE) from December determine the grade that they achieve?

The mock grade will only be used if it doesn't disadvantage the student. This has been a government decision as it was widely publicised in the media that December mocks wouldn't count as GCSE grades. Therefore if they have completed work of a higher standard since then, and/or their estimate was higher, the mock grade will be disregarded.

What happens if my child misses some assessments because they're self-isolating?

Each student will complete several assessments for each subject, which will mainly be at least two weeks apart, so we will be able to use any other assessments available to us. Note that it will not be possible to sit assessments on return as students would miss lessons and revision for the next assessments as a result.

How will you weight the quality of work completed in the next ten weeks in comparison to previous assessments completed before and/or during lockdown?

As a principle, the assessments being completed over the next 10 weeks should enable us to determine a student's grades. Only if their performance over the next 10 weeks is lower than their previous assessments before Christmas will we review their prior assessments and take those into consideration.

How can I support my child?

Attendance at school is the most important factor at this stage. Please encourage your child to attend every day, engage as well as they can and to ask their teachers any questions that they have. They shouldn't walk out of any lessons feeling uncertain about anything.

Yours faithfully

Miss G Greenhalgh
Head of School