

LANCASTER ROYAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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8th March 2021

Dear Parents and Students,

I am writing to give some reassurance and further details of the way in which we plan to determine grades for GCSE and A-level students this year. Further detailed guidance is still expected from exam boards about grading each individual subject.

This has been a unique and exceptionally challenging year for students. We will continue to support them every step of the way. Pastoral staff will go into every form group this week to talk more about the plans and to answer questions.

Principles

1. The overriding message to pupils is: We are your biggest supporters. We will make sure that you get the best possible grades that are fair and can be justified by our evidence.
2. We determined Centre Assessed Grades very successfully last year. The process was different, but we were fair to individuals, consistent across subjects, and outcomes were excellent.
3. These are school assessed grades, not teacher-assessed grades. We are not allowed to engage in dialogue about possible outcomes for any individual. Thank you in advance for not pressuring or asking teachers about grades.

Exam board process

We have to determine grades in every subject:

1. A holistic picture of performance which can take into account work that pupils have done already such as teacher assessments to date, Prelims, coursework, non-examined assessments or Personal Investigations.
2. They cannot be based on just one exam or assessment such as the assessments before Easter.
3. We submit our grades to exam boards in mid-June, and have to determine the grades as late as possible in the academic year. We are not allowed to determine the grades now (it is only March) – we also need to give pupils every chance to show their performance over the next couple of months.

Exam boards will carry out quality assurance on every school and spot checks on our evidence before they award final grades in August.

Details

We have asked all teachers to stop teaching any new material to reduce pressure on pupils. We will hold two assessment periods. The first one is earlier and broader. The second period will be smaller and more focussed.

Assessment 1: These assessments before Easter may be on the whole course, or in some subjects teachers may have given guidance on which areas are included. Students should do their very best, but not worry – these are very different to final GCSE and A-level exams. The timescales are compressed and assessments are early; pupils have just come out of remote teaching and have not been in classrooms since December. Our assessment will take into account that these are in some ways more like the Mock exams that they replaced. Teachers may give an indication of approximate grades in these assessments, but those will not be the final grades.

Assessment 2: We will hold a second assessment period before summer half term. These will be very different. We have asked teachers to halve the subject content for these assessments, and teachers will tell students which topics will be in Assessment 2. Pupils will only need to revise 50% of the content – which in most cases they will already have revised for Assessment 1. There will be much more time for in-school preparation, including about a month with no assessments after Easter. We hope that this focussed approach will give every student an opportunity to perform at their very best.

The formal nature of the assessments does raise the temperature. Pressure can sometimes bring out the best in us, just as exams do in normal years. Just as importantly, the formal nature of the assessments gives confidence that no-one can gain an unfair advantage. Our assessments will be secure and ensure fairness.

We will use our professional judgement. There are advantages in this year's flexible approach. We know our pupils. There may be some who have worked well all year but for some reason have a bad day. There will be late developers on an upward trajectory who are now working really well.

We will use teachers' evidence from earlier in the course, and NEA grades, and data from Assessment 1 and Assessment 2. However, grades will not be determined as the output of a statistical model. With both academic and pastoral staff, we will look at every grade in every subject, including all the pieces of evidence, and use our knowledge of each pupil and our professional judgement before we submit grades to examination boards.

Final comments

It is lovely to have students back in school today. It is reassuring that unlike normal years, grades will not all depend on their performance on one day.

Our advice is to make sure that the academic focus is balanced with lots of time outdoors and offline, with good habits of eating and sleeping, and with lots of contact with family and friends.

We will be in touch later on about arrangements after summer half term and the final dates for students to be in school. We are considering options including some bridging lessons for Year 11 towards their A-levels, and possible lessons for Upper Sixth in preparation for university courses.

Please get in touch if we can support your son or daughter further in any way.

Yours faithfully,

Dr C J Pyle