



Blackfen School for Girls

Raising aspirations - releasing potential

Headteacher Matthew Brown BA(Hons) DMS(Ed)

Blackfen School for Girls,
Blackfen Road,
Sidcup, Kent.
DA15 9NU
T: 020 8303 1887

E: admin@blackfen.bexley.sch.uk
www.blackfenschoolforgirls.co.uk

24th March 2021,

Dear Parents and Carers of students in Year 11, Year 12 (1-year GCSE/BTEC courses) and Year 13,

Examinations update (2): Arrangements for Summer 2021

The purpose of today's letter is to provide more detail to students and their families about the work of the school to generate Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) for BTEC, GCSE and A-level qualification courses which are due to finish next term. A general update in Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13 Teams has also been posted today and an email copy sent to you.

How will grades be awarded this summer?

Grades for GCSEs, BTECs and A levels 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 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 exam board materials which are due to arrive in schools 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 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 our evidence.
4. If the exam 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?

Put simply: no. The grade students achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. The assessment outcome is set against a nationally-defined standard, not the teacher's own opinion. This assessment outcome is then subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the final grade is awarded by the exam board, as usual. This is why the grades are defined as 'Centre Assessed Grades'.



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 carried out by teachers and exam board staff, not an algorithm. There is no limit on the achievement of students, providing there is clear evidence that they are working at that grade.

What about loss of learning / impact of Covid?

This year, teachers will only assess students on the course content they have been taught – because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means students will not be disadvantaged if as individuals, or whole class or whole year group, they 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 in teacher assessment.

Will grades be different between different schools and colleges?

No. The standard against which teachers will be assessing students 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.

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, including lesson tasks, subject tests, and practice or past papers set by the exam boards. This may include evidence from before the second lockdown, as well as evidence from March to June 2021. The exam 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.

The exam 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, exam board questions are only one of the many pieces of evidence we will use to assess students this summer.

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 students or parents on teachers to increase grades was also considered exam malpractice and it is exactly the same case for 2021. If students or parents are found to be putting teachers or leaders under 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 exam 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 lessons, participate and learn to the best of their ability, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Students' grades will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands. You will have noted in yesterday's email that I strongly recommended students to attend school on a regular basis. It is essential that they are in lessons to hear the teacher-led explanation and discussion of ideas and to practise the skills required in the classroom assessments.

I trust that this information is useful but please do not hesitate to contact me at school, should you have other queries. An overview of the assessment process in school is provided on the second attachment to this email. Mr Brown will be writing to parents and carers, as usual, at the end of term and will give further details about key dates after Easter.

Yours sincerely,



Miss F Minnis
Deputy Headteacher