

11th March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: Update on Assessment Grades for Summer 2021

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome all of our students back to Arnold Hill Academy following the recent period of national lockdown. Teachers and support staff are prepared to support students with a smooth reintegration back into school, to continue their learning and build upon the high-quality online provision that has been available during the recent months.

This is an important time for all students that are due to complete their qualifications this year. During the next few months they will be supported in lessons to prepare for assessments that will be part of the evidence used to inform their centre assessed grades. We understand this is a difficult time for students and parents. Please be assured that we are working closely with our Trust schools and exam boards to ensure all remaining time available is used effectively to support the well-being and maximise the achievement of all involved.

The final details of the process that will be used to assign grades for GCSE's, A Levels and Vocational subjects during this year have not yet been released by exam boards, but we are able to share with you an overview of the process in the F.A.Q section at the end of this email. Please be aware that the information shared below is based on current guidance available. The details may change as further guidance is released by exams boards. We will ensure that you are updated as additional information is made available.

The benchmark assessments that are due to take place following the Easter Holidays will form a significant element of the evidence to be used. All subject teachers will be providing students with an overview of the content to be included in the students' exam along with details of resources that can be used to support revision. An email with links to the document will be shared with parents and students within the next two weeks to support their preparations.

Further details regarding the range of evidence to be used in the grading process and an overview of the appeals process will be made available to parents and students over the coming term. Please can we take this opportunity to ask that parents and students do not contact subject teachers to seek further guidance in these areas. We will be providing parents with an opportunity to discuss any individual concerns with a relevant member of staff before the Easter holiday and following the release of guidance from the exam boards.

Please can we ask that you continue to encourage your child to engage in all lesson activities and interventions available this year. This is essential to support with learning and will provide additional evidence of their attainment to inform their final grades.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Yours faithfully

Arnold Hill Academy is part of the Spencer Academies Trust

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Frequently Asked Questions.

How will grades be awarded this summer?

Grades for GCSEs, A levels, and most other qualifications including applied generals 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 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 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 school's 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?

Simply: No. The grade students achieve will start with the 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 board 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, or the whole class or whole year group have been unable to complete the 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 the grading process 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. This may include homework tasks, mock exams, and papers set by the exam boards. This may include evidence from before the second lockdown, as well as evidence from March – May. The exam boards are producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter. Different departments and subject teachers may use different sources of evidence, and there is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used, it's about performance across a range of evidence.

Please be assured that the school will take a **range** of evidence into account when completing the process rather than relying solely on earlier mocks that have taken place. There is ample time for students to demonstrate further progress in lessons in order to achieve their grade outcome for each subject.

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 the assessment 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 placed on teachers by a parent or students to increase grades was also 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 the 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 classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Their grade will be based on performance, and so outcomes are ultimately in their hands.