



# St Mary's Catholic School

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*where everyone can succeed*



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Dear Students, Parents and Carers

I hope this letter finds you all safe and well. We continue to remember in our thoughts and prayers anyone suffering as a result of COVID-19. I hope that students are finding the work that teachers are uploading useful and supportive and that this is helping students to re-engage with learning, after the abrupt closure of the school. This letter is an update on vocational qualifications grading, further information about the school's preparations for providing "centre assessed grades" to the exam boards and a brief comment on the autumn exam series.

## Vocational qualifications grading

Ofqual has now published arrangements for grading vocational subjects, affecting a minority of our students. A document entitled **Summer 2020 results for vocational subjects** is now available on the Ofqual website. Essentially, for vocational qualifications taken by St Mary's students, the Ofqual document confirms that the approach will be similar to that taken by the exam boards for GCSEs and A levels, with students awarded a calculated grade for each of their subjects. Schools will feed into this process by providing centre assessed grades, just like for GCSE and A level – i.e. giving their judgement on what grade would most likely have been achieved by each student, had teaching and learning continued as normal. The vocational qualifications guidance document indicates that the awarding bodies could also take account of any 'banked' results – ie where part of a vocational qualification has been completed, whether an external exam component or an internal component which has been standardised and/or officially "signed off" by the verification process. We are awaiting further guidance from the different awarding bodies about this.

## Centre assessed grades contributing to calculated grades for GCSE, A level and AS qualifications

We previously forwarded you the guidance published by Ofqual relating to centre assessed grades for GCSE, A level and AS qualifications (EPQ and Thinking Skills only at St Mary's). To repeat earlier reassurance, the guidance makes clear that there was no requirement on schools to set additional work after 20<sup>th</sup> March towards any qualifications, nor were schools expected to ask students to complete unfinished "Non-Exam Assessments" (i.e. their NEAs) for the purposes of centre assessed grading. For information, an NEA is a formal assessment rather like coursework, which is not an exam, but, in normal circumstances, the NEA mark is submitted to the exam board to contribute to the overall grade. Typically, NEAs can account for up to 20% of a qualification (other than in a small number of practical subjects where it is a higher percentage). NEA marks are not to be submitted this year. No student, therefore, will be disadvantaged if some of their work, such as part of a non-examined assessment (NEA), was not completed by 20<sup>th</sup> March.

As the guidance points out, schools should take account of a wide range of evidence in coming to judgements about the most likely grade each student would have achieved in each subject, had they taken their exams in the summer. The guidance states that this evidence can include student performance over the course of their studies, homework assignments, any mocks and any NEAs, whether fully or partially completed. St Mary's teachers have a wealth of varied evidence on which to draw and they know their students well. No one piece of evidence, such as a December or March mock result, or a partial or completed NEA, or a piece of homework or classwork, will determine centre-assessed grades. These will be determined by teachers' professional judgement of the whole evidence base and knowledge of our students. It is worth keeping in mind that almost 5 out of 5 ½ terms' worth of timetabled teaching and learning, plus homework over that period, had been undertaken for GCSEs and A levels by 20<sup>th</sup> March. This in itself will provide much evidence, and will help ensure no over-reliance on a single piece of evidence.

It is important to reassure students also that centre assessed grades will NOT reflect where students were at in terms of their achievement on 20<sup>th</sup> March but rather, teachers' professional judgement of *"the most likely grade each student*

would have achieved... had they taken their exams in the summer". In other words, teachers will naturally build in to their judgements, all of the progress that they would have expected students to make in the final 2-3 months of study. We know at St Mary's that great strides are made in this final run up to the exam period itself.

For most students, in most subjects, whether at GCSE, A level or in vocational subjects, all work completed by 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020, is already with teachers, to assist with the centre-assessed grading process. This includes the vast majority of non-exam assessment (NEAs), so we will not be requiring students to submit anything further to us. In a small number of subjects, however, we may need to contact some students where we believe, from our records, that a small amount of work might still be in their possession which we might wish to see. Where necessary, students will declare any work completed after 20<sup>th</sup> March. If we do need to contact any students, we will do so later this week or early next week at the latest. There is no need for students or parents to be contacting teachers directly about this.

We are confident, therefore, that we will have all the evidence that we need to prepare our centre assessed grades over the coming weeks, in line with the official guidance about this. We have also given a lot of thought as to what to do about sharing any 'year-to-date' assessment data with parents and students and have decided upon the following:-

There will be no Achievement 2 grade sheets issued. These normally come out at Easter time and indicate students' current progress and predicted/potential grades in the summer. They are redundant now, as their primary purpose, to serve as a motivator for the final term of work towards the exams, no longer applies. Issuing Achievement 2 grade sheets may be confusing and may lead some students and/or parents to equate all grades on such sheets with centre assessed grades when this is not necessarily the case.

By way of reminder, the formal Mocks were before Christmas and grades were shared at that time. In many subjects, there was a second round of assessments shortly before closure known as "March mocks". We do not intend, however, to formally issue to all students and parents, the results of these March mocks either because by doing so now, we may lead some students or parents to assume incorrectly that these grades will automatically be the centre assessed grade, which is also not the case. In many subjects, these assessments were shorter than a full mock anyway and were carried out in classrooms, rather than in exam hall conditions. Once again, one of the main purposes of March mock results, to help show what needs to be done by way of final exam preparation, is now also redundant.

We are conscious that students in many, but not all, subjects may have been told their March results by their teachers before the closure, which is perfectly normal. We do not think it is necessary, however, for students who did not receive a particular March assessment result to receive it now, as it serves no real purpose, as explained above. If, however, a student wants to receive any outstanding results, we will provide them on receipt of a written request. Our strong recommendation, however, is that this is not necessary and we reiterate that no conclusions whatsoever can be drawn about centre-assessed grades from these assessments. Finally, for the same reasons as outlined above, we are not intending to issue NEA provisional marks, in subjects where this has not already happened. The centre-assessed grades will be one overall grade and we will not be required to submit separate grades for NEA components.

### Autumn exam series

There is still no additional information about the timing or content of potential autumn exams, other than the fact that results of such exams are expected to be available by the end of December 2020 and a student will be able to keep the higher of their calculated grade or autumn exam series grade. As previously mentioned, however, these exams are intended for what is hoped to be a very, very small minority of students who might be unhappy with a calculated grade issued by an exam board this summer. We will contact you again once further information emerges.

I hope everyone continues to stay safe and well in these challenging times.

Best wishes.



J Foster – Headteacher