



**CULCHETH
HIGH SCHOOL**
› THE BEST THAT WE CAN BE

Key Stage 3 Assessment

A Guide for Parents 2026 - 2027



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What is assessed at Key Stage 3?

Assessments at Key Stage 3 are called Quality Marked Assessments (QMAs). When students are assessed in class using the QMAs, teachers are checking to see how much information students currently know, understand and can apply of the curriculum covered. QMA assessments are marked with a percentage. If a student achieves 68% on an assessment, this tells us that they are currently able to demonstrate the correct knowledge and skills on two-thirds of the questions or marks available. However, more importantly, QMA results also tell students, teachers, and yourselves as parents, which areas of a subject are not yet secure, and need further work and practice.

How many QMAs are there per year?

At Key Stage 3 subjects set 3 QMAs per year. This spread of QMAs allows time for teaching, practical assessment activities to review learning and explicit revision between each QMA assessment window, to help students to maximise their progress.

How do QMAs work?

In the written subjects, QMAs will almost always be examinations. QMAs are designed to promote long-term learning, helping students to know, understand and be able to do more in each subject, and retain this overtime. Departments do not use the 'end of unit' test model of assessment. Rather they plan QMAs that test everything that has been covered over the year. This requires students to continually review and go back to work covered across the whole year. Assessments are therefore more challenging but help to make 'learning stick'. Rather than testing chunks of learning they have covered recently and will then not revisit, resulting in this learning being lost.

The practical subjects (Music, Drama, Art, Design & Technology and PE) will assess the practical work students produce. These assessments will often take place over a series of lessons, normally culminating in a final performance or piece of work.

KS 3 QMA Targets

Every Key Stage 3 student has a target percentage. A student should aim to achieve or exceed this percentage in all QMAs by the end of Year 9 (except Core PE). Student percentage targets are set using prior attainment data, so that each student has a challenging and aspirational target to aim for, without it being out of reach for their starting point at high school.

Core PE QMAs

Students follow the Core PE programme for all five years at Culcheth High School. Therefore, they are set a target to work towards achieving by the end of Year 11.

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What does my child's QMA score tell me?

Assessments at Key Stage 3 are designed to assess what has been covered in class up to that point, therefore any student could potentially achieve 100%. A QMA only tests content covered in class and revision tasks.

However, few students will ever score 100% due to the breadth and depth of the assessments. Students make mistakes, because learning is not easy. Successful learning takes hard work and perseverance over time to succeed. Additionally, at the start of their high school journey students are all at different stages in their learning. This is why students are given a target percentage to reflect their starting point and help them to recognise what is a good performance for them individually.

We do understand that parents are keen to use QMA scores to look at how their child performed and if this puts them on track for making progress. How to do this is explained below. In class, teachers will use QMA results to address gaps in learning. QMAs provide teachers with the vital information needed on how to adapt planning and direct feedback to have the most impact on learning overtime.

How do I know my child is making progress?

This is the most common question asked by parents.

Students will learn some parts of a subject more quickly than others, therefore their QMA assessment scores will go up and down to reflect this. It is not expected that QMAs will demonstrate neat, regular steps upwards on each task that is set.

If your child's QMA score has fluctuated, this is usually explained by their differing confidence on changing topic areas. The QMA handbook outlines the topics examined in the QMA and the student will get feedback in class and on their work on how to improve. If you are still unsure, about a QMA score, please contact us, your child's teachers will get back to you with the information or guidance you need, to support your child further.

If your child achieves 55% on QMA 1 in Year 7 and then they achieve 55% again on QMA 2 and 3. This can be viewed as 'progress' being made. This is because the amount of curriculum covered has increased and the students have learnt a lot more information and can still get 55% of this large amount of information correct. Also, some of this information they have had to retain over a very long period, which is harder to do.

We do not expect students at the start of Year 7 to be able to achieve or exceed their target percentage straight away. Especially as some skills within subjects, are cumulative and students will get better and more competent with practice. To help you see where they should be you can use the 'On Track Ladder' included in this guide. The 'On track' Ladder is also available in the student planner. Students will use the 'On track' Ladder when reviewing their QMA scores in form time.

Why is my child not reaching their 'On Track' grades?

There are many 'learning' reasons why a student will achieve below their target or 'On Track' percentage. Some of the reasons are:

- They may have been absent for a proportion of the work on the assessment
- They may not yet have securely learnt all content
- They may have not done enough revision to learn and memorise the information required
- They may need more help to develop an effective revision strategy to prepare
- They may know and understand the content, but have misinterpreted the question
- They may have struggled with the timing or other exam skills required

All can be addressed, as part of the planned learning and feedback. If a QMA result highlights a potential issue, it will help to address this as early as possible.

Moving towards GCSEs

Another common question parents have is how Key Stage 3 targets relate to GCSE grades. It is very important to see there is no link. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is a high quality and in-depth phase of learning and is separate from Key Stage 4/ GCSE. Key Stage 3 is a valuable curriculum; it is not just a stepping-stone to GCSE. Therefore, our assessments are not a stepping-stone either. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is planned carefully to ensure that it is progressive and each year builds on the next. We want to ensure that every student learns as much of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, as securely as possible, to have a good foundation to start Key Stage 4.

When students start Key Stage 4, they will be given a GCSE target grade for each subject. These target grades are set based on national performance information about your child's own personal abilities and potential.

Reporting QMA scores

Students will be given QMA scores in class as part of the feedback process. These scores will be recorded onto the QMA assessment sticker on the front of their book or folder for the subject and can be viewed at any time.

As a school, we will share three QMAs with parents, per year, as part of the Achievement and Progress Reporting systems. You will receive one Achievement and Progress Report per term, each report will list one QMA grade per subject per term.

Are QMAs 'On Track'

Every Student has a target percentage to reach by the end of Year 9. On the following pages the 'On Track' ladder shows you the milestones your child should be looking to reach to be 'on track' to reach these targets in their subjects over the two years.

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What do I need to know about assessment in Year 9?

Year 9 is the last year of the Key Stage 3 curriculum. It is also a transition year, during which all students are given the opportunity to review and gain the experience needed to make their GCSE option choices in March 2027, ready to commence the full study of their GCSE courses in September 2027 at the start of Year 10.

One key difference to note in Year 9 is how the expectations of the 'On Track Ladder' changes for Year 9 students.

In Year 7 and 8 the progress ladder (which can be referenced in student planners or at the back of this guide) shows 'increments of improvement', for students to work towards over the first two years of the Key Stage 3 Curriculum. The increased expectation of each step reflects learning overtime, maturity and a student's greater grasp of skills and application of their learning. For example, you would expect that a Year 8 student in the summer term would be a more confident and mature essay writer than a Year 7 student in the autumn term. Therefore, if you were a student with a 70% target set in a subject in September of Year 7, achieving 50% of the marks on an assessment would mean you were 'on track', by the start of Year 8 you needed to be achieving 60% to be 'on track' and by the end of Year 8 hitting your 70% target.

In Year 9 there are no more steps upwards on the 'On Track Ladder'. All students should aim to hit or exceed their percentage targets in all QMAs from the start of the year and maintain them throughout the year. This reflects the fact that students are now completing the Key Stage 3 curriculum and should be aiming to maintain a performance on the final content and skills.

Finally, as the Year 9 curriculum progresses, teaching staff will be supplementing the Key Stage 3 curriculum with the foundation skills and knowledge to support the transition to Key Stage 4. This will be gradually blended as the year progresses, **but it does mean that an assessment at the end of Year 9 will be more challenging than at the start of the year, so maintaining a percentage assessment score all year, will demonstrate excellent progress in learning.**



KS 3 Subjects 'On Track' Ladder

Targets	90%	80%	70%	60%	55%	50%	B5
Y9 Term 3	90	80	70	60	55	50	B5
Y9 Term 2	90	80	70	60	55	50	B5
Y9 Term 1	90	80	70	60	55	50	B5
Y8 Term 3	90	80	70	60	55	50	B5
Y8 Term 2	90	80	70	60	50	50	B5
Y8 Term 1	80	70	60	50	50	40	B4
Y7 Term 3	80	70	60	50	40	40	B3
Y7 Term 2	70	60	50	40	40	30	B2
Y7 Term 1	70	60	50	40	30	30	B1

Core PE "On Track" Ladder

Targets	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%
Y9 Term 3	75	65	55	45	35
Y9 Term 2	75	65	55	45	35
Y9 Term 1	70	60	50	40	30
Y8 Term 3	60	55	45	35	25
Y8 Term 2	60	50	40	30	20
Y8 Term 1	55	45	35	25	15
Y7 Term 3	50	40	30	20	10
Y7 Term 2	45	35	25	15	5
Y7 Term 1	40	30	20	10	5



Checking your child is “On Track”:

- Find out their target for each subject.
- Find the target column.
- Look down to find the correct point in the school term.
- Are their current QMAs equal to or greater than the percentage/ grade in the table?
- If so, they are on track to meet or exceed their target
- If they are not on track, there could be many reasons for this. A good place to start is to look in their exercise books to see the feedback they are receiving in lessons.
- Students will track their progress using the following traffic lights system:

GREEN – On or above your “Track grade”

AMBER – Up to 10% below your “Track grade”

RED - More than 10% below your “Track grade”

The B Level Target Explained:

- The B Level is the ‘Breakthrough Stage’.
- This Level supports the students who are working below the age related curriculum in Year 7.
- To support learning, students on the B Levels will be given modified assessments.
- The B Levels become progressively more challenging up to B5, which indicates they are ready to sit age-related assessments. Targets will be set as 50% at this point.

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