



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

Key Stage 4 Assessment

A Guide for Parents 2026-2027



› RESPECT
› HONESTY
› EXCELLENCE

What is assessed at Key Stage 4?

In Year 10 and 11 there are two types of assessment: Quality Marked Assessments (QMAs) and Pre-Public Examinations (PPEs). QMAs take place in the classroom. PPEs, are full mock GCSE exam weeks and take place in the school hall. During a PPE week the normal school timetable is suspended to give students the full exam experience, to help support their preparations for their final examinations at the end of Year 11.

What is a QMA?

QMAs are in class assessments. They are a 'check point' to see how much information students currently know, understand and can apply of the curriculum covered. QMA assessments are marked by the class teacher, and feedback is undertaken to allow students to reflect on their performance.

What is a PPE?

Pre-Public Examinations are the GCSE mock exams. The process of the real examination system is followed as closely as possible. The normal school timetable is suspended for a week, and all PPEs take place in the school hall. In the weeks prior to the PPEs, an examination timetable is published for students and parents; guidance on the areas of revision required is shared by subject teachers. PPE papers are examination board certified materials, and where possible completed in the full examination time allocated to the final GCSE papers. It will never be a 'full' exam experience as many subjects will have up to three examinations at the end of a GCSE course. For most subjects in PPE week, they set one component or examination paper.

When are QMAs?

Each year we produce a calendar of QMA dates. Students and parents can use this calendar to help plan ahead for learning. The QMA calendar states the focus of the QMA and when it will take place.

What is a Target Grade?

GCSE target grades are set using prior attainment data from Key Stage 2. The predictions are drawn from a very large national record of student data. Targets help to show students and parents what they should be working towards by the end of Key Stage 4. Target grades are never limiting; with hard work and effort some students will make even more rapid progress and move beyond their target grades. No academic sets or tiers of entry for examinations are limited by a student's target grade.

GCSE Fine Grades

GCSE assessments are marked using exam board criteria. Teachers allocate marks based upon how many of the criteria are fulfilled by a student.

This provides a mark or a percentage of the assessment criteria achieved overall. Using the GCSE grade boundaries (see next page) teachers are then able to award a GCSE grade for each piece of assessed work.

To help students and parents identify the meaning of this grade, a +, - or = is added. The + symbol denotes this grade is at the top of the boundary, = means the performance is mid grade and a – denotes the performance has just reached this grade boundary.

- RESPECT
- HONESTY
- EXCELLENCE

What do the new GCSE Grades mean?

The current GCSE subjects were introduced in 2017. Since this point all GCSEs in England are now awarded Grades 9 – 1.

For comparison, when you as parents were at school a GCSE Grade C is equivalent to a GCSE Grade 4 and a Grade A is equivalent to a GCSE Grade 7. See below for the conversion chart.

Grade 5 is now considered to be the 'strong pass' at GCSE level and should be the grade all students are working towards achieving.

Ofqual

Grading new GCSEs from 2017

New grading structure	Current grading structure
9	
8	A*
7	A
6	B
5	C
4	
3	D
2	E
1	F
	G
U	U

GCSE Grade Boundaries

Exam boards review grade boundaries annually, after student work is marked.

Exam boards publish their grade boundaries every year.

Grade boundaries are broadly similar each year with small fluctuations as required.

- > RESPECT
- > HONESTY
- > EXCELLENCE

What Grade Boundaries are used for QMAs?

QMA tasks are marked using school agreed internal grade boundaries. These are set by school and reviewed annually. The school boundaries are required to reflect the difference between a QMA and a final GCSE exam paper. The time available in class, and often the preparation that is completed in class prior to a QMA, mean that performance could be falsely inflated if the national boundaries were used. A lot of departmental planning and preparation goes into setting the internal grade boundaries and they are reviewed regularly.

What Grade Boundaries are used for PPEs?

The results your child receives for Pre-Public Examinations will use the national GCSE grade boundaries of the previous year, sometime plus 1-3%. This very small increase in national boundaries allows us to build in what we believe is an appropriate margin to accommodate possible movements in Grade Boundaries.

What are my child's predicted GCSE Grades?

At Culcheth High School, we do not issue predicted GCSE grades. We report the GCSE grades students achieve on their QMA and PPE assessments.

These are only ever an 'indication' of performance on a piece of work at that point. If a student achieves a Grade 6 on a QMA or PPE, this does not guarantee they will achieve a Grade 6 in that subject at the end of the GCSE course. The QMA or PPE grade tells us that, at that time, and on that topic material, they knew enough and could write answers accurately enough to achieve the marks required for a Grade 6. Therefore, if they continue to work consistently and cover all areas of their studying and revision in the same way in the run up to the final examinations, we expect them to achieve a similar grade. However, no GCSE performance is guaranteed and the only way to ensure the best grades for your child, is to make sure they commit to the hard work and dedication needed to be successful in each subject.

When is Assessment information reported?

QMA scores are reported to students, 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. 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 assessment grade per subject per term.

➤ RESPECT
➤ HONESTY
➤ EXCELLENCE

How do I know my child is making progress?

GCSEs are hard work and require determination over an extended period. Students are not expected to achieve their target grades at the start of their studies but work towards them over the course of the two years. The 'On Track' Ladder shows how you can break this progress down over the two years.

The 'On Track' Ladder is, however, only a guide. Please remember 'learning is messy' and performance goes up and down, depending on the topic and demands of the assessment. Do not think your child has 'gone backwards' if their assessment score in a subject falls or they do not make the next step up on the ladder. It is important to look at what has been assessed and how well they prepared to look at the 'bigger picture' of the overall assessment mark.

If your child achieves GCSE Grade 5 on QMA 1 in Year 10 and then they achieve a Grade 5 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 they are still able to maintain this grade. Equally, if an assessment score falls, this does not mean everything is terrible. It just tells us that there is an area of the subject your child finds harder to understand and will need to work harder on this to raise their overall performance and examination outcomes.

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

There are many 'learning' reasons why a student will achieve below their 'On Track' grade. 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

Teachers are constantly reviewing the QMA scores and planning learning and feedback opportunities in class to address these. If a QMA result highlights a potential issue, it will help to address this as early as possible.



KS4 Subjects “On Track” Ladder

Targets	8	7	6	5+	5-	4	3
Y11 Term 3	8=	7=	6=	5+	5-	4=	3=
Y11 Term 2	8=	7=	6=	5=	4+	4=	3=
Y11 Term 1	8-	7-	6-	5-	4=	4-	3-
Y10 Term 3	7+	6+	5+	4+	4-	3+	2+
Y10 Term 2	7=	6=	5=	4=	3+	3=	2+
Y10 Term 1	7-	6-	5-	4-	3=	3-	2=

All students will track their progress using the following traffic lights system:

GREEN – On or above your “Track grade”

AMBER – 1 full GCSE below your “Track grade”

RED - More than 1 full GCSE Grade below your “Track grade”

GCSE Fine Grades Explained

- 5+ Top of the grade boundary (very secure)
- 5= In the middle of the grade (secure)
- 5- At the lower end of the grade (insecure)



Core PE “On Track” Ladder

Targets	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%
Y11 Term 3	90	80	70	60	50
Y11 Term 2	90	80	70	60	50
Y11 Term 1	85	75	65	55	45
Y10 Term 3	85	75	65	55	45
Y10 Term 2	80	70	60	50	40
Y10 Term 1	80	70	60	50	40

Checking your child is “On Track”:

- Find out their target for each subject
- Find the target column
- Look up the ladder 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.