



**CULCHETH
HIGH SCHOOL**

› THE BEST THAT WE CAN BE

Key Stage 4 Assessment

A Guide for Parents 2024 - 2025



- › RESPECT
- › HONESTY
- › EXCELLENCE

What is assessed at Key Stage 4?

Students complete six assessments per year, per subject. There are two types of assessment: Quality Marked Assessments (QMAs) and Pre-Public Examinations (PPEs). Assessments that take place in the classroom are QMAs. Once a year students will complete the PPEs, which is a mock GCSE exam week. The normal school timetable is suspended for a week and the PPEs take place in the school hall to give students the experience.

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.

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What do the new GCSE Grades mean?

New content alongside new methods of assessing GCSEs was introduced in 2017 and 2018 as GCSE started to move across to the new reformed qualifications. At the heart of these changes, has been a desire by the government to ensure that the UK National Curriculum is as challenging as it can be, to prepare our young people to the best of our ability to compete in a globalised world.

At secondary (like the changes at primary), the curriculum content and assessment arrangements have become harder and more challenging. There are now more exams and the exams for some subjects are longer, but the good news is that students are meeting these new challenges exceptionally well at Culcheth High School.

For parents, often the most common question is still about the change of the GCSE grades. The old grades A* - G are no longer used for GCSE subjects. All subjects have now moved to a system of Grades 9 – 1. In 'old money' terms the 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 | D |
| 3 | E |
| 2 | F |
| 1 | G |
| U | U |

GCSE Grade Boundaries

The most commonly asked questions by Key Stage 4 parents are about grade boundaries. Ultimately, grade boundaries are not fixed and have the potential, nationally, to move each year. Exam boards review grade boundaries annually, after student work is marked. There is also more turbulence in the system than previous years, as the more demanding exam papers are introduced. This will reduce in time as the new courses become established. But it does mean that there are no fixed national boundaries for any school to use.

With no examinations in 2020 and 2021, there is still some readjusting of the GCSE grade boundaries every year and exam boards move back to pre-covid levels. Consequently grade boundaries do shift more the normal each year at present.

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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, plus usually 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. The only subject that deviates from this slightly is Maths and this is explained separately.

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 would 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 QMA grade per subject per term.

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How do I know my child is making progress?

GCSEs are hard work and require determination over an extended period of time. Students are not expected to achieve their target grades at the start of their studies but work towards them over the course of the three 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 on this assessment there are part of the subject that your child finds harder to access and will need to work harder at to address by the time of the final exams.

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.

What do I need to know about assessment in Maths?

In Maths, like all other subjects, the QMA is a 'check point' of how securely each student knows and understands the work they have been learning in class. For example, if a student achieves 60% on Maths QMA 1 this tells us that: 40% of the current work covered in class that is not secure and needs further work (examinations are marked as a percentage and then converted to a GCSE grade using the grades boundaries).

We understand that knowing how well your child is doing in Maths (like English) is probably the most important information parents want to know. Ultimately, the best way to know that your child will get a great GCSE Maths grade at the end of Year 11 is to ensure they are confident and secure with each Maths topic as they move through the course. The QMA grades tell you this. If QMA scores fluctuate you will be able to see that they are more confident in some Maths topics than in others and be able to direct their work and efforts to those that they currently perform weakest in.

QMAs are not full GCSE papers and therefore the GCSE grades are only an indication to students and parents of the 'level' of GCSE the student has demonstrated on those topics. If the student who achieves 60% achieved enough marks to get a GCSE Grade 7 on that test, this is not suggesting that they will certainly achieve a Grade 7 in the final GCSE exams in Year 11, just that the work they have produced in this QMA illustrates Grade 7 ability.

The Maths department have the additional challenge of 'Tiered Entry' Papers in the final GCSE examination: Foundation and Higher. It is only by the end of Year 11 that all students working towards the higher paper will have completed enough work in class to access the most challenging questions on the higher paper. If GCSE students were set, a full, final GCSE paper in QMAs and PPEs there would be many questions on the paper that students would not yet have covered in class. This is not good for student confidence and self-esteem.

To prevent this, the Maths team have devised a series of exam papers for Year 10 students that become progressively more challenging. This allows students to spend more time focusing on the topic areas covered in the classroom up to that point and not be faced by a wide number of topics they have not yet covered. To reflect this, the top grade on some papers is capped to reflect the overall level difficulty of the paper. The final exam at the end of Year 10 is the pre-public exam (PPE). This will be a full GCSE paper using grade boundaries in line with national standards.

In the Year 11 PPE week, all students will be tested using full GCSE papers at either the Higher or Foundation tier of entry, to ensure all students are entered for the correct tiers of entry for the final summer term examinations. Year 11 students will also receive additional opportunities to practise full GCSE papers under exam conditions and less formally through homework.



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.