



Charles Darwin School

Operated by the Charles Darwin Academy Trust

Headteacher: Sunil Chotai, BSc

18th March 2021

Dear Year 11 and Year 13 students, Parents and Carers,

Exam Grades 2021

First of all, let me start by saying that it has been great to see you all return to school for face to face education. I also want to take this opportunity to say thank you to you all for the way you have approached the return to school and the demands of the LFD testing.

As you may be aware following the Secretary of State's announcement in relation to the cancellation of public examinations this year, grades for GCSE, A Level and most other qualifications will be arrived at using a process that involves teacher assessments against national standards, internal quality assurance and external quality assurance by examination boards.

The national process defined by the DFE and the examination regulator Ofqual will work in our school as follows:

1. Teachers will assess students against the national standards, which will be defined by the examination boards before the Easter break. This assessment will be based only on the content that has been taught.
2. Departments/subjects will submit grades which will be quality assured by senior staff. This internal quality assurance process will have to be approved by the examination boards to ensure it is rigorous and in line with the national standards.
3. Examination boards will then quality assure the school's submissions of results, this may involve the random sampling of work that has been used to evidence the grades issued.
4. If the examination boards are confident in our submitted grades then the exam boards will award students their final grades
5. If students do not think that their results are accurate, they will have the right to appeal.

So, it is clear that teachers will not award student grades, the starting point will be with teacher assessment of performance across a range of evidence. This is against a nationally-defined standard, not an individual teacher's own opinion. This assessment is then subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the final grade is awarded by the examination body.

How will loss of learning time be accounted for

This year, teachers will only assess students on the content that has been taught - because of the pandemic not all the syllabus may have been covered. This means that students will not be disadvantaged if they individually or their class or whole year group have been unable to complete their full course. However, grades can only be submitted on the basis of the evidence we have of students' performance in the content that has been taught. Students who would usually have extra time in exams will have this taken into consideration in teacher assessment.

What evidence will be used?

Teachers are able to draw upon a range of assessment evidence from across a student's study of the course. This may include homework tasks, mock exams, class tests and papers set by exam boards. This may include evidence from before the latest lockdown, as well as evidence from March-June. The examination boards are producing assessment materials that will be sent to us in the next few weeks and some subjects may also use this. Different departments may use different sources of evidence and there are no requirements for any one type of assessment to be used - it is about a performance across a range of evidence.

Deadlines for the submission of grades

The deadline for the submission of grades to the examination boards is 18th June, this is after a rigorous quality assurance process has been undertaken in school. It is therefore likely that the deadline for the collection of all teacher based assessment will be sometime prior to this. I will confirm the exact date teachers will be finalising their evidence once the examination boards have issued details of their procedures.

Will the grades be different between different schools?

NO, the standard against which teachers will be assessing students is set nationally by the exam boards. This standard will be used during external quality assurance and appeals to ensure consistency and fairness across the system.

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 examination malpractice.

In 2020, undue pressure from any student or parent on teachers to increase grades was considered to be exam malpractice. It is likely to be the same for 2021. If students or parents are found to be putting teachers and leaders under undue pressure to increase grades, then this matter will be referred to the exam boards and an investigation into malpractice may ensue.

There will however be an appeals procedure - the details of which are awaited and which I will communicate to you in due course, that will enable students who feel that their grade is inaccurate to lodge an appeal.

What should students do now?

The most important thing for students to do now is to continue to attend lessons, learn and act on the feedback from their teachers, revise and read around their subject. The grade that will be awarded finally will be based on their performance and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.

On return to school after the prolonged period of school closure, we felt it was important for students to settle back in to school; we did not therefore feel that it was appropriate to commence with a series of tests/mock examinations immediately for our Year 11 and Year 13 students. Now however some formal assessing will take place reasonably soon,

A little after Easter, once we have received further information, assessment material, quality assurance guidance and details of the standards needed for each grade, we will be in a position to confirm the details of the evidence that teachers in each subject will be drawing upon to help them assess a student's final grade ready for moderation and quality assurance. Clearly the evidence base will be different in different subjects and will be more complicated in some than others. Our aim will be of course to ensure fairness, consistency and an approach that allows full credit to be given to our students within the obvious constraints.

Current Performance Information

After the Easter break we will be issuing the usual CAPP report for Year 11 students. This should contain current performance information that students and parents will find useful.

Easter Holidays

During the Easter break, subjects will be offering a variety of catch-up lessons where appropriate. These lessons will be targeted in the first instance towards practical subjects, where the lack of availability of practical rooms since September has hindered subject delivery and impacted on pupil progress. We will be in touch with you in due course with further details of this offer.

Results Days

These will take place on 10th August for A Level results and 12th August for GCSE results. Further details will be communicated as they emerge in due course. As usual, enrolment into the Sixth Form will be dependent on achieving our already published entry criteria and will take place on 12th and 13th August.

Sharing of grades with students and parents

As already mentioned, the deadline for submitting grades to the examination boards is 18th June 2021. You will be aware that we are not permitted to share any grades with you ahead of results day.

End of Year events for Year 11 and Year 13

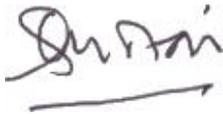
At the moment it is difficult to imagine how we can accommodate the organisation of the School Prom for Year 11 and the Sixth Form Ball later this academic year. The guidance on large gatherings, staff safety, pupil safety, complications with venue booking costs, travel to and from venues are such that we cannot commit to holding these events at the moment. So I would ask parents/carers at this stage not to incur any expenditure towards preparations for

these events. If this situation changes significantly and we can go ahead then I will be in touch. I am aware that not going ahead with these events may be disappointing for all concerned, however I do not feel that we can commit to any bookings whilst such uncertainty is still prevailing.

It is also difficult for us to confirm any other end of year arrangements for Year 11 and Year 13 students at present. The uncertainty is much too great and we would not wish to be in a situation where we have to reverse a decision. It may help parents in their planning to understand that the last day for Year 11 and Year 13 is likely to be in the period end of May - first week of June.

In the meantime, our message to all students in these two year groups in particular is to engage better than ever with their learning, act swiftly on the advice offered by their teachers and do their absolute best to prepare for any assessments. These are things that that I am confident that the vast majority of our students fully appreciate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sunil Chotai', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Sunil Chotai
Headteacher