

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: Update regarding A-levels and GCSEs

We hope this finds you well and coping as best as you can under the current circumstances. Please send our best regards to your children who coped admirably and behaved impeccably on their last day at school on Friday, in spite of their deep disappointment. We somehow managed to cobble together impromptu leavers' assemblies for both Year 11 and 13, as well as a mass shirt signing in the hall for the Year 11s which at least gave them something of a feel of a last day! We were also very touched by the number of Year 13 students who, in spite of the devastating news about not sitting their A-level exams the previous day, still managed to club together and find presents for their teachers; our wonderful students embodying the Nower Hill way: Service Not Self.

So on to more serious matters: exam grades. With regard to the assessment of A Levels and GCSEs this summer, Ofqual (the exam boards regulator) has announced that schools will be asked to submit a grade that reflects what teachers feel individual students would have achieved, had they sat the exams this summer. These teacher predictions will take into account mock exam results, non-exam assessment and coursework as well as the teachers' professional opinions as to the likely outcome a student would have achieved in the summer.

Once they have received this information, the exam boards will then combine the teacher prediction with other factors to reach a final grade. These other factors will include the student's prior attainment and grade distribution from previous years (i.e. nationally they would want to award similar numbers of grade 9s, 8s etc. at GCSE or A grades, B grades etc. at A-level as had been achieved in previous years). The students will then be awarded these grades before the end of July, with the certificates they receive being no different from any other year (i.e. future employers will not know they did not sit exams). Students will be able to appeal decisions on their outcomes if they feel the process has not been followed correctly. Students will also have the opportunity to sit exams if they are not happy with their results, either at the earliest opportunity once schools have reopened or in the summer of 2021.

Although we now know the broad approach exam boards and Ofqual will be taking, we are still awaiting more information on all the steps mentioned above and will write to you again once this is released. Please find below a link to the full press release from the Department for Education on Friday 20th March.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-details-on-exams-and-grades-announced>

We feel desperately sorry for our students, staff and of course you their parents, whom we know have worked so hard to prepare for the A Level and GCSE exams which the young people now do not have the opportunity to take. The teacher assessment system outlined by the DfE and Ofqual leaves many questions unanswered and will clearly require more detail, but we are where we are, and we are confident that Ofqual and the exam boards will work with us to do everything possible to ensure grades are awarded fairly and consistently in these difficult circumstances.

Please can we ask for your support in respecting the system that has been put in place and our professional judgement and knowledge of the children. We respectfully request that parents do not contact their children's teachers with pleas to increase grades or to raise historical issues that they now believe may have impacted upon their child's potential grade. Thank you for understanding that these are very difficult times for schools and it is important that our staff are allowed to focus on making the best judgments for our students, and that the school maintains the integrity of the exams system, as it always has.

As a result of the announcement by the government about exam grades, you will understand that we will no longer be setting daily work for students in Years 11 and 13 over the next few weeks, as this can no longer be justified. However, we know that it would be useful during this time of uncertainty for students to continue their studies. Therefore, following the Easter break we will look to set some extended work that we will ask students to complete either to prepare themselves for A-level or university study.

We do understand that you are likely to have more questions regarding the assessment process, however for the moment we have shared with you all the information that we currently have. As a result, we would ask that at present you do not contact the school to request further information about your child's grades and rest assured that as soon as we know more, we will be in touch. Thank you for your understanding.

With very best wishes from all at Nower Hill and we hope that you and your families continue to keep well.

Louise Voden
Headteacher