

St Mary Magdalene Secondary Phase Assessment Guidance

Context

Over the past few years there has been considerable national reform of assessment in schools. In 2013, the Department for Education removed the National Curriculum assessment levels that had been in use in Key Stages 1-3, and in 2016, Key Stage 2 assessments were awarded scaled scores (80-120) rather than levels. Reforms to GCSE content and assessment have also been underway since 2015, and as of summer 2019, students' attainment in all GCSEs are awarded as a number (9-1) rather than a letter (A*-G).

As a new secondary phase, we initially designed our own system of levels to replace National Curriculum levels in Years 7 and 8, grading students from Omega+ through Gamma to Alpha-. We then used GCSE levels to assess students in Year 9 onwards. This system has been effective in assessing students, but having consulted parents and students, we realise that they have not always found it easy to compare attainment across year groups or to understand what their progress looks like.

Since September 2019, St Mary Magdalene Secondary Phase has assessed students' work throughout Years 7 to 11 using GCSE numbers. As well as this system providing greater clarity to parents and students, we are taking other steps to personalise the assessment system and ensure we support all students to achieve their academic potential.

This document explains the assessment system at St Mary Magdalene further.

Assessment

All students are assessed using GCSE numbered grades (9-1) for reporting purposes. Therefore, if a teacher awards a student a grade 6, the teacher has assessed that the student is producing work at the standard of a GCSE grade 6. These grades will not routinely be awarded for classwork or homework, but will be used as part of the termly reporting cycle and on assessments as appropriate.

Some, and particularly the youngest students, will not work at a GCSE grade standard. Students working below a grade 1 will be graded at:

- 1a (equivalent to working at a comfortable Year 6 expected level)
- 1b (equivalent to the threshold of the Year 6 expected level)
- 1c (below the Year 6 expected level)

Our status as an all through school means that our teachers are uniquely able to work with members of staff in the primary phase to accurately assess work not yet at a GCSE standard, and to provide students working at this level with appropriate feedback to ensure they progress.

When reporting current working grades, teachers will use 'fine' grades within the 9-1 grading system, where each grade is divided into three bands. This indicates how securely the student is working within this current grade.

- 6+ indicates that the student is working at a high grade 6, and is close to getting a grade 7
- 6 indicates that the student is working at a secure grade 6
- 6- indicates that the student is just above the threshold of a Grade 6

Given that some students may remain on one grade over much of the course of a year and still make expected progress, fine grades allow a student, parent/carers and teacher to effectively track progress.

Targets

Students are given target grades for the end of the year in each subject. By comparing this with their 'on entry' grades and current working grades, each student's progress can be measured. This enables us to swiftly identify students who are underachieving, and then to detect any barriers to learning, put in place additional support and contact parents/carers.

The target grade is created using several pieces of data. A charity, the Fischer Family Trust, use the scores from Key Stage 2 assessments along with other contextual data to provide a GCSE baseline target grade for every student in each of their subjects. We triangulate this data with our own 'on entry' tests and regular assessments to provide each student with target grades, set at the start of the year but subject to change if, for instance, the student makes greater than expected progress.

The target grade is set at a level so that each student is expected to make at least as much progress as students in schools in the top 20th percentile for

progress (FFT20). In practice, this level of progress typically means making one GCSE grade of progress each year.

FFT20 projection	Year 11	Year 10	Year 9	Year 8	Year 7	Typical avg KS2 result range
9	9	9	9	9	9	
8	8	8	8	8	8	
7	7	7	7	7	7	
6	6	6	6	6	6	
5	5	5	5	5	5	
4	4	4	4	4	4	
3	3	3	3	3	3	≥113
2	2	2	2	2	2	107-113
1	1	1	1	1	1	103-109
			1a	1a	1a	101-106
				1b	1b	95-103
					1c	≤99
						B

Fig 1: End of year target setting

As shown in the graph above, these target grades can be used to provide a projection of GCSE outcomes based on Key Stage 2 results.

For example, Olivia scored 105 in both reading and Maths at the end of KS2. Using other contextual data, FFT20 projects that she will achieve a 6- in her GCSE Maths examination. She therefore enters school in Year 7 working at a GCSE grade 1 and – through effective teaching and learning and lots of hard work – she can be expected to make one grade progress per year to reach an outcome of 6 by Year 11.

End of GCSE target grades are provided to students only in Year 10 and qualitative targets (i.e. concrete subject-specific steps for improvement) are always prioritised in lessons over quantifiable targets (i.e. a grade to aim for). Target grades are not set in stone: between Years 7 and 11, target grades may be changed if, for instance, a student makes rapid progress.

Progress

Although the target setting table (Fig 1) is useful in showing where students should be at the end of each academic year, we know that progress is not always linear and that students develop at different paces. Every student is different and will make more or less progress at different times during their academic journey at St Mary Magdalene.

Within school, we use a range of measures to understand the acceptable range of attainment for students based on their prior attainment and to judge the extent to which each individual is or isn't fulfilling their potential. Key tools for this purpose include the DfE's Key Stage 2 to 4 transition matrices and FFT's benchmark indicators.

For the student, however, the use of a simple target grade provides an aspirational but realistic target to work towards, and – along with the regular reporting of current working grades – allows the school, parents/carers and students to monitor academic achievement and progress across and between years.

If a student doesn't make expected progress in any of his or her subjects, he or she is put on the classroom teacher's underachievement tracker. This is a supportive rather than a punitive measure, leading to steps being put in place to help the student make the necessary progress to fulfil their potential. Communication and cooperation between the school and the student's home is vital, so at this point, parents/carers are informed.

Assessing work

The marking policy explains the protocols for marking at St Mary Magdalene but the following points may be helpful in understanding how students are graded.

When students begin their GCSEs, they are marked against the mark schemes of exam boards. Before students begin their GCSEs (typically Years 7, 8 and 9), each subject area at St Mary Magdalene has assessment frameworks which assess the National Curriculum's Key Stage 3 aims and subject content in their area, whilst adhering to GCSE grade descriptors. This is true for all subjects, including projects in Years 7 and 8. Most individual pieces of work will not be graded using a GCSE grade but rather, following the guidance in the marking policy.

Reporting

Reports are provided to parents/carers three times per year, and include students' target and current working grades. Keeping in mind that students are expected to make one grade of progress per year, these two pieces of information show parents/carers whether their child is on track, as well as their current absolute attainment.

Attitude to learning is essential for academic success so in addition to the above, students' reports also contain grades for effort, behaviour and quality of homework. In these attributes, students are grades are from 1 to 4:

- 1: Outstanding
- 2: Expected
- 3: Below expected
- 4: Cause for concern

Reports also display a percentage attendance, and a tally of achievement and behaviour points.