

Our Values: Kindness, Honesty, Respect

# Ballakermeen High School



27<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope this letter finds you well. We were delighted to welcome Year 11 back to school and have been pleased with their positive attitude and work ethic. We know you will have questions about the process for the replacement of exams and I hope the information below will be helpful. There is a lot of detail included, not least because we are dealing with three different examination boards, each of whom has slightly different requirements.

### **How will grades be awarded this summer?**

Two important things to note are that we will not be undertaking formal exams and grades will not be decided by a formula. Instead, teachers will be conducting in-class assessments in order to have an evidence base, leading to an holistic, professional judgement. There is no limit to the achievement of students, providing they have evidence that they are working at a level which is clearly evident in their work. It will be no easier or harder to achieve specific grades than it would be in any normal examination year.

Students' performance will be assessed across a range of evidence. Question papers and materials produced by the exam boards will be used in all subject areas. This will be a robust measure, given that these materials have been designed by senior examiners. Although many of the questions provided will be drawn from past papers, there may be some new material as well.

Island schools use three main exam boards (CAIE, WJEC and Pearson, which is covered by Ofqual).

Although there are specific differences between them, their approach is broadly the same:

- Students will be informed of the evidence that will determine their grades. For WJEC and JCQ boards, it is expected that the evidence will be consistent across the class or cohort (CAIE have slightly different requirements)
- Teachers will use a range of evidence to determine awarded grades e.g. assessments, mock results, coursework or other substantial classwork
- Subject Leaders will submit grades which will be quality assured by the school
- Exam boards will review schools' quality assurance processes before grades are submitted. Once grades are entered, the exam board will conduct various checks to make sure the grades are fair and consistent across centres. This will include sampling of evidence
- If there are concerns with the grades submitted, the exam board will work with the school to address this before results day
- If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, students will be awarded their final grades
- If students think an error has been made during the process of awarding a grade, they will have the right to appeal.

#### **What will these assessments look like for students?**

- All assessments will take place in classroom settings, apart from any that are taken during the 'Contingency Week'. These will be taken in a centralised venue
- Assessments will cover content that has been taught
- Exam boards state recent evidence is likely to be more representative of student performance
- Not all pieces of evidence will carry the same weighting of marks; this will be decided by subject teachers who will determine an holistic, 'best fit' grading judgement
- Some vocational and options subjects will have different assessment points and these will be communicated by teachers separately
- Students entitled to additional support will receive it for all their assessments – please see the section below on access arrangements
- Staff must be in a position to verify work as the students' own. Any assistance should be acknowledged; this is only likely to be an issue if students cannot complete the assessments in school, and an alternative way of doing them has to be found
- When different groups of classes are doing the same assessments, we will endeavour to rotate the order in which they are undertaken, so no group of students is fairly/unfairly treated
- It may appear that students are taking a high volume of assessments, please bear in mind that they are taking place in class time. Whilst an examination would normally be sat in a two hour session, the equivalent assessment may be taken over three or four lessons
- Teachers will not be in a position to determine grades until they have sufficient evidence
- With the exception of WJEC (Welsh Board) students will not receive their grades until the 12th August.

#### **What can we do to support our children?**

- The best thing students can do is to revise hard and do all they can to ensure they are fully prepared for the assessments. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands
- Attendance is very important; if we do not have the sufficient evidence that these assessment windows provide, this may affect the grade that we are able to issue

### **Special Consideration**

Special consideration requests will not apply in the usual way this summer. In some circumstances, small adjustments to the marks may be made. (Please be aware that exam boards themselves rarely award more than 3% uplift). All communication on special considerations should come through the central email address and any request must be made in advance of the grade submission deadline. The Exams Officer can be contacted: tracey.o'neill2@sch.im

Learning Support Services and the Exams Officer are working closely with Subject Leaders to ensure that everyone is offered their entitlement. Because this series of assessments is much more complicated than exams that would be taken centrally, it would be very helpful if students could remind teachers of their entitlement a few days ahead of an assessment; we will be doing that centrally, as well, of course. (A 'belt and braces' approach!)

### **Are students entitled to know their grades?**

This varies between the exam boards, please see below:

#### **WJEC** (Art, Drama, French, German, Technology, Mathematics, Media, RE)

Students will be informed of the GCSE grade that the teacher is submitting to the exam board. They will then have two weeks in which to make an appeal if they feel an error has been made.

#### **CAIE** (Sciences, Computer Studies, Economics, English, English Literature, Geography, Global Perspectives, History, ICT, Music)

Students can be informed of the marks they have been awarded for each piece of evidence, but they cannot be informed of the grade it represents. If a teacher does so, the exam board will view this as malpractice.

#### **Ofqual Regulated Boards** (Enterprise, Performing Arts, Sport)

Teachers will determine BTEC grades this year. They are not allowed to disclose the final grades that will be submitted to the exam board.

In all cases, students should not attempt to second-guess the grade submitted, as teachers will be using a range of evidence to inform their final judgement.

### **Appeals**

Our teachers will use 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 exam malpractice.

If students are not happy with the result published in August, they can appeal. However, it is important to point out that the basis for appeals will be limited. Appeals will only be successful if it can be shown that due process has not been followed and the result given does not match the evidence provided in the student's portfolio.

Given that our experienced teachers will be using materials and grade descriptors generated by the exam boards to evidence our grades and our submissions will have been 'quality assured' at multiple points, I would expect the boards to support our judgements. Clearly, if there are any clerical errors, we will quickly correct them, but exam boards will not be re-marking school-based assessments.

**What happens if students have to self-isolate in the coming weeks?**

Special considerations will apply if students have to isolate/are ill for any assessments and they will still be able to achieve a grade. If this applies to your family, please contact us as soon as you can.

If students miss an assessment due to be undertaken in school time, we will use the Contingency Week to undertake assessments in a central venue. There may be a requirement for a new assessment to be created.

**Study Leave**

All assessments should be complete by Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May. We have built in two additional 'Contingency Weeks'. Our Year 11 Leavers' Day celebration will take place on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> May and the final day of full-time education for Year 11 is Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May. However, if students have completed their assessments and had their portfolios of evidence signed off, their study leave may begin earlier.

If students misbehave, or disrupt the learning of others, they will be placed on study leave and only be allowed into school to complete any necessary assessments. In both situations, parents will be informed in writing.

**And Finally**

I must apologise for the level of detail in this newsletter, but I am hoping that it covers many of the questions that you may have.

If students continue to work hard, revise thoroughly and complete all work set by teachers they should receive the grades they deserve. Should you have any questions regarding this process, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With kind regards,

Adrienne Burnett,  
Head Teacher