

Parents / Carers Guide to Assessment in KS3 at Whitburn C of E Academy

At Whitburn, we believe that assessment of student learning is not an end in itself, but is a fundamental part of the ongoing process of learning. Getting an accurate picture of the knowledge and understanding that students have embedded and the skills they can perform fluently is crucial in helping students, teachers and parents / carers understand what has been learnt, how well it has been learnt and the next steps for students.

Accurate assessment of learning, supported by regular review, allows teachers to carefully plan future learning so that all students can develop a high level of knowledge and understanding of our broad and balanced curriculum. It will also help promote student independence by giving them more detailed feedback on the actions they need to take to improve their own learning.

Over the last year we have reviewed our assessment and reporting of progress at Key Stage 3 in the light of the latest and best educational research and feedback from students and parents / carers. Following this review we will be making the following changes to the way in which students are assessed and attainment reported at Key Stage 3:

- Student attainment will no longer be reported on GO4Schools using GCSE grades. Instead we will use a new system that is designed to reflect more accurately how well students have learnt their curriculum. Please see below.
- We will not generate end of year target grades from KS2 data. Consequently we will not report student progress towards that target grade. This means that the colour scheme (Purple / Green / Pink) to denote the 'residual' (Current Grade minus Target Grade) will no longer be used. Instead, different shades of the same colour (green) will be used to easily see how well students have learnt the curriculum content and skills.
- There will be greater emphasis on assessment for formative purposes (ongoing, using different methods, smaller chunks of the curriculum) to inform future planning, rather than larger 'summative' Key assessments. These will take place less frequently (typically 2 or 3 times per year) and cover a wider range of topics.

Rationale for the changes.

- GCSE grades are designed to be awarded by exam boards after all students in the country have taken the same exam covering a wide range of knowledge and skills in a subject at the same time, under the same conditions. Exam boards rank students' scores and create a grade boundary to ensure that roughly the same proportion of each grade (9 to U) are awarded each year. Using these boundaries to 'grade' KS3 work is inaccurate and potentially misleading as students haven't covered the same curriculum or been tested in the same way. Essentially, GCSE grades simply reflect the performance of the students in those exams. They are not useful in assessing how well a Year 8 student has learnt the Maths curriculum for example.
- Assessment should give an ongoing picture of students learning (what they know and can do), not their performance on one day in a 30 minute summative 'Key Assessment'. Relying on these 'Key Assessments' led to an end of term / half term rush to assess students. Some students had more than 3 in a day which caused unnecessary anxiety and caused the curriculum to be disrupted, which actually harmed students learning. Emphasising ongoing assessment will give students and parents / carers a much better picture of what they can know and do.
- Deriving subject based targets from KS2 SATs is always very inaccurate, particularly when those targets are expressed as GCSE 'grades' in KS3. Moving away from a colour scheme based on

student progress (their residual) towards target grades will remove the twin problems of students with 'high' KS2 grades always seemingly being below 'target' whilst students with 'low' KS2 grades always seemingly being above target. These can lead to students becoming either demoralised or complacent. Again this harms their learning.

New Student Attainment (Learning) Reporting System

From September 2021 we will report student attainment (what they know and can do) using the following measures:

Measure	Descriptor
Learning is very secure (V)	Able to recall the great majority of content / concepts / skills with fluidity. Able to apply and articulate knowledge / understanding and skills in new contexts is strong. Able to make links with other areas of the curriculum
Learning is secure (S)	Able to recall most content / concepts with a degree of fluidity. Able to apply and articulate knowledge / understanding and skills in some contexts. Shows evidence of links to prior learning
Learning is mostly secure (M)	Able to recall some content / concepts. Sometimes able to apply and articulate knowledge / understanding and skills to a different context.
Learning is developing (D)	Recalls a limited range of content / concepts with support. Developing the ability to apply knowledge / understanding and skills in different contexts

When a student is formatively assessed on a particular piece of the curriculum, it will be recorded on Go4S as V, S, M or D. In summative assessments where a score is generated e.g. 30 out of 40 then the % score is used to determine the level of attainment. For example a score of 30 out of 40 on a summative assessment would be 75% and so would generate a 'V' (learning is very secure).

FAQs

What does formative assessment look like?

Formative assessment can be done in many ways. For example:

- Quizzes
- Multi-choice questions
- Reading or observing student work (either during or after a lesson)
- Live marking (marking students' work as they are completing it)
- Breaking a complex task down into several smaller parts and assessing one part at a time.
- Spelling and vocabulary tests
- Filling in blank knowledge organisers
- Written plans
- Questioning

Some of these forms of assessment do not involve written marking and as such you may not see large amounts of written marking in students' books. However, this does not mean teachers are not assessing your child's work and helping them to improve. By assessing learning more frequently your child will receive more feedback to help them improve.

What happens if my child is not at least secure in their learning?

Regular formative assessment will allow teachers to uncover gaps in learning and misconceptions more easily and frequently. When this occurs, teachers will give feedback and support (re-explanation / additional materials etc) to enable students to become more secure in their learning.

If a student's learning is mainly developing, then additional support and guidance will be given such as extra practice, modified materials, parental contact etc.

Will you still use KS2 data?

Information from teacher assessments at Primary School (SATs prior to 2020) is most useful for giving an indication of ability in English and Maths. This is used to help set a baseline to group students into classes. We will not use KS2 data to set targets for students as this can cap aspirations.

My child has gone from a 'V' to an 'S'. Are they falling behind?

Not necessarily. All subjects increase in difficulty as the curriculum progresses. It may be that for this latest section of work your child has found it more challenging for the time being. Also students have different capabilities in different areas of the subject. For example in English, they may find creative writing easy and enjoyable and so 'do well' in that, but then may find analysing poetry more challenging and so do 'less well' initially. Also children do not learn in a steady, linear fashion. They can appear to make quick rapid gains at times and at others appear to be struggling. This is natural.

What about GCSE?

Our aim is to ensure that during KS3 students acquire the knowledge, skills and attitude needed to start their GCSE courses. We recognise that students and parents / carers need information on their progress through their GCSE courses and so we will continue to use GCSE 'grades' to report student attainment in their GCSE years. Grades given in the early part of a GCSE course should be treated with caution as the students have not covered sufficient content to give an overall grade. For instance a Level 6 gained on a summative assessment in December of Year 10 does not mean that the student is 'working at' a level 6, or indeed will achieve a level 6 at the end of Year 11.

If you have any queries/questions about your son/daughter's progress within a subject, please don't hesitate to contact their subject teacher. If your concern is more general i.e. across 3 or more subjects, please contact your son/daughter's Head of Learning / Year Leader.