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Dear Parent/Carer,

Currently in education, there is a significant amount of change, including a New National Curriculum and the phased introduction of more challenging GCSEs and A Levels. These changes are happening over the next few years in all schools and your son/daughter will experience them.

The New National Curriculum has a greater focus on knowledge and skills development, along with the opportunity to study the ‘big ideas’ of a subject in greater depth. A key change has been the removal of assessment levels, something which students and parents have become familiar with both at Primary and Secondary school.

All schools nationally have been tasked to design and publish a new coherent Assessment Policy that reflects the above changes in national policy in a way that enables students and parents to understand the new assessment system. Systems will inevitably vary from school to school.

We believe that these changes provide the school with an opportunity to develop a Key Stage 3 curriculum and assessment system that is bespoke to the needs and aspirations of students at Deyes High School.

This new assessment system:

- Is based on high expectations and challenge for all
- Focuses on developing key subject concepts, knowledge and skills needed at GCSE
- Starts with the end point in sight. In other words, what do our students need to know, understand and be able to do to achieve their full potential at GCSE?
- Uses regular assessment and pupil feedback for improvement – and so develops what we call a ‘growth mindset’
- Incorporates high quality end of topic assessments which help develop the skills needed to tackle GCSE examination questions
- Ensures equal access to the full range of assessment criteria for all students so that all have the opportunity to achieve academic excellence
- Ensures that the data from assessment is reliable, identifying what students have and have not understood and informs future teaching/intervention needs
- Is designed to re-establish ‘the language of learning’ over ‘the language of levels’

This assessment system has been designed in consultation with all stakeholder groups within the school community including, teachers, parents, governors and, of course, students. However, it is a new policy and so your views and opinions on the system are welcome as we look to refine it further in the months and years ahead.

Mr P Duffy
Head of School
The government rationale for the removal of levels

The Royal Commission: ‘Assessment without Levels’ (September 2015) says:

‘Despite being intended only for use in statutory national assessments, too frequently levels also came to be used for in-school assessment between key stages in order to monitor whether pupils were on track to achieve expected levels at the end of key stages. This distorted the purpose of in-school assessment, particularly day-to-day formative assessment. The Commission believes that this has had a profoundly negative impact on teaching.

Too often levels became viewed as thresholds and teaching became focused on getting pupils across the next threshold instead of ensuring they were secure in the knowledge and understanding defined in the programmes of study. Depth and breadth of understanding were sometimes sacrificed in favour of pace. Levels also used a ‘best fit’ model, which meant that a pupil could have serious gaps in their knowledge and understanding, but still be placed within the level. This meant it wasn’t always clear exactly which areas of the curriculum the child was secure in and where the gaps were.’

What are the new GCSEs like?

In September 2015 new GCSEs were introduced in the following subjects:

- English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Combined Science, Geography, History, Modern Languages, Religious Studies, Design & Technology, Art and Design, Drama, Dance, Music, Physical Education, Computer Science, Citizenship Studies, Cooking and Nutrition. (More subjects will be added to this list in 2016)

These new GCSEs will first be examined in the summer of 2017 for our current Year 10. They are more demanding and require higher levels of literacy and numeracy to access the top grades.

Other changes include:

- a new grading scale that uses the numbers 1 to 9 to identify levels of performance, with 9 being the top grade. This only applies to English and Mathematics for the current Year 10.
- a structure where all assessment happens at the end of the course and content is not divided into modules
- exams as the default method of assessment, except where they cannot provide valid assessment of the skills required (e.g. Art)
How does the 9 to 1 grading compare with the current A* to G grading?

This is most easily represented by the following graphic:

The chart above shows that the new grade 2 is equivalent to the old grade E, the new grade 4 is equivalent to the bottom end of the old grade C and the new grade 7 is equivalent to the old grade A. It also shows that the new national benchmark for a ‘good’ GCSE pass is a grade 5 which is approximately half a grade more challenging than the old grade C. Approximately 60% of students in the country currently achieve a grade C or above in GCSE English and Maths, with approximately 40% currently achieving a grade B.

Key Stage 3 Assessment at Deyes High School

Teaching staff at Deyes High School have carefully mapped the new National Curriculum aims and content for each subject into 4 learning pathways based upon what students need to know, understand and be able to do in order to achieve each of the new 1 to 9 GCSE grades. These form the age-related expectations for students who are working towards each grade range.

These pathways have been defined as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Knowledge, understanding and skills expected of a learner on target to achieve the new...</th>
<th>This is in line with...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Platinum</td>
<td>grades 8-9</td>
<td>approximately the top 10% nationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>grades 6-7</td>
<td>approximately the top 30% nationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>grades 4-5</td>
<td>approximately the top 50% nationally and is therefore broadly in line with the national average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>grades 1-3</td>
<td>students working towards the national average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At no point is a student identified or labelled as ‘gold’ or ‘silver’. Instead, learning objectives and criteria are assigned to the learning pathway colours to indicate that they are progressively more challenging and demanding. The colours simply place those objectives or criteria in the longer-term context of the new GCSE examinations and within the context of your child’s age-related expectations.

All students have open and equal access to the full range of assessment criteria regardless of their Key Stage 2 (primary) starting point. The ‘level’ aspect is also removed as each strand gets progressively more challenging as the years progress. For example, students who are frequently achieving the gold criteria become progressively more secure in the criteria required to achieve a grade 6 or 7 the closer they get to their GCSE year.

This is represented in the graphic below:

Please note that this is how the curriculum has been designed but is not part of the teacher’s daily dialogue with the student at Key Stage 3.
What does this look like in the classroom?

When learning objectives are shared at the start of the lesson, the learning pathway colour is referenced to show how the learning process deepens and becomes progressively more difficult. Some students or groups of students will make rapid progress through to the ‘platinum’ concepts whereas others may need more structured support or more time to grasp the same concepts or skills.

To watch a video of Deyes High School teacher using this system to introduce learning objectives click here.

Day-to-day in-school Formative Assessment – ‘Marking and Feedback’

At Deyes High School, day-to-day formative assessment takes a variety of forms. These include:

- verbal feedback
- the use of colour pens and highlighters to indicate strengths and areas for improvement in a piece of work
- light touch ‘tick and flick’ marking
- Literacy and numeracy corrective marking
- ‘STAR’ feedback which provides students with: S – Specific Strengths; T – Targets for Improvement; A – Action for improvement; R – Response to the above feedback by the student either in the form of a written comment in by demonstrating the improvement in a subsequent piece of work

The frequency of each of the above marking strategies is outlined in each department’s marking policy and takes into account factors such as the nature of assessed work (written or practical) and the number of lessons students have of each subject within the week. This daily dialogue will focus entirely on the detail of the success criteria not the progression from one learning pathway to another.
At two separate assessment points in each unit or project, students will receive feedback in the form of an annotated ‘Progress Map’. These show how each project gets gradually more challenging using a thinking framework called Bloom’s Taxonomy.

The example below shows how the teacher has highlighted the criteria met at each assessment point. Assessment Point 1 (AP1) achievements are highlighted in yellow with the target for improvement highlighted in blue and explained further in the ‘target’ box at the bottom. By highlighting the criteria met at Assessment Point 2 (AP2) in pink, we can see how the student has made progress between assessment points.
How will your child’s progress be reported to you?

The Royal Commission: ‘Assessment without Levels’ (September 2015) says:

‘In-school summative assessments can be reported to parents to inform them about the achievement, progress and wider outcomes of their children across a period, often a term, half-year or year.’

At Deyes High School, there will be three points in the year at which your son/daughter’s performance will be formally reported home.

In term 1, parents will receive a Student Progress Report that will provide you with some general information regarding your child’s performance, attitude to learning and homework management in each curriculum subject. It will also include attendance and punctuality information. This will be posted or emailed to you depending on how you prefer to receive reports.

The top of the report explains which learning pathway your child would be expected to work at for English, Maths and other subjects based on the attainment at Key Stage 2 (primary school).

If your child’s current academic performance is in line with this expectation, then his/her ‘Current Progress’ would be ‘expected’. If your son or daughter is frequently meeting criteria which is above the expected learning pathway, his/her ‘Current Progress’ would be reported as ‘Above’ or ‘Well Above’ as appropriate.
Similarly, if your son or daughter is not meeting the criteria expected of them, his/her ‘Current Progress’ would be reported as ‘Below’ or ‘Well Below’ as appropriate.

The numerical values attached to the ‘Attitude to learning’ and ‘Homework Management’ aspects of the report are defined as follows:

**Attitude to Learning**

1. Your son/daughter is highly motivated and is always actively involved in learning activities and tasks.
2. Your son/daughter frequently makes a positive contribution and is actively involved in learning activities and tasks.
3. Your son/daughter needs to develop a more consistent approach to their learning activities and tasks to meet their full potential.
4. Your son/daughter demonstrates a lack of motivation and needs to take more responsibility for participating in learning activities and tasks.

**Managing homework**

1. Your son/daughter’s homework and other assignments are always completed on time.
2. Your son/daughter’s homework and other assignments are usually completed on time.
3. Your son/daughter’s homework and other assignments are sometimes completed on time.
4. Your son/daughter’s homework and other assignments are rarely or never completed on time.

In term 2, you will receive the above report days prior to your child’s parents’ evening event. Here, the Student Progress Report will be supplemented by annotated progress maps from each subject which will clearly indicate the criteria your son/daughter has met to date and their current targets for improvement. You will be given these as you meet each of your child’s subject teachers.

In term 3, parents will receive their final summative report of the year. This should show the improvements made since the last report.