

HCHS Assessment Handbook

A parent's guide

This handbook is designed to explain the reasons behind our assessment strategy.

It provides an overview of when assessment data will be sent home and what this data means.

It starts with a 1-page summary as a quick overview.

Assessment at Hanley Castle: a 1-page summary

At HCHS, we check learning in different ways. We use two main types of assessments:

- **Formative assessment** happens all the time in lessons. It includes 'silent starter' questions, quizzes, and homework. Teachers use it to check understanding and help students improve.
 - **Summative assessment** is more formal. It tests how well students have learned a chunk of the curriculum. Summative 'assessment weeks' happen twice a year from Year 7 to Year 11, and students may get topic tests in some subjects throughout the year too. Summative assessments help students practise for exams like GCSEs and give teachers and parents a picture of progress.
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How students are supported for summative assessments

In the 4 weeks before each assessment period:

- Parents are informed.
- Students get clear revision materials.
- Assemblies and tutor sessions teach revision skills.
- Homework focuses on revision.
- An assessment timetable is shared.

Some assessments are held in the exam hall to help students get used to formal exam settings.

Access Arrangements

Students who need extra support (e.g. extra time) will receive it during assessments, but this will normally be in classrooms. In Year 10 and 11, access arrangements should match what they will get in their GCSEs.

What you will receive as a parent

After each assessment period we shall send an email home with the following for each subject:

- A **percentage score** (with a GCSE forecast for Year 10 summer exams or Year 11 mocks).
- **Attitude & Effort (A&E)** grade: How well students apply themselves.
- A **quintile**: shows approximately how your child compares to others in their year.

We shall also report your child's most recent reading age score, attendance, rewards, and behaviour data.

At the end Years 7-10 a **Tutor report** will provide a summary of broader achievements.

Why We Do This

Research shows that regular, well-supported assessments:

- Help students remember more.
- Reduce exam stress when it really matters in Year 11.
- Encourage good study habits.

We aim to make assessments meaningful, fair, and helpful for students and parents.

Overview

Assessment takes place constantly in schools and takes several forms. Students begin each lesson with a series of written questions to practise retrieval of prior learning. Teachers use this to help shape their lesson, in which they will continually assess students' learning through verbal questioning, responses on mini-whiteboards and low-stakes quizzing. There will also be mid-unit checks, end-of-unit tests and homework activities as part of the curriculum. All of this is assessment; impactful because it helps teachers to understand how to move students forward within a lesson and over a sequence of lessons, and because it provides students with feedback to make their next steps. We call this **'formative' assessment**.

Students also need to learn how to prepare for longer, more formal assessments that test larger bodies of knowledge. We call these **'summative' assessments**. *For further explanation see Appendix 1.* If we were to sideline this process until Year 11, we might risk high levels of anxiety amongst students taking GCSEs who would be ineffective in their preparation due to lack of practice.

We have therefore formalised a programme of summative assessments from Year 7-11. These will take place twice per year, as indicated below. They will inform students and their parents as to how they are progressing through the curriculum, giving an indication of approximately where their score places them within the cohort. More importantly, teachers will report how they are applying themselves to their learning in each subject: long-term success comes as a result of consistent effort. Finally, the assessments will enable the school to systematically monitor each student's attainment and to intervene if necessary.

	When assessed	What is reported?	When?	Rationale
Year 7	Sept-Oct	Attitude and Effort (A&E)	Late Oct	Settling in - y7
	<i>Late Sept</i>	<i>Baseline Ma and En tests – not reported</i>	<i>School use only - monitoring</i>	
	Late Jan	Assessment 1 percentage / A&E	Mid Feb	Pre-DT rotation
		<i>Parents Evening</i>	<i>Late Feb</i>	
	June	Assessment 2 percentage / A&E	July	End of y7
Year 8		Tutor report	July	Broader attributes
	Sept-Oct	Attitude and Effort (A&E)	Late Oct	Settling in - y8
	Early Dec	Assessment 1 percentage / A&E	Mid Dec	Informs options
		<i>Parents Evening</i>	<i>January</i>	<i>Informs options</i>
	Early June	Assessment 2 percentage / A&E	July	End of KS3
Year 9		Tutor report	July	Broader attributes
	Sept-Oct	Attitude and Effort (A&E)	Late Oct	Settling in - y9
	Nov/Dec	Assessment 1 percentage / A&E	Mid Dec	New courses check
	April	Assessment 2 percentage / A&E	Early May	Progress in courses
		<i>Parents Evening</i>	<i>Early June</i>	
Year 10		Tutor report	July	Broader attributes
	Sept-Oct	Attitude and Effort (A&E)	With asst 1	Settling in - y10
	Late Oct	Assessment 1 percentage	Mid Nov	Early y9 asst 2
		<i>Parents Evening</i>	<i>March</i>	
	April / May	Year 10 exam grades / forecast range / A&E	Early June	Exam Hall experience
Year 11		Tutor report	July	Broader attributes
	Sept-Oct	Attitude and Effort (A&E)	Late Oct	Settling in - y11
	Jan*	Mock GCSE exam grades / forecast / A&E	Early Feb	Preparation - GCSEs
		<i>Parents Evening</i>	<i>February</i>	Post-mocks focus
		Final advice per subject	Late March	Final revision focus

**Some practical Y11 mock exams (e.g. art, MFL) will take place before the Christmas holiday.*

Our evidence-based approach to this assessment strategy is based on the work of leading educationalists in the field, including: Dylan Wilam, Daisy Christodoulou, E.D. Hirsch, the Education Endowment Foundation and the Department for Education.

How will your son/daughter be supported for summative assessments?

There is an old saying: 'you don't fatten a pig by weighing it!'. So, what is the benefit of putting students and their teachers (and, no doubt, their parents) through a programme of summative assessments when they could be using lesson time for learning? The answer to this lies in cognitive science. Formative assessment is great for making links between ideas and developing understanding in our short-term memory, then coding and storing it in our long-term memory. However, the 'testing effect' of summative assessment reinforces this storage into long-term memory and trains students to retrieve and apply large quantities of knowledge that had previously been stored. Like all skills, this requires practice, and the earlier we start to train students in their process the better they become at it. But we have not simply "miniaturised" the GCSE process. The format of the assessments has been carefully structured from Year 7 to provide some familiarity between subjects whilst retaining the essential features that make a valid assessment for each subject discipline. *More explanation is provided in Appendix 2.*

Research shows that summative assessment has an impact on students' approach to learning because there is an anticipation that an inference will be made. This depends on many factors: does the assessment 'count' for anything? What are the consequences if it does or doesn't go well? How good is the relationship with their teacher? Is success within their reach? What is their experience of previous assessment? So, whilst for many summative assessment has a positive impact, it is also true that a negative experience results in the opposite effect on students' levels of motivation. Our goal must therefore be to ensure that students:

- care about doing well
- believe that they can succeed
- know *how* to succeed.

A programme of well-structured support will be put in place in the run-up to each of these assessment series, in which students are taught the most effective revision skills and guided to maximise their success. This is standardised so that all students experience the same high-quality support.

Standardised preparation for a summative assessment series

4-5 weeks before a summative assessment series begins (sooner for Year 10 exams and Year 11 mock exams):

- Parents will be informed
- Teachers will ensure that students know what will be assessed, providing appropriate revision resources. These will be consistent across all students taking the assessment.
- An assembly will launch the preparation period, reinforcing effective revision strategies and work habits.
- A tutor programme will be launched to support students in their preparation, including the construction of a revision timetable.
- Homework in all subjects will be dedicated to revision. Where appropriate, structured activities will be provided to support the revision process.
- An assessment timetable will be published.

Assessments will generally be held in lessons but scheduled sensitively to minimise pressure on students and to standardise the conditions in which they are taken. Some assessments will be taken in the examination hall, to familiarise students with sitting exams in a formal setting, although we are limited by the time we can take the Sports Hall from the PE department. Year 7-11 assessments taken in the examination hall include:

- Year 11 mock exams
- Year 10 summer exams
- Some Year 7-9 maths and English assessments

Access Arrangements

Access arrangements for GCSE must reflect the normal working patterns of individual students. Internal summative assessments will provide additional time and appropriate support for those students eligible to receive them. Access Arrangements for the Year 10 summer exams and Year 11 mock exams will be as similar as possible to those provided in the actual GCSE exam series, and parents will receive information about this in plenty of time.

What will be reported?

Following each assessment window, an assessment score will be reported home. This will generally be a percentage score, although a GCSE forecast grade range will be reported after the Year 10 summer exams and the Year 11 mock exams. The timing for each cohort can be seen in the overview on page 1.

In order for parents to reflect on their child's performance in different subjects, a '**quintile**' will also be reported, along with an **attitude and effort (A&E)** descriptor.

Rewards and demerits data will be reported, alongside the average (median) for the year group. Additionally, we shall include the most recent reading score and attendance data.

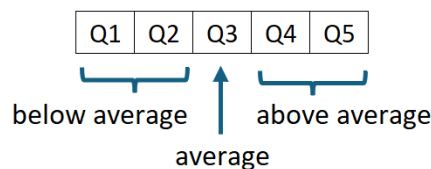
At the end of the year, a written report will be provided by each student's tutor, summarising their year and celebrating aspects of progress that might not be reflected in assessment data.

An explanation of grades, percentage scores and quintiles is given in Appendix 3.

How to interpret assessment data

We recognise that in-school assessments are a 'snapshot' in time; progress is not linear and fluctuations are to be expected. However, it is misleading to compare a percentage score in different subjects, or even in the same subject between different assessment series. This is because the difficulty level cannot be standardised across all subjects and all assessments, particularly with such a small sample size when compared to national assessments such as KS2 SATs or GCSEs.

For this reason, student performance in each subject is placed in one of 5 bands or '**quintiles**' (Q1-Q5). Each quintile represents 20% of all students who took that assessment. Without going to the undesirable extreme of providing a rank position within the cohort, this gives parents an idea of how their child's performance in that particular assessment compares with the cohort as a whole.



Progress is difficult to quantify: our curriculum is the progression model, and the most important factor in determining success is for a student to work hard and apply themselves, no matter where their starting point. If a student is in the 1st (lowest) quintile and remains in the 1st quintile from one assessment series to the next but their attendance and A&E scores remains at least 'good', they will be making the expected progress through our curriculum. Their quintile indicates their approximate position in the year; other students will also be improving. As a general rule when comparing assessment series:

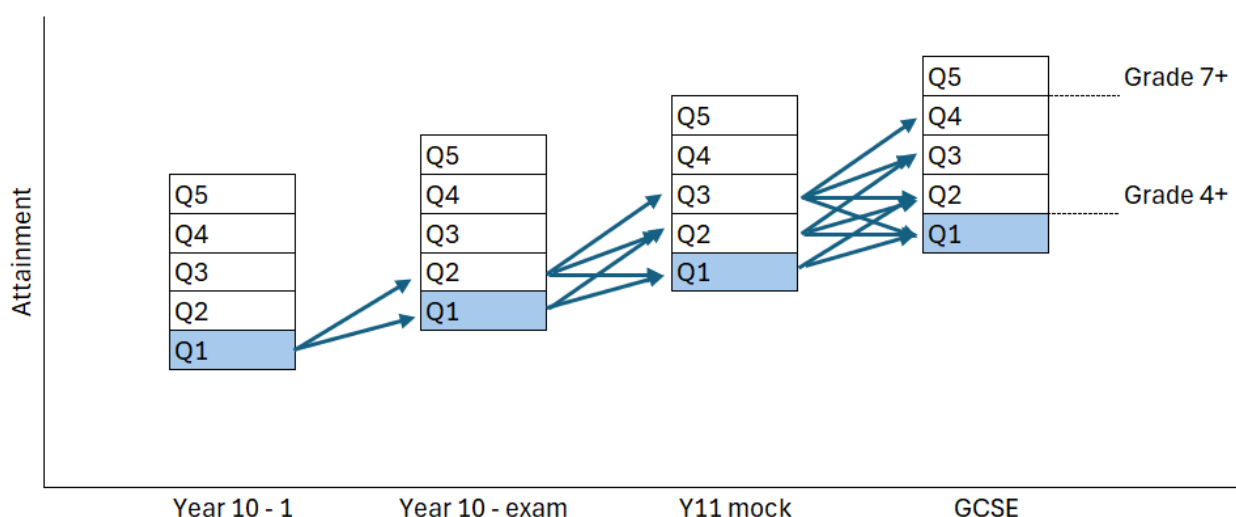
- Staying within the same quintile reflects expected progress.
- Moving to a higher quintile suggests exceptional progress, greater than that of their peers.
- Moving from the 5th to the 4th to the 3rd quintile suggests that a student may not be making the expected progress, making less progress than their peers.

It is worth explaining that quintiles are calculated for all the students taking the assessment within that cohort. Whilst this gives a clear indication of potential in subjects where the whole cohort has taken that assessment, it is a less useful indicator for KS4 option subjects where fewer students have chosen a particular course.

In core subjects, Hanley students in quintiles Q2 to Q5 generally go on to get a grade 4 or higher in their GCSEs. Hanley students in Q5 often get grade 7 or higher.

We must also acknowledge that performance now does not limit what someone can do in the future. Just because a student's result is in a certain quintile now, it doesn't mean they will stay there. The best way to improve is to work hard, and to start as early as possible.

The figure below illustrates how a student's assessment scores can remain within the same quintile (Q1) yet they can be making good progress. Also, how a student's effort can determine the progress that they make – the quintile is not fixed.



We shall continue to refine the reporting process based on feedback from parents. As we further develop our curriculum and students' understanding of the learning skills which bring the greatest success, we shall consider whether this can also be reflected.

At this stage, we feel that by reporting attainment and effort together we can help parents to make sense of the data that they receive.

The snapshots represent an indication of how effectively students have learnt the content of our curriculum at that point. The benefit of this programme of summative assessment lies in the objective nature of the data, and we would not wish to lessen this by including, for example, an indication of whether the teacher feels that the student's performance in the assessment was typical of what they see in lessons.

Appendix 1 - The purpose of assessment

Formative assessment is that which provides feedback to students and helps them to learn while the aim of **summative assessment** is to 'achieve a summary mark which captures a student's performance relative to that of other students'.

Formative assessment

This type of assessment is an integral part of lessons as part of our teaching cycle. It is not graded, recorded or reported and is part of our approach to teaching and learning. It can take many forms, such as lesson or homework activities, multiple choice quizzes, short-answer quizzes, mid-unit tests or the use of mini-whiteboards. It underpins our rationale for silent starters which normally take the form of low-stakes retrieval quizzes. Retrieval practice also plays a critical role in moving knowledge into the long-term memory: 'storage strength is increased both by restudying an item or by successfully retrieving it from memory, but that retrieval has a bigger impact on storage strength than restudy' (Wiliam, 2020).

Marks from these are not collected or analysed centrally; their purpose is to provide feedback to students, thereby moving them forwards in their learning, and to inform what the teacher does next.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) produced a report in 2021 on 'teacher feedback to improve learning' in which it is asserted that 'done well, [teacher feedback] supports pupil progress, building learning, addressing misunderstandings, and thereby closing the gap between where a pupil is and where the teacher wants them to be'. The range of approaches used is outlined through our Teaching and Learning Protocol.

Summative assessments

Summative Assessment Tasks take place twice per academic year for each cohort. Known as the 'testing effect', such assessments help students store previous learning in their long-term memory. Additionally, the purpose of these is to make inferences about how well students have learned and understood the key curriculum concepts in each subject. This supports teachers, subject leaders and school leaders to take actions that move students forward in their learning and ensures that our curriculum implementation is refined and improved over time.

Formally collecting performance data more than twice per year has little impact. However, the educational benefits of preparing for and sitting summative assessments this frequently include:

- Developing skills in learning larger bodies of knowledge
- Reducing exam anxiety when students reach Year 11
- Providing a greater academic focus in Years 7-9 and a positive ethos around success.

When handled correctly, summative assessment can trigger positive learning behaviours. This depends on how much the assessment matters to the student: they need to care about doing well, to believe that they can succeed and know how to succeed.

The outcomes of summative assessments are reported to parents, with an indication of how these sit within the year group and whether they are in line with what we would expect. *The format of these reports will remain under review, to ensure that parents understand the data and can interpret it usefully.*

Appendix 2 - The format of summative assessments

To be effective, a summative assessment should:

- Sample a large body of knowledge, where this is selected from a well-structured, knowledge-rich curriculum
- Be prepared for and taken under standard conditions
- Be of moderate difficulty, so that it distinguishes between students.

It needs to be **reliable**. This means that data produced is accurate and can be meaningfully analysed. Reliability is achieved through the format of the assessment (and therefore the way in which it is marked and the type of data that it produces) and the consistency in which the assessment is undertaken.

However, it also needs to be **valid**. This means that there is clarity around the purpose of the assessment and what inferences will be made from it; it must reflect the nature of the subject being assessed. Subject leaders have the autonomy to design assessments that respect the distinct “disciplinary” nature of their subject domain, suitable for the stage of the students that they are assessing. Drama and art are examples of KS3 subjects which are likely to be assessed in different ways to other subjects.

Sometimes a balance needs to be struck between reliability and validity. For example, an English assessment could be made extremely reliable by giving students a multiple-choice test on their knowledge of grammar. However, a more valid task might be to assess students’ skills in producing an extended piece of writing. Hence, to be valid we might choose a seemingly ‘less reliable’ assessment method. Reliability (consistency of teacher assessment) is then increased through other means, such as a well-understood mark scheme, standardisation and moderation.

Assessments must enable analysis of performance, not merely describe it. The following general structure is used:

1. Have students retained and retrieved simple knowledge (including key vocabulary)? *We encourage the use of carefully constructed multiple-choice questions.*
2. Do they understand this knowledge?
3. Can they do something more sophisticated with this knowledge?

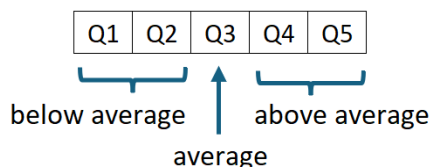
Whilst final GCSE assessments often combine concepts in ‘synoptic’ questions, this is unhelpful in younger years if we are to use assessments to identify and address specific misconceptions. As such, Years 7-9 assessments should not mirror the ‘authentic’ GCSE format.

Appendix 3 – Explanation of grades, percentages and quintiles

GCSE grades have a shared meaning, but they are designed to reflect performance at the end of Year 11, having studied the whole course and been assessed in the full range of skills. It would be misleading to report a grade for younger years because we would be implying that if students took the full GCSE at that point (e.g. in Year 9) then that is the grade that they would achieve. The earliest we feel that a sensible forecast grade can be given is following the Year 10 summer exams, and even then, we report a forecast grade range. This reflects the teacher's best estimate of the grade range that a student might achieve at the end of Year 11, based on the quality of work that they have seen to that point. Only in Year 11 mock exams can we tentatively benchmark subject assessments against a national cohort, thereby increasing the reliability of the grade suggested.

Raw marks (or percentage scores) alone do not provide a shared meaning. This is because the same assessment score in different subjects (or even assessments taken at different times within the same subject) will not reflect the same standard achieved, due to some tests being 'harder' than others. Whilst the principle of a percentage score is understood, a student's performance in different subjects cannot be compared, nor their performance from one assessment to the next within the same subject.

For this reason, we indicate a student's performance within their cohort by reporting in which '**quintile**' they are placed. This is a 5-point scale of performance, with the 3rd (middle) quintile representing average performance for that assessment by the cohort. At Hanley Castle, students in the top 4 quintiles have generally gone on to achieve a grade 4 or higher at GCSE in core subjects, and those in the upper (5th) quintile have generally gone on to achieve grade 7 or higher. *[Some schools report a rank position within the cohort. HCHS recognises that any assessment score represents a snapshot of performance, and as such a rank position implies a level of accuracy that is greater than is reasonable or helpful.]*



To give an idea of which quintile you might expect your child's assessment score to be placed we report the quintile within the HCHS cohort in which their Year 6 (Key Stage 2) SATs scores were placed.

'Progress' is most helpfully defined as a student successfully moving through a carefully planned curriculum. It is not linear and fluctuations are to be expected. Parents can use the following broad principles around quintiles to reassure themselves about progress being made:

- If a student maintains their quintile they are likely to be making expected progress. Their 'position' within the cohort has been maintained.
- A student whose quintile has increased is likely to be making progress above expected.
- A student whose quintile has decreased has moved to a lower rank position in the cohort and may not be making expected progress.

An in-school calculation will produce a 'standardised score' (a more granular version of quintiles) to help us to identify students who are vulnerable to underperformance and therefore need further support, as well as to celebrate exceptional progress. It is not anticipated that this will be reported home.

Students' **reading age** is assessed using nationally-referenced systems to ensure students who need additional support with reading are able to benefit from targeted interventions. These are taken periodically and monitored by leaders to measure the impact of reading intervention programmes.

Attitude and Effort (A&E) descriptors are reported for each subject at the same time as assessment scores / quintiles to reflect the teacher's impression of the student's approach in their lessons.

Attitude and Effort	Description		
Outstanding	Consistently goes the extra mile. Dedicated to continual improvement and reaching their full potential.		
Very Good	Always shows a very good attitude to learning. Could still be more proactive in lessons.		
Positive	Generally does what is required. More consistency is needed.		
Unacceptable, because they are:	Coasting	Disruptive	Uninterested
	Barely does the minimum of what is asked of them in lessons.	Has interrupted lessons or stopped others from learning on more than one occasion.	Appears to be lacking motivation. Extra support has been needed to keep them on task.

GCSE grades

Many parents are familiar with the previous A*-G scale but are less sure about the current grade 1-9 scale. The following shows how the two scales compare. Six grades now distinguish between student performance in what was the 4-grade range of A*-C, whilst the previous grades D-G are split into just 3 grades.

Old grades	New grades
A*	9
A	8
B	7
C	6
	5 STRONG PASS
	4 STANDARD PASS
D	3
E	2
F	1
G	
U	U