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11 September 2018

Dear Parents

In Years 7 & 8, your son's work and progress will be assessed using ability bands and this letter sets out how this will work.

At the beginning of Yr7 each of your son's teachers will determine his initial ability in that subject. In most cases this will be done through a Baseline Assessment, but may also incorporate further assessed work done during the first half-term. Using this information they will match him to one of five bands that reflect his ability in that subject. The bands are: Foundation, Developing, Secure, Confident and Exceptional. Their broad definitions are given below (and will appear on subsequent reports):

Ability Band	Broad Definition
Foundation	Has basic knowledge and understanding of the subject at this level. Can employ basic skills with guidance.
Developing	Is starting to show broader knowledge and understanding of the subject at this level, and can offer solutions in familiar situations. Has greater familiarity with different skills and can employ them with some accuracy.
Secure	Has good knowledge and understanding of a range of elements of the subject at this level, and is beginning to show greater independence when finding solutions. Skills can be selected with some guidance and their use shows increasing accuracy and precision.
Confident	Has detailed knowledge and understanding of the subject at this level, and can use these to develop sensible solutions independently. Can select and use skills precisely and accurately.
Exceptional	Is able to synthesise ideas to deal with unfamiliar situations. Can use detailed knowledge and understanding to evaluate and analyse. Uses skills creatively.

These broad definitions have been customised by every Department to describe what they expect each band to entail in their subject at the start of each year, and they will make this clear to your son. As it is possible that your son's ability will vary from subject to subject he should not be surprised to be in different bands for some subjects.

At key points during the year, your son's performance will be assessed and his teachers will match this to expected outcomes for the ability bands. Comparing his current ability band to the one at the start of the year will make it possible to determine how much progress he is making in that subject. Your son should therefore have a better grasp of how well he is doing against the criteria set out for each subject and be able to see what he can do to improve.

The following examples show how progress will be determined:

Student	Initial Teacher Assessment	Current Assessment	Progress since start of year
John	Secure	Confident (+ 1 band)	More than expected
David	Developing	Developing (same band)	As expected
Peter	Secure	Developing (- 1 band)	Less than expected
Sebastian	Developing	Foundation (- 2 bands)	Much less than expected
Mark	Developing	Confident (+ 2 bands)	Much more than expected

Some important points:

1. To encourage your son to view all of his work as part of a process to help him improve his ability in each subject, teachers will provide comments that will identify the good aspects of the work as well one or two targets to indicate improvements your son could make. These targets are likely to refer to aspects of the five ability bands. (In some cases a score may be given if it's appropriate to the task, e.g. if it's a test.)

This will make sure that the focus is firmly on the feedback, rather than just the grade achieved.

2. Just as an old A grade at GCSE is not the same as an A grade at A Level, so the expectations for each ability band will increase throughout the course of Yrs7 & 8 as shown in the diagram to the right.

Therefore we would expect all students to make progress over the course of the year irrespective of their starting band, though we would not expect all students to be able to achieve Confident or Exceptional by the end of Yr7 or 8.

For example, a student deemed to be Foundation at the start of the year may still be in that band at the end of the year but should be encouraged by the fact that they have made expected progress.

However, a student who starts the year as Secure may not make expected progress and so may be assessed as Developing at the end of the year. Your son's teachers will, of course, be monitoring his progress throughout the year and will provide support to encourage and help him to make expected progress.

It is our hope that this system will encourage most students to want to move through the bands over the course of the two years.

Autumn Yr7	Spring Yr7	EoY Yr7	Autumn Yr8	Spring Yr8	EoY Yr8
Exceptional					
Confident					
Secure					
Developing					
Foundation					

For illustration only

3. This system is based on matching your son's ability to the expectations each subject sets out rather than on his position in the year group. This means that your son's performance over the year will reflect the progress he has made through his own efforts. We feel that this is a fairer system than one based on rank position which can give a confusing indication of progress. This is because it is affected by how well (or how poorly) others perform. For example, in a test where the mean average is 45%, a pupil who scores 55% is above average. However in a subsequent test where the mean is 65%, if this pupil scores 60% he has done better than in the last test but now appears below average simply because others have performed better than he did. The new system would recognise the progress made.
4. Your son's performance during Yr7 will be reviewed at the start of Yr8 and this may result in him beginning Yr8 with a different ability band to what he started Yr7 with. This is because we would not necessarily expect all students to make progress at the same rate over the course of the two years. Rather, it is entirely likely that they will make sudden improvements and then plateau (or even dip) as they find some aspects of the course easier or more challenging. Therefore their trajectory will be stepped... but should have an overall upward gradient over the course of each year.

As a consequence, your son's progress throughout each year will be assessed against his ability band at the start of the year, rather than the level indicated on his preceding report.

5. Finally, it's likely that we all have slightly different interpretations of the terms used to describe the ability bands. Therefore it's very important that we all use the definitions provided by the school (either the broad ones above or the more specific ones provided by departments) in order to avoid any confusion caused.

If you have any questions of a general nature regarding this change please contact me at school. If you have questions that are specific to a subject, then please contact the Head of Department. Contact details are available on the school's website: <http://www.bws-school.org.uk/>.

Yours faithfully

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