



Rt Hon Justine Greening MP
Secretary of State

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Neil Carmichael MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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28th March 2017

Dear Neil,

We have revised our GCSE qualifications in England to make them more rigorous, with more demanding content so our young people have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in 21st Century Britain and to match those of their peers in high-performing education systems elsewhere in the world. The first of the new GCSEs – in English and maths – will be awarded this August, with further subjects to follow over the next three years. The new qualifications will be graded 9-1 instead of A*-G, with 9 the highest grade. This new grading scale is intended to better recognise the achievements of high-attaining pupils and ensure parents have greater clarity over how their child performs in their exams. It will also distinguish the new, more challenging GCSEs clearly from the predecessor qualifications.

I want to provide certainty about how this new grading will work and, in particular, the consequences for individual pupils of achieving a grade 4 or grade 5. Rather than reporting on the “good pass”, we will instead distinguish between a grade 4 as a “standard pass” and a grade 5 as a “strong pass” and report on both.

Under the new system, a grade 4 and above will be equivalent to a C and above. This is - and will remain - the level that pupils must achieve in order not to be required to continue studying English and maths post 16. Therefore, a GCSE pass at new grade 4 will continue to have real currency for individual pupils as they progress to further study and employment. Where employers, FE providers and universities currently accept a grade C we would expect them to continue recognising a grade 4.

The government wants to see the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 and above rising as the performance of the education system improves - but this will take time. Indeed the process used by Ofqual to avoid grade inflation

will ensure that broadly the same proportion of pupils achieve the grade 4 and above this summer as achieved the grade C and above last year. This is why I want to be very clear to schools, employers, colleges and pupils themselves that a “standard pass” is a credible achievement and one that should be valued as a passport to future study and employment.

I am determined to continue to raise standards in our schools. For this reason I will continue to publish not just the “standard pass” (grade 4 and above) but also the “strong pass” (at grade 5 and above) in school performance tables. To reflect this ambition, achievement at the “strong pass” will be one of the benchmarks used to measure the performance of schools – comparable with the strongest performing education systems. This will not affect individual pupils, but - alongside other performance measures – will allow parents, Ofsted and others to see which schools are getting the best results from their pupils – ensuring we can provide more support to those schools that need it.

School performance should, of course, continue to be judged on the range of headline progress, attainment and destination measures in performance tables. The main accountability measure that determines the floor and coasting standard for school performance will continue to be Progress 8, which gives schools credit for students’ progress across all grades and is therefore not affected by where the threshold measures are set.

The government’s continuing drive for higher standards in our schools is at the heart of our approach. The new GCSEs are more challenging and will provide stronger qualifications for our children. I am clear that these are the right reforms, and we must implement them in a way that is fair to all children, enabling them to achieve their potential whilst also holding schools to account at an ambitious level. It is right therefore that we credit all those who achieve a grade 4 or above with a “standard pass” and that we are clear in our messages to employers, colleges and Universities about the continuing currency of that achievement.

My officials will write to stakeholders shortly to clarify this position, and I am laying a copy of this letter in the House library, and publishing it on gov.uk. We will continue to reinforce this message through our wider communications in the run up to GCSE results this August.

Bert Usher,
Julia -

RT HON JUSTINE GREENING MP