



Light Hall School

Parents' Guide to the GCSE Examinations 2008 - 2010

The GCSE Examination

1 What is GCSE?

GCSE = General Certificate of Secondary Education.
Replaced GCE ('O' level) and CSE in 1988

2 The Examination Boards

There are three English examination Boards offering parallel qualifications:

- OCR Oxford, Cambridge & RSA - includes old Midlands groups.
- AQA Assessment & Qualification Alliance - SEG + NEAB + City & Guilds.
- EdExcel London & B. Tech.

Also there is a Welsh Board (WJEC), a Scottish & a N. Ireland board.

3 Gradings

All boards use grades A* to G (and U for unclassified). Any of these grades are a "pass" at GCSE level, although grades A* - C are regarded as the equivalent of the old 'O' levels and these are the grades that pupils are hoping to achieve, schools are judged upon and employers and colleges prefer.

4 Differences between 'O' levels and CSE, and GCSE

- Coursework (individual project-style work) is a key component.
- Examination questions tend to be less factual and more skills and application orientated.
- Examination papers are usually tiered.

5 Tiering

- Different examination papers with differing content and question structure for candidates of varying abilities.
- The range of grades is restricted for different tiers.
- Tiering varies from subject to subject.
 - * Some subjects still have no tiering, eg Art, History, Drama, PE, Music
 - * Most subjects have 2 tiers:

Foundation - covering grades C to G

Higher - covering grades A* to D

Pupils entered for Foundation tier cannot achieve higher than grade C and those failing to achieve D on the higher tier paper are reported as unclassified.

Maths also now has 2 tiers.

6. GCSE variations

- ◆ Modular GCSE's have several examinations staggered throughout the 2-year course, which all count towards the final grade. The best examples are Science and Maths. Test dates are set at the beginning of the course and cannot be changed
- ◆ Short courses take half the time and equate to half a GCSE
- ◆ Applied GCSE's are new courses with a more vocational element. They take twice the curricular time and equate to 2 GCSE passes

7. National Certificate in Information Technology

- ◆ This is a new course designed for all Y10 students with 4 levels of qualification, determined by duration of study and ability
- ◆ Assessment for this is all internal, with external moderation
- ◆ There are 3 grades: Distinction; Merit; Pass

8. BTEC

- ◆ Vocational courses worth 2 GCSE's, assessed by project work and short assessments and graded Distinction*; Distinction; Merit; Pass

Coursework

- This can make up 20% to 70% of the final mark and the percentage varies between subjects, syllabuses and boards. In most subjects it constitutes about 25%. The percentage should reflect the amount of time spent on the coursework. There are big changes to coursework planned for the immediate future, although the only significant change this year is that it has been removed from Maths.
- Coursework is individual project-type work, to be completed independently from primary or secondary data. It may involve 1, 2 or more pieces of work.
- Coursework stresses the importance of "Key Skills", ie
 - independent learning and organisation
 - research skills
 - using information
 - sustained, continuous effort
- Coursework deadlines
 - are spread throughout the 2 years, according to subject
 - candidates need to know the deadlines, plan for them and stick to them.
- Useful pointers for pupils:
 - use the assessment (marking) criteria found in the syllabus
 - look at previous candidates work
 - receive on-going advice from teachers and act on it
 - learn from normal lesson work, especially during Year 10.
- It is important to remember that coursework must be the student's own, although group results can be shared. Copying from other candidates' work is viewed very seriously by examination boards and can result in disqualification.

Examination Entry Policy

- Good attendance - minimum 90%

- Classwork and homework completed to best of ability

- Positive attitude to learning and to the subject

- Coursework deadlines met

- Completion of modular tests

- Positive results from mock examinations

Continuing help from the school

- The Learning resource Centre is available each day for homework, 3.05 PM until 5.00pm, and at breaks and lunchtimes
- Books and ICT facilities in Learning Resource Centre and computer rooms
- Extra lessons after school and in holiday time
- On line curriculum and 24 hour school
- Easter Revision classes
- Parent - Teacher contact
- Role of the Form Tutor
- Mentoring - Miss Knight
- Revision guidelines/Tips/Timetables
- Past papers/revision notes/revision guides

How parents can assist

- Take an interest in work covered - ask for an explanation of content
- Listen to your child's concerns - even if a solution is impossible
- Take an interest in coursework - read it through, give constructive criticism
- Encourage and support without pressuring
- Encourage regular attendance and punctuality
- Promote long-term ambition
- Know when coursework deadlines are near and encourage
- Keep in touch with school - **INFORM US EARLY OF ANY CONCERNS**
- Avoid comparisons with others (brothers or sisters, friends)
- Keep things in perspective - be patient
- Provide good working conditions in the home
- Encourage sensible planning (for example, a revision programme)
- Ensure your child gets regular breaks
- Encourage your child to ask their teacher for help
- Encourage the use of school facilities