A parent’s guide on the use of NC levels in reporting for students in Key Stage 3 (Years 7 – 9)

We are frequently asked questions about Assessment, Tracking and Reporting. These range from, “how do you assess our children”, to “what is a National curriculum level and how do you arrive at one?” These are all good questions and ones that we endeavor to answer clearly, so that parents know as much as their children about what’s going on in school. We have decided to put together this document to help parents understand what the National Curriculum is, how it’s assessed and how we use this information to plot the progress of your child.

All the grades issued in your child’s report are a combination of all assessments carried out so far this year – not just an end of year or term examination.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any further questions about teaching and learning in the Secondary School.

What do National Curriculum Levels mean?

In Key Stages 1, 2, and 3, the National Curriculum is accompanied by a series of eight levels. These are used to measure your child’s progress compared to pupils of the same age. There are eight National Curriculum levels, covering the ages 5-14 years. The lowest is Level 1, which describes the achievements of children at around the age of five. The highest is Level 8, which is achieved by the most able students by the age of 14. There is also a description of ‘exceptional performance’ beyond Level 8, which only a very small number of the most gifted or able pupils ever reach.

Children develop at different rates, but National Curriculum levels can give you an idea of how your child’s progress compares to what is typical for their age.

For example, by the end of Key Stage 1, most children will have reached level 2, and by the end of Key Stage 2, most will be at level 4.

Why are NC levels so important?

The numbered attainment levels tell you what progress your child is making in comparison to national (England) standards. Sublevels show whether your child is working at the higher (a), middle (b) or lower (c) levels within each numbered level. For example, 5C is higher than 4a.

The average expected UK standard is for students to be working at L4 when they enter Y7 and L5/6 at the end of Y9. It is of course possible and expected that many students will work below or beyond these levels.
Tracking student progress against potential

Education in the 21st century is about personalising the experience and this means a focus on individual progress!

Testing
What testing is carried out at the start of a Keystage?

At the start of year 7, students will take an assessment called CAT3. This is used to measure the potential of a student. It is not a test that can be studied for, nor can it be passed and failed. It measures potential and is a helpful tool for teachers to predict how much progress a child will make through years 7, 8 and 9. This helps the school to track the students and make sure that they’re on course to fulfill their potential.

At the start of year 10, students will again take a CAT3 assessment. This helps the school set aspirational targets across IGCSE subjects. Teachers can then use this information to measure progress and make sure that students are on course to reach their potential. It also helps us to make sure that students are taking the correct subjects.

What is meant by the term tracking?
Tracking is the term used to describe the monitoring of your child’s progress. By tracking progress every half term, we can ensure that all groups of children are making good or accelerated progress. Combined with the regular use of pupil progress meetings (where children not making the required progress are identified and reasons/interventions discussed) and the use of continuous teacher assessment, we are able to consider the needs of different groups and individual children and adapt planning accordingly. Children with special needs have an IEP that will be reviewed each term with parents and child.

What is progress?
Progress is the term used to describe how much improvement has been made by an individual in a particular subject area. Progress is not to be confused with attainment, which means how good someone is at something! This can be a little confusing; teachers focus on both attainment and progress, though we place a greater emphasis on progress. Teachers are looking to see how much better their students are at regular intervals – that’s why we assess.

Progress can be a messy business and students can have both positive and negative swings!

Measuring progress
For each curriculum subject, there is a programme of study (the subject content) and supporting schemes of work. The programmes of study describe the subject knowledge, skills and understanding pupils are expected to develop during each key stage. These are not generally shared with parents, but students understand the concept of units of work. Teachers make formative and summative judgements every day. Student work is assessed and progress measured in a

The difference between progress and attainment

The ups and downs of the ‘messy’ progress journey!

number of ways:
- Formal tests;
- homework;
- class presentations;
- evaluations;
- groups and pair work; and
- a number of other ways sometimes unique to the subject (Music, drama and PE, for example).
How much progress is enough and why bother tracking progress?

“If I didn’t think about it, I would’ve said I’d want to know my attainment but…... it’s not all about the grades/scores honestly, I mean that's not all that matters. Plus, a lot of people are so grade driven/obsessed and I’m trying to step out of this way of thinking…. I think progress is important since it makes someone look at how they can improve themselves and as a learner as whole instead of 'I need to get 100%'. Improvement is key… good grades should be [the] effect/result from being a good learner. It shouldn’t be the other way round; having to have good grades to be a good/determined learner.”

TIS student and product of KS3

How much progress should they make over a year?
The answer here is slightly complicated. Our aim is for three full levels of progress per Key Stage. So if a child was a level 4 at the end of year 6, they should be a level 7 by the end of year 9. Had they been a level 3 at the end of Primary, they should be a level 6 at the end of Key stage 3. This is an extremely challenging target – the average progress expected in the UK is 1.5 sub levels a year of 1.5 full levels during a key stage. We have higher expectations of our students and will try our best to stretch them within their personal limits. Please understand that this is an aim (and a very ambitious one) and the amount of progress an individual child will make can be affected by all sorts of things – it’s perfectly normal to have a year where slightly less progress is made, or more for that matter. If you feel your son or daughter has made less than you'd expect, it's definitely worth discussing it with the school.

Why do you track my child’s progress?
To make sure that their end of year or Key stage target is accurate, achievable and most of all, challenging!

Frequently asked questions

What is the currently working at grade (CWA)?
This grade describes where your child is right now. It takes into account the most recent work done. This may (or may not) include larger assessment or exams. This working at grade can and will change depending on the work covered and the assessment method used.

My child’s levels seem lower than I expected – what might be going on?
There could be any number of reasons. Sometimes children don't perform as well in school as they do at home - perhaps if they get easily distracted in a busy classroom. Or it might be that although they are capable in some areas (say, within level 4 numeracy criteria), there are other areas in which they are not so strong.
It's worth discussing this with the subject teacher if you become worried about progress but remember teachers are living and breathing the assessment criteria. Most parents are not! Politely asking for an understanding or more detailed explanation of your son or daughter's levels because they were a little lower than you’d expect is fine.

Can my child’s target grade change throughout the year?
You can expect the grades to adjust as a child moves through a year, and definitely through a key stage. Children starting Year 7 will have their end of year and end of Key stage target altered a number of times to take into account different rates of progress and any other factors that may be affecting their progress. It’s good to keep in touch with your child’s form tutor. This will help to keep open channels of communication if you do need to come in and talk later.

Why is my child’s current grade higher than their end of year target?
Occasionally, a child will perform beyond their predicted end of year/ key stage target. A good example of this would be in PE. A student with an end of year target of 5b may be currently working at 6b because the assessed area is Badminton. Maybe, the child is exceptionally good within this area of the subject. As the child continues through the course, the other grades will be lower, eventually averaging out at a 5b. Again, if you have any questions about this, your child’s form tutor or Head of Year will be able to help you.
If you require any further information about anything covered in this document, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are always happy to help and answer questions.
A parent’s glossary of terms:

- **Attainment** is how good someone is at something.
- **CAT3 – Cognitive Ability Tests** are the most widely used assessment of reasoning ability in the UK. It provides information about pupil strengths, areas of relative weakness, learning preferences and serves as a useful indicator of potential.
- **Formative assessment** is generally carried out throughout a course, project or unit of work and used to aid learning. In a school setting, formative assessment might be conducted by a teacher (or peer) or the learner, providing feedback on a student’s work, and would not necessarily be used for grading purposes. Formative assessments provide information that is used to inform the next steps of learning.
- **National Curriculum** - The National Curriculum is a framework used by all state schools in the UK to ensure that teaching and learning is balanced and consistent. It sets out:
  - the subjects taught
  - the knowledge, skills and understanding required in each subject
  - standards or attainment targets in each subject - teachers can use these to measure your child’s progress and plan the next steps in their learning
  - how your child’s progress is assessed and reported (Within the framework of the National Curriculum, schools are free to plan and organise teaching and learning in the way that best meets the needs of their pupils).
- **National Curriculum Level or NC levels** are used to compare your child’s ability against local and UK national standards of achievement. The criteria required to achieve each level is wide. It takes, on average, two years to complete each level.
- **Progress** – how much has an individual improved from any given starting point
- **Schemes of work or schemes of learning** are the documents used by teachers to inform their teaching. They are the content.
- **Summative assessment** is generally carried out at the end of a course, project or unit of work. In a school setting, summative assessments are typically used to assign students a final grade. Summative assessments are evaluative.

As a parent, how can I best support my child?

Parents’ evenings and other information evenings — these are valuable opportunities for you to meet your child’s teachers or form tutor and talk about any concerns that you may have. You will be able to look at some of the work that your child is producing and discuss targets to help improve his or her work still further.

Generally, you can help your child by:
- encouraging them to give maximum effort in all lessons
- ensuring regular attendance at school
- impressing upon them that punctuality is important to the prompt start to lessons and the maximising of teaching and learning time

Points of contact:
Should you require any further information then please contact either Mr. Mongare or Mr. Gilberthorpe.

- **Giles Mongare** – **Vice Principal & Head of Secondary** (giles.mongare@tenby.edu.my)
- **Matt Gilberthorpe** – **Deputy Principal, Curriculum** (mgilberthorpe@tenby.edu.my)