

GCSE Mathematics Tiering Policy

1. Purpose of this Policy

This policy sets out how GCSE Mathematics tiering decisions (Foundation or Higher tier) are made at Archbishop Holgates School. Its purpose is to provide clarity and transparency for students and parents, ensuring that all decisions are consistent, fair and in the best academic interests of each individual child.

2. Principles

At Archbishop Holgates School, tiering decisions:

- Are made entirely by the school, based on professional judgement.
- Are rooted in the principle of securing the best possible outcome for each student.
- Are informed by a broad range of assessment evidence, not a single test.
- Aim to ensure students are entered for the tier where they are most likely to succeed with confidence.
- Prioritise student wellbeing by avoiding entries that carry unnecessary risk (e.g., exposure to large volumes of content they have not mastered).

While we welcome dialogue with parents, tiering decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the Maths Department, supported by the Senior Leadership Team.

3. Assessment Evidence Used to Inform Tiering

We use multiple sources of evidence to ensure decisions are robust and fair:

- Year 10 Mock Examination
- Year 11 Mock Examination
- Iterative assessments and end-of-unit tests

- Homework papers and practice assessments
- Classwork and teacher observations
- Question Level Analysis (QLA) to identify strengths and areas for development
- Student confidence, consistency, and resilience across the curriculum

No single piece of data determines a tiering decision; rather, we look at the overall profile of the student.

4. Tiering Decisions Following Year 10 Mock Examinations

4.1 Students sitting the Higher Tier paper

- Grade 5 or above: the student may remain on Higher tier.
- Grade 4: the Maths Department will carefully consider whether Higher or Foundation tier is most appropriate, based on the full range of evidence listed above.
- Grade 3 or below: the student will move to Foundation tier.

4.2 Students sitting the Foundation Tier paper

- Grade 5: the school will consider moving the student to Higher tier, provided the evidence suggests they can confidently access the Higher curriculum.
- Grade 4 or below: the student will remain on Foundation tier.

4.3 Finalisation of Tier Decisions at the End of Year 10

Once a student is placed on the Foundation tier at the end of Year 10, this is generally expected to remain their tier of entry for GCSE. A move from Foundation to Higher during Year 11 is not normally possible. This is because a significant amount of Higher-only content is taught in Year 10, and students who have not covered this material at that stage are unlikely to be able to access the Higher curriculum with confidence later on.

In addition, the Higher tier assumes secure mastery of all Foundation content, and Year 11 alone does not provide enough time to cover the remaining Higher-level topics in the depth required.

For these reasons, a Foundation tier placement at the end of Year 10 is usually considered the most appropriate and sustainable route for the remainder of the GCSE course.

5. Tiering Decisions Following Year 11 Mock Examinations

The same criteria apply as in Year 10. Year 11 mocks are typically the final point at which tier changes can be made, as curriculum stability becomes essential in the lead-up to GCSE examinations.

Final tiers must be confirmed in line with examination board entry deadlines.

6. Rationale for These Thresholds

These thresholds are based on:

- National outcomes and exam board guidance
- The structure of the Higher tier paper, which assumes mastery of all Foundation content
- The significant risk of students achieving below a Grade 4 on Higher tier if foundational knowledge is insecure
- The importance of ensuring students sit the tier that maximises their chance of achieving their best possible grade, not simply the highest potential grade

Our priority is always to balance aspiration with realism, ensuring each student's exam entry gives them the strongest chance of success.

7. Reviewing Tiering Decisions

Requests for reconsideration will be acknowledged, but tiering decisions are not subject to negotiation. However:

- Parents may request a meeting to understand the rationale behind the school's decision.
- Students may be asked to complete additional assessments or QLA-driven tasks if further evidence is required.
- The final decision remains with the Head of Mathematics, supported by the Senior Leadership Team.

8. Communication with Parents

- Parents are informed of tiering decisions following both the Year 10 and Year 11 mock examinations.
- Where performance places a student on the borderline, parents will receive an explanation of the considerations involved.
- Any changes to tiering will be communicated promptly and with full reasoning.

9. Commitment to Student Success

Regardless of tier, all students receive:

- High-quality teaching
- Access to targeted intervention
- Clear feedback through QLAs
- Support to achieve their best possible outcome in Maths

No student's future opportunity is determined solely by their Maths tier; the focus remains on enabling each child to progress confidently and achieve their personal best.