



## Pensby High School

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Headteacher: Mr K Flanagan

17 April 2026

Dear Parents and Carers

I am sending a reminder to all parents of Year 11 students for clarity and as a reminder with regard to tiering for maths, Spanish and science (separate and combined). I do realise that tiering decisions have been made, but I want to ensure that the rationale for these decisions is clear. A copy of a letter laying out the process and sent to all parents in January is at the bottom of this email.

Clearly the entry to a tiered subject is to some degree a subjective and professional view from the staff at school, however, this view is informed by two fundamental aspects: performance over time and the moral proposition of in effect, doing no harm.

### Data:

Students sit assessments and mock exam papers, these are marked and marks are tracked through. They are marked as individual papers and performance on each paper is set against the mark scheme for that paper. In this way, even small incremental paper by paper increases in performance over time can be seen, as can any trend; and as importantly the strength of the trend is observable. At this point of the year, when all teaching has finished and we are close to the examinations themselves, we have a good indication of likely outcomes for individual students right down to individual papers.

Ofqual guidance is very clear:

**'A student who is expected to achieve a grade 4 or grade 5 should be entered for foundation tier.** A grade 4 or 5 achieved at foundation tier is the same as a grade 4 or 5 achieved at higher tier. Exam boards are required to make sure that it is no easier or more difficult to achieve a grade 4 or 5 on higher or foundation tier. There is nothing on certificates showing the tier of entry.'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-guide-for-schools-and-colleges-2026/ofqual-guide-for-schools-and-colleges-2026>

This is because, there is not just a risk, rather a reality that students fall off the grading at higher tier and do not achieve a grade.

### Risk to children:

Our children spend 11 years in formal education, 12 including perhaps the most important year, early years/foundation. Whilst we want the best possible outcome for children and we would hope that all students would gain the very highest grades, that unfortunately is not supported by our system. At its most simplistic, around a third of any cohort of students, in any given subject do not gain a grade 4 or above, with the actual percentage varying between subjects. This is something we generally do not discuss as a society and we reflect almost exclusively on those who pass, but is something we absolutely want to avoid for as many of our students as we can. Surely there can be no more soul destroying end to over a decade of effort, than a U.

If we enter children for a higher tier paper, without the track record or evidence that indicates a secure grade 6 or higher, we increase the risk to that child regarding their outcomes being negative and we do so out of hope, not data. I stand by hope being one of the most important tenets in my life, but I will not allow for hope,

to lead to a child failing to gain a grade in a subject that they may well have been studying for 11 to 12 years. That is why the decision regarding tiering is based on both professional judgement and tracking of outcomes at paper level.

Whilst no system can be perfect, our aim is to minimise the risk to every child and whilst as a parent I hope for the very best for my children, the very best for them sometimes that means we need to minimise their exposure to unnecessary risks.

Staff at the school will make the decision about tiering and whilst this may disappoint some parents, individual decisions are made in the best interest of the child and will not change.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Flanagan

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22 January 2026

Dear Parents and Carers

As you are aware, Year 11 parents evening is on Thursday 12th February (booking will be live from Thursday 29th January at 5pm). This is an opportunity to discuss your child's progress and to talk with their class teachers about areas they can continue to develop face to face in school. Equally it is an opportunity to reflect on how much has been achieved so far.

We are aware that some of you would like to know the tier of entry for students sitting, mathematics, Spanish and science GCSEs, but at this stage I would request that you do not use the short meeting slot to discuss this topic. Students sit their tiering exams in tiered subjects in the week beginning 23<sup>rd</sup> February, we will not have a full understanding of how they can perform across a full range of skills under examination conditions until they have taken these assessments. At present we are focusing on ensuring your child continues to progress and develop their knowledge and understanding in their GCSE subjects, so they are in the best place to sit these assessments. After we have reviewed their performance in these assessments, and we are hopefully that we will have more guidance from the exam boards regarding exams this summer, we as a school will make a decision on their tier of entry in subjects where this is relevant and inform you and the students regarding this decision. I have outlined below our rationale for tiers of entry:

**Tiers of Entry:**

- Parents and students do not choose the tier of exam they sit. The school will decide who is entered for higher or foundation tier when provisional entries are made at the beginning of March Year 11.
- GCSE tiers of entry will be based on current attainment as demonstrated by Year 11 mock examinations.
- Ofqual (the exams regulator) has been clear in the expectation that schools will enter students they believe expected to attain Grades 1 -5 for foundation tiers. As an example, in 2025 GCSE mathematics only 52.8% of candidates nationally achieved grade 5 or higher. It has been recommended that borderline grade 5 – 6 and above candidates are entered for the higher tier. This attainment at a high grade 5 or 6 MUST be consistent across all aspects of study to be recommended for the higher tier. In 2025 GCSE mathematics only 27% of candidates nationally achieved grade 6 or higher. It should also be noted that on Wirral more than 30% of pupils are selected by 'ability' at the age of 11.
- Students who are considering applying for sixth form courses in science subjects need to be aware that colleges such as Birkenhead Sixth Form are specifying a minimum of a GCSE grade 6 for entry to these

courses. Grade 6 requires that pupils are sitting higher tier. Entry to higher tier is determined by progress and attainment to date and not a chosen future pathway.

**Minimum indicative grades for entry to higher tier examinations**

Subject:	End of Year 10 exam on Higher Tier Papers	Year 11 Mock (Taken in Dec 2025)* on Higher Tier Papers
Mathematics	High Grade 4	High Grade 5
Spanish	High Grade 4	High Grade 5

Subject:	End of Year 10 exam on Higher Tier Papers	Paper 1 Mock (Taken in Dec 2025)* on Higher Tier Papers	Paper 2 Mock (Taken in February 2026) on Higher Tier Papers
Biology	High Grade 4	Middle Grade 5	High Grade 5
Chemistry	High Grade 4	Middle Grade 5	High Grade 5
Physics	High Grade 4	Middle Grade 5	High Grade 5
Combined science	High Grade 4	Middle Grade 5	High Grade 5
Required across both papers			

Please contact Assistant Headteacher, Mr Clement-Evans should you wish to discuss this letter.

Yours sincerely



Mr K Flanagan  
Headteacher