

How are my child's benchmarks set?

In the October edition of the Newsblast I gave some guidance about the assessment strategy at Maiden Erlegh School.

You have asked for further clarification about how benchmarks are actually set.

The brief guide "What does the report tell me?" stated:

The **Benchmark** (or target grade) is the **aspirational grade** that would put your child one grade above the average for students of their ability in their Year 11 GCSE exams.

In this more technical response I wanted to unpack the above statement further.

In order to set a student and subject specific benchmark we use the statistical analysis provided by the Fischer Family Trust, a non-profit educational organisation that has been working nationally with School assessment data since it was established in 2001.

Using the prior attainment data generated at the end of primary school (KS2 SATS) and looking at outcomes for all students nationally in specific subjects with specific starting points FFT generate statistical estimates for students to achieve each grade on the 1-9 GCSE grading system.

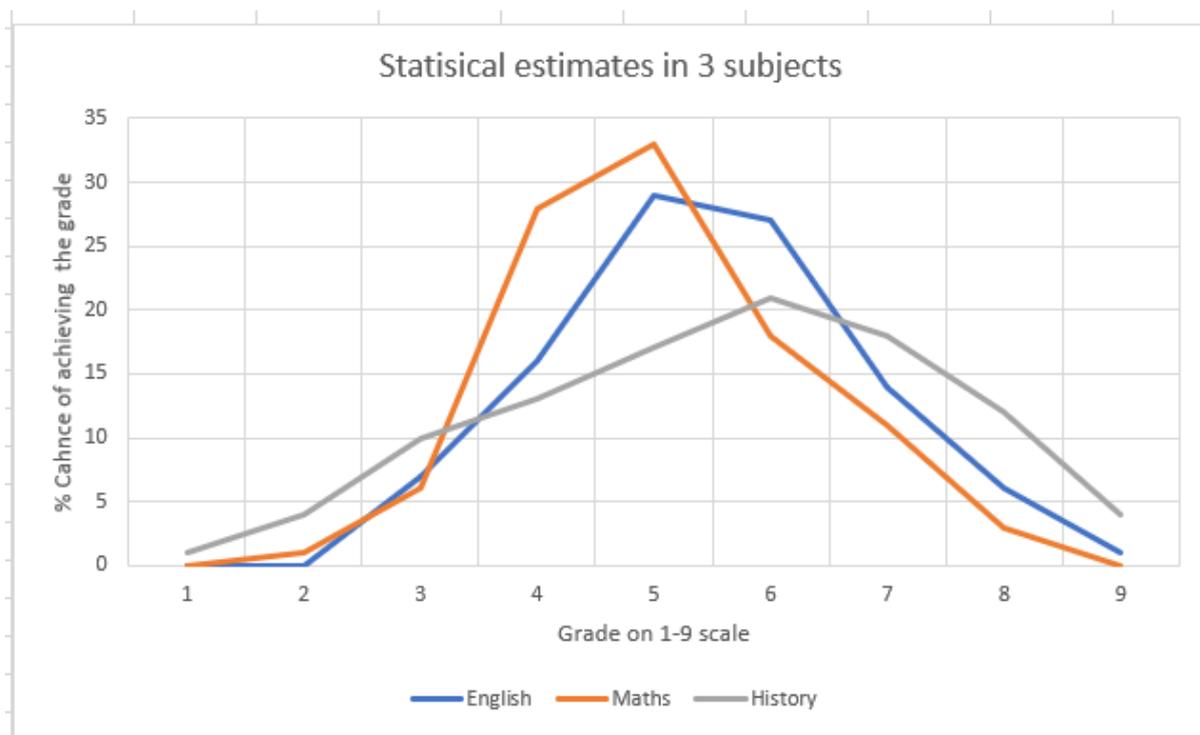
To support schools to set suitable targets for individual students they allow schools to match themselves against the performance of other schools with the same level of achievement or ambition. As a high performing school we choose to use the estimates applicable to the top 5% of schools nationally. Technically these are called FFT5 estimates. These estimates are shared with students annually in the October student own target setting window. From these estimates we then determine a median grade called the FFT5 GM grade. This is the grade that a student with their particular KS2 SATS scores is on average likely to achieve in a top 5th percentile school. As this grade is an average we then set an aspirational target that is one grade higher than this. This is called an FFT5 GA grade (GA meaning one Grade Above).

To give some contextual examples of how this actually works I hope the following may clarify this further.

Let us consider a female student who in their KS2 SATS on the new testing regime was at the expected level in the three strands Reading, Writing, and Maths and who actually scored 105 as Reading Scaled score and 103 as a Maths Scaled score.

The following table, and associated graph, shows the distribution of estimates for English, maths and History in a top 5th percentile school for a student with these KS2 SATS results.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
English language	0	0	7	16	29	27	14	6	1
Maths	0	1	6	28	33	18	11	3	0
History	1	4	10	13	17	21	18	12	4



This information shows that prior attainment in maths is a stronger indicator of future outcome than for English and that both of these are stronger indicators than for History. (The standard deviation for maths is 1.22, for English 1.32 and for History 1.83)

To complete the picture, I have also compared the estimates in an FFT5 school with those in a FFT50 school. The GM grades in a 5th percentile school are broadly 2/3 of a grade higher than in a 50th percentile school. In some subjects it can be more than a grade higher as shown below for history.

	FFT5 GM	FFT5GA		FFT50 GM	FFT50 GA
English language	5H	6H		5L	6L
Maths	5M	6M		4H	5H
History	6L	7L		4M	5M

This means that the benchmarks we set are truly aspirational targets. They should be understood as neither a cap to achievement, as some students do get higher grades, nor should missing these targets be seen as a sign of failure, as the process we use to set them is built on the positive mindset of reaching for the stars. These statistical considerations can help to guide conversations about potential achievement but at the end of the day the most important factor in any student outcome is the motivation and application of the student themselves and their desire to achieve. This is why we do not just set targets but each year open up a motivational discussion between students, parents and teachers about setting student own targets during our October target setting fortnight.