Richmond Tutoring

Foundation or Higher?

The two GCSE Maths tiers side by side: the grades each one can give, how many marks are needed, and how to decide which is right for your child.

Foundation

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

- Grades 1 to 5. The highest grade possible is a 5.
- More marks for number, ratio and everyday maths; fewer long algebra problems.
- You need a high share of the marks: 63 to 64% for a 4 on AQA and Edexcel in 2026 (44% on OCR).
- Suits students working securely at grade 3 or 4 who want to lock in a pass.

Higher

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

- Grades 4 to 9. A student who just misses a 4 can be given a 3; below that is a U.
- Harder questions: algebraic proof, vectors, circle theorems, harder trigonometry.
- Grade boundaries are much lower: 19 to 26% of the marks for a 4 in 2026.
- Needed for a 6 or above, and usually for A-Level Maths.

Marks needed in June 2026 (all three papers added up)

Exam board	Foundation grade 4	Foundation grade 5	Higher grade 4	Higher grade 5	Higher grade 7
AQA out of 240	154 (64%)	187 (78%)	63 (26%)	97 (40%)	166 (69%)
Pearson Edexcel out of 240	151 (63%)	181 (75%)	50 (21%)	82 (34%)	146 (61%)
OCR out of 300	133 (44%)	183 (61%)	57 (19%)	94 (31%)	170 (57%)

Sources: AQA, Pearson Edexcel and OCR raw mark grade boundaries, June 2026. Boundaries change every year.

Signs Higher could be right

- [ ] Mock results are a secure 5, or a 4 that is rising.
- [ ] Comfortable with algebra: solving equations, expanding and factorising.
- [ ] Aiming for a 6 or above, or thinking about A-Level Maths or a science.

Signs Foundation could be right

- [ ] Mocks are around a 3 or a low 4, and a pass is the main goal.
- [ ] Higher papers leave a lot of questions blank.
- [ ] A grade 4 or 5 is enough for the next step they want.

Questions to ask the school: Which tier is my child entered for, and why? What did they score in each paper of the last mock? When is the final decision made, and can it change?

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