



ST. MARY'S SECONDARY SCHOOL
HOLY FAITH CONVENT, GLASNEVIN, DUBLIN 11



9th May 2020

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

As we head into the second week of May our thoughts and prayers are, as ever, with you all and especially those who have been impacted negatively by the Coronavirus.

We are very aware of how stressful the last eight weeks have been for you and your families and truly appreciate the great efforts our teachers have made to ensure that the remote teaching and learning initiative has been successful. It has been an anxious time for all students but for our 6th years this anxiety has been on a different scale entirely. The effect of stretching the LC timeline out to late July and August must have exacerbated the feelings of trepidation especially for those among them who were already finding it hard to engage due to family and other circumstances not least among them being the lack of that reassuring face to face contact with teachers which sustains students and spurs them on during this last leg of their second level journey. Minister McHugh's announcement yesterday was not unexpected and I hope it put an end to the uncertainty that you have been living with over the past few weeks. In it he stressed that 'the system being put in place will allow a young person to progress to the next stage of their life in a timely fashion'. After long and arduous discussions with all the stakeholders the Minister pronounced that 'the fairest and most equitable way to do that in the current circumstances is to offer students the option of Calculated Grades for the 2020 Leaving Certificate but also to guarantee them the right to sit the examinations at a later stage when it is safe to hold them in the normal way'. Although the media cited almost 80% of LC students in favour of such a solution the finality of this sudden end might have left some of them reeling - relieved that the awful uncertainty is over - but shocked that it has all ended so quickly. I sincerely hope that the relief outweighs any other negative emotion after what has been for our 6th year students and their families a time of painful uncertainty.

Parents and students will undoubtedly have many questions and the government has compiled a FAQs document for students, teachers and parents which can be accessed on Gov.ie <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2f07eb-leaving-cert-2020-information/#information-for-leaving-cert-students> which should answer most of your questions. Should you not find the answer to your question there please feel free to contact myself, Ms Devaney or Ms O'Donnell by email.

Guidelines have been issued to schools for the Calculated Grading of Leaving Certificate Students 2020 which is explained in the poster which can be accessed at <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/74094/5866cff28d534c4293388da83070149e.pdf#page=1>

Once this process begins teachers will not be able to communicate with students on any aspect of it. Minister McHugh made this clear in his press briefing stating 'Teachers will not be allowed to discuss grading with students'. It is very important that all students understand this and under no circumstances should they contact a teacher to discuss grades. Teachers are being instructed by the government to engage in the process of Calculated Grading and while this is underway there can be no communication about grades with the students who are being graded and any such contact would be inappropriate and ill-advised.

The Leaving Certificate teachers are as shocked as their students about the suddenness of this end to their teaching of 6th years and are eager to link in with their classes and we have asked students next week to engage with their teachers on Teams so that they have the opportunity to wish their students well which they really want to do and students will have the opportunity to do likewise.





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I know the next few days might be difficult for some students in terms of school and coming to terms with the abrupt end that might not have been expected. It is not all over however, and it was heartening last Tuesday to be part of the Graduation Team and to witness such enthusiasm and good will among 6th year students who volunteered in such numbers to make this online graduation a successful, memorable, historic and very special occasion which will be celebrated in their homes with their families. While their teaching teams will be deactivated over the next while the Graduation Team will remain very active and Mr Coll and his team will be keeping students busy between now and 18th May and beyond to ensure that everything is uploaded on time and ready for the big event. I am aware that students have already begun preparing the different elements of the ceremony from photos, readings, music etc., and that they will continue to do so up to the deadline. I am delighted that our students have this to focus on and that they now have the time to do it, their school days having been cut short; and I am really looking forward to 26th May, and to that sense of occasion and community when everyone is tuned in at the one time together online.

Our Online Graduation is a wonderfully creative response to the Covid-19 crisis but we also want our 6th year to know that we will also be planning a live event as soon as it is feasible to gather again in numbers, when we will invite you all back to the school for the official presentation their Graduation Certificates at a specially convened Awards Ceremony. We look forward to this opportunity to meet you all again and to celebrate our Class of 2020 and their time with us as they begin to embrace the next chapter.

We would like to reassure you that our support network is still up and running for our 6th years and should they require access to Guidance and Counselling services or any other pastoral support their year head Mr McGill, Ms Devaney, Ms O'Donnell and myself and our Guidance Counsellors Ms Gavin and Ms Nayar are available to any student who requires access to supports until the end of the school term.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you, our parents and guardians, for your cooperation, patience and understanding. Your support for our remote teaching initiative has made it possible for us to keep teaching and learning alive for our students during a very trying and unprecedented time.

We hope that the clarity offered by the Minister's announcement yesterday has put an end to the uncertainty you have all been living with and it is our earnest wish that you and your families stay safe and well as we extend our warmest wishes to you.

Yours faithfully,

Bernadette Bourke
Principal

Mary O'Donnell
Deputy Principal

Frances Devaney
Deputy Principal

