



Coláiste Pobail Bheanntraí

Seskin
Bantry,
Co. Cork.
Principal: Dr. Kevin Healy B.A, H.D.E, M.Ed, Ed.D
Deputy Principal: Mr. Denis O'Sullivan, BSc. (Ed.), H.D.E

Phone: 027 56434
Fax: 027 56439
E-mail: cpb@corketb.ie

11th May 2020.

Dear Parent/Guardian/Student

I hope you and your family are keeping safe and well.

You will be aware by now that the Minister for Education announced last Friday, 8th May, the postponement of the Leaving Certificate Examinations for 2020. Subsequently, the Minister published a 'press release' on the Department of Education (*DES*) website with details of alternative proposals for the LC 2020 and it can be found at the following link: <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-05-08.html>. The new proposal, which is considered by the *DES* to be "the fairest and most equitable way" of proceeding, is "to offer students the option of Calculated Grades for the 2020 LC but also to guarantee them the right to sit the examination at a later stage when it is safe to hold them in the normal way". The 'press release' also provided further links to useful documents which can be found on the *DES* website, which includes a comprehensive guide for students to 'Calculated Grades', and it can be found at the following link: <https://www.education.ie/en/Learners/Information/State-Examinations/a-guide-to-calculated-grades-for-leaving-certificate-students-2020.pdf>. There is a further supplementary document, in the form of 'Frequently Asked Questions', and it is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2f07eb-leaving-cert-2020-information/#information-for-leaving-cert-students>.

You are strongly advised to take the time to view and read thoroughly each of these informative documents as they are the 'official' *DES* documents that will provide you with more accurate and detailed information than you might view/read on other media outlets or sources. It is not my intention here to repeat at length what is in the aforementioned *DES* documents.

In brief, the system of producing Calculated Grades for LC students involves two main phases of processing two data sets. The first is an internal, **school-based phase** and the second is an external, **DES national statistical standardization process** involving a State Examinations Commission (*SEC*) statistical review. In phase two, involving a specific unit of the *DES*, the estimated percentage mark supplied by the school is transformed into a calculated mark which is then used to generate a Calculated Grade. In essence, the *DES* will compare the school's profile of achievement at LC over the last three years to the national standards, to build up a picture of school performance. They will also review the performance of this year's group of students against their overall performance at Junior Cycle. This may mean that marks and rankings submitted by schools will be examined and may be adjusted by the *DES* using statistical methods to ensure a common national standard is applied.

In the first instance, I want to focus here on phase 1, the **school-based phase**, as there a number of important matters and issues that I want to emphasise and highlight. In the school-based phase, as stated in the *DES* FAQ document that I referred to above, Q5, teachers "will draw on existing records and available evidence to provide a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgment of the most likely percentage mark that each student would have achieved if they had sat their examinations and completed coursework under normal conditions". The teachers will use a number of records of a student's academic performance and progress such as homework and class work, class assessments and exams/tests in

school such as Summer, Christmas and Mock exams. On the basis of the existing records, teachers will exercise their professional judgment to provide a fair, objective and balanced estimated percentage mark for each student and will also put students in a rank order in their class. Subject teachers in the same department will then review the estimated percentage marks and rankings of the students by the individual teacher. Following this 'alignment' process as it is referred to, the subject teacher will then finalise their estimated percentage mark and rankings. I, as Principal, will then review the estimated percentage marks and rankings of the teacher and 'sign off' on them on behalf of the school before submitting the finalised marks and rankings to the *DES*.

As Principal, to ensure uniformity of standards in the marking process in the school, I have the authority to return the estimated percentage marks and rankings to the relevant group of teachers for further consideration. To assist us in this process of producing Calculated Grades, teachers, including the Principal, are due to be furnished by the *DES* with detailed national guidance while there is also reference to training being provided to support and direct us.

I am elaborating at length on the school-based phase of producing Calculated Grades so as to emphasise that while individual teachers put forward an estimated percentage mark for each student in their class, the finalised result is the outcome of a collective decision, based on a collaborative and consultative process involving teachers and school management. To reiterate what is stated in the *DES* 'Guide to Calculated Grades....', the teachers are professionals who are bound by their 'Code of Practice', a Code that is "underpinned by the values of integrity, trust, care and respect". As Principal, I can assure you that the teachers of *Coláiste Pobail Bheantraí* are committed to exercising their professional judgment in a fair, objective, balanced and unbiased manner so as to ensure fairness and equity for all students in the school.

The *DES* documents provide some clarity on how teachers involved in the school-based phase are to be safeguarded so as to ensure that the integrity of the process is protected and not compromised. In this context, in p.11 of the *DES* document, "A Guide to Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate....", in the section on 'Ensuring objectivity and fairness', it states that "the principal, deputy principal(s), teachers or other members of the school staff must not under any circumstances discuss with any student or with the parents or guardians of any student the estimated marks that the school is submitting". It is expected that further clarity on this matter will be detailed in the national guidance document for teachers that is yet to be issued. In order for the teachers to discharge the duty that is now required of them, it is imperative that the school-based phase is carried out in a space that is free of any perceived undue influence or pressure being brought to bear from any quarter. Students, and their parents and guardians, are therefore required not to be contacting or corresponding with teachers or making any representations that might be construed as a means of negotiating with the teachers about the estimated percentage mark that is to be assigned to the student. It is important that we all work together so as to respect and protect the integrity of the process in the interest of fairness and equity for all students

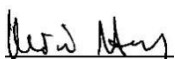
It is becoming a cliché to state that we are living in challenging and unprecedented times and that we are in uncharted territory. As Minister McHugh states in the *DES* 'press release', the decision to postpone the LC examinations has "never happened in our country before". It is widely acknowledged that the current proposal is far from an ideal solution but the *DES* gives assurance that the Calculated Grades process has sufficient "oversight and control (measures)" and a number of "inherent quality assurance measures" to ensure students receive as fair a result as possible to enable them to "progress to the next stage of their life in a timely fashion".

I also wish to inform you that, following consultation with Cork ETB (*CETB*) this morning, as a body they are seeking further clarification and answers from the *DES* on the detail of the process of Calculating Grades as *CETB* fully acknowledges that there are still many unanswered questions in relation to it. *Cork ETB* have also advised all schools within its sector that all tuition for LC students is suspended for now pending further clarification from the *DES*. Once *Coláiste Pobail Bheantraí* receives further clarification I will be in contact with you again.

If you have any questions in relation to the above please do not hesitate to contact me via email at cpb@corketb.ie.

Thanking you in advance for your understanding and co-operation in relation to this matter.

Take care and stay safe and well.



Kevin Healy
Principal