6th February 2018

Dear parents/carers,

Re: ‘Early Entry’ Arrangements

In October 2017, a review undertaken by Qualifications Wales into the use of ‘early entry’ examinations was published. Subsequently, Welsh Government introduced a policy of ‘first entry counts’ when measuring the performance of schools. It has been widely publicised that this policy was largely introduced to challenge underperformance in schools around English and mathematics outcomes. These new arrangements affect the current Year 10 students.

I thought it would be helpful to outline the use of ‘early entry’ at The Bishop of Llandaff. In recent years it has been focused predominantly in mathematics and, in 2017, for English Language. As our curriculum is very tradition, many of our students would sit approximately 25 public examinations as part of their GCSEs and the opportunity to complete some of these early has been incredibly motivational. Furthermore, as mathematics is a 100% unseen paper, the strategy of early entry has enabled the school to support students at all abilities to achieve the best possible outcomes at the stage of which they are ready. Those students in the current Year 11, also sat English Language in the summer of Year 10 for the first time. This was because it was a new qualification with an opportunity to re-sit in November of Year 11. However, this was only available if students sat the exam in the summer of Year 10. Therefore, the decision was based on providing students with as many opportunities to achieve their target in English Language. In both subjects, students have done exceptionally well at both A*-A and A*-C as a result of the use of ‘early entry’. Students have always then been able to improve upon these outcomes where possible.

Despite introducing the policy a number of weeks ago, there has still been some uncertainty across schools in Wales about the impact of these reforms on all subjects. However, on 29th January 2018, the government published update materials for schools regarding the new measures. As a result, I am now in a confident position where we can communicate these changes and how it will impact on your child. The update last week confirms that the new policy will impact on all qualifications. However, for those subjects taught in a modular format (these are designed for students to sit at different stages throughout the two years), this policy has little impact. In short, the ‘first entry counts’ rule only applies to the whole qualification once it is completed and ‘cashed in’ for a final overall grade.

The introduction of new performance measures should not have a significant impact on our strategy at school. In both English and mathematics, nearly all students sit both qualifications. However, rather than all students sitting mathematics (Numeracy) at the end of Year 10, the department will undertake pre-public examinations (ie. mocks) later in March to establish readiness for ‘early entry’ at the end of Year 10. Where this is possible, students will have the opportunity to sit the paper early. The school has been planning English for the two year period and again, students will sit elements of the two English (Language and Literature) papers throughout Year 10 and Year 11 so that a whole qualification is not ‘cashed in’ until the end of Year 11.

Those subjects which have modular examinations at the end of Year 10 will continue to sit these. Naturally, these will vary depending on the options choices your child has made. We will communicate the examination timetables with students once they become available. This is likely to be mid-March to enable the school to assess the outcomes of the mathematics pre-public examinations and identify readiness for summer entry. Please be assured that we will continue to ensure all our energies focus on supporting all of our students to achieve their full potential.

Thank you for your support and patience in communicating these important changes to policy.

Yours sincerely,

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Headteacher

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