

Dear Grade 8 Parents

Your sons are about to have their first exams at Bishops. For some of you it will be the first exam session your son has ever had. I would just like to say a few of things about it from a pastoral side. (If you have an older son you probably know all this already.)

Firstly, it is probable that your son is going to find this time the happiest time at College so far! Most boys enjoy the change of routine and the increased amount of free time that comes with exams. Most days he will finish school earlier than normal and although we would hope he uses some of this free time to work, this is likely to depend upon what exam he has the next day and how conscientious he is as a rule. Some exams are exams in the old sense of the word (learn and be tested on what you have learnt e.g. Science) but others are more to do with testing skills and comprehension and there is not much that a boy can do in preparing for it the day before. That is when he should be looking ahead and working out what exams he does need to learn for which may be a couple of days away. In this he may need your help to be disciplined. He is not used to having so much time and most boys find it hard to see beyond the immediate. I am afraid it is not unusual to find that some boys do less work during exams than at other times because they lack the self-motivation needed and less actual homework is set.

Secondly, please be aware of your son's whereabouts during this exam time. Sports practices are sometimes held early with the result that boys have more time to do their own thing. Good communication with him is needed. (Boarders will find the Houses more relaxed at this time as quite a few seniors go home to work. Housemasters will do what they can to ensure discipline and that prep times continue as normal but you may like to have a word with your son about what you expect.)

Thirdly, please remember that boys learn better in a relaxed, though disciplined, environment. It sometimes takes great skill as a parent to insist your child works and yet not raise the emotional temperature to such a point that the learning process becomes inefficient. Help him plan his evenings, including a number of breaks. Do not let him stay up too late.

I know it is important that boys do well in exams and we all want our sons to achieve the best they can do. However, many boys will not manage to do their best either because they lack maturity at present or struggle in some way (or both). Many find it very hard to sit and work for extended periods. We can get as cross as we like with them but it will not help that much – and may actually achieve the opposite of what we hope. It may help if you sit with your son prior to the exams (with his timetable) and establish some expectations beforehand around the structure of each evening – and even a few afternoons. He may need some hands-on help from you to revise. Most boys learn best when they write things down and this also shows you (and themselves) they have been through the work in a helpful way..

Yours sincerely
Peter Westwood
(Deputy Headmaster Pastoral)