



Dear Parents/Carers

Reopening Schools

As you will be aware, last week, the First Minister made a statement in the Scottish Parliament which detailed a route map for moving Scotland out of lockdown. This included information on the approach to reopening schools on a phased basis. The Scottish Government has produced a document providing more detail on the points made in the First Minister's statement <https://www.gov.scot/publications/excellent-equity-during-covid-19-pandemic-strategic-framework-reopening-schools-early-learning-childcare-provision-scotland/>.

This document is only a framework and the Scottish Government states that Local Authorities (LAs) will be provided with detailed operational guidance in the coming weeks. As a result, at this stage, it is possible to provide you with only a broad summary of next steps:

- **Staff to return to school buildings in June 2020.**
Staff can only return when it is safe to do so and confirmed by The Scottish Government. At the moment, staff will continue to deliver learning from home through Microsoft Teams and Google classrooms.
- **Staff to plan and prepare for a new blended model of learning which will be implemented in August.**
"This new model, which will ensure adherence to safeguarding protocols such as appropriate physical distancing, will include part-time in-school learning and part-time in-house learning for almost all children." (extract from - ***A Strategic framework for reopening schools, early learning and childcare provision in Scotland***).
- **The start date of the new term will be standardised to 11 August 2020.**
This is an earlier than planned date for Aberdeenshire Schools. We will provide you with more detail on this, following discussion as a Local Authority.

A phased return to school is a highly complex situation involving a wide variety of variables and considerations. Health and Safety will be the key driver however we need to take into consideration factors including our staffing situation, pupil groupings and course requirements, building capacity and layout and transport requirements. Extensive planning is required to implement the actions highlighted above. We await the guidance highlighted above but are already working with colleagues across Aberdeenshire to plan for that return.

As a school, we are totally committed to doing our very best to maintain continuity of learning for our young people. For now, we are doing this by working hard to develop our approaches to digital learning. If we compare where we are now with digital learning with where we were in late March, significant progress has been made. This is testament to how we work as a school community and to your ongoing support. The further development of digital learning will be a core aspect of our phased return plan and we hope to survey pupils and parents soon to help us identify what is working and what we can develop.

Over the coming weeks, transition work will be underway for all children, with a collaborative focus between the respective primaries and the Academy. Our current approach is to ensure a virtual transition experience for the new S1 pupils. This includes video introductions to staff and to the school's procedures. We have also established online Teams so that we can directly answer queries. In terms of the planning required for a phased return we unfortunately do not envisage an opportunity to have pupils visit the building before summer.

Across the school, we are planning movement from one-year group to another and if your child is entering S4-6 you will shortly receive further information about the change of timetable and the working expectations around this move. While the current learning environment is far from ideal it is crucial that all pupils engage to the best of their abilities, capabilities and circumstances so that they do not lose ground which then affects their future chances.

I am sure you will have many questions about the phased reopening, and we are currently looking at how we can gather these questions then attempt to answer them. We feel it would be helpful to have sight of both national and local guidance prior to attempting to answer your queries so will be in touch once we have an idea of timescales.

Lastly, I wish to stress just how much we value your support at this time. We really appreciate all you are doing to support that learning at home. We know it can have its ups and downs and keeping young people engaged is not always easy on top of all your other commitments. Education Scotland are now publishing regular newsletters and these offer some supports, they can be found here <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/scotland-learns/a-weekly-newsletter-for-parents-and-carers/> If you have specific school questions on any topic please contact us through the school email address portlethen.aca@aberdeenshire.gov.uk ensuring you highlight the nature of your query in the subject line.

Thank you and please stay safe.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Morrison
Head Teacher
Portlethen Academy
27 May 2020