

Parent Letter 27 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In writing this I hope you and your families are safe and as well as can be in these difficult times. The stress and uncertainty of the current situation is uppermost in my mind as we work to establish how we can best support our young people. Each young person and family will have their own unique challenges at present. The situation has also changed so rapidly that communicating with you has been a real challenge, particularly as what is the case one day is often different the next, then changes again. I know this is frustrating and we are doing our utmost to seek clarity. Unfortunately and understandably this can take a long time in coming. I've tried to capture the most up to date picture on some key areas below.

### **SQA statement on coursework for National Courses**

The SQA released their statement on Tuesday 24 March and can be found here <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/93658.html> As with many recent statements these are hugely complex issues and the SQA are working on further clarity so that teachers, pupils and parents are clear on what will happen. When this is available, we will communicate with pupils and parents/carers.

### **Completion of courses**

The key question we have been asked by pupils, parents and staff is whether there is a need to carry on with courses and whether any work completed will provide evidence. In terms of carrying on with courses, it is important that, where possible, young people complete courses so that they have covered all the content and skills. This is so that they can progress on to the next level without any gaps. This applies to all subjects and years as S6 courses may provide content for College or University. There is also a key point about young people completing what they began and being able to articulate that to potential employers. Sometimes this may include work that would have been assessed but is also key to the course. It is often the case that the final assignment or piece of coursework is the thing that pulls all the content, knowledge and skills together so it is essential to completing the course. This ties in to the second point and we await clarification from SQA. In the interim we would place the focus on completion of course work so that progression is easier when we return to school. Examples include completion of Logbooks in Metalwork and Woodwork. Mrs Craw and her team, in Modern Languages, have arranged online 1:1 Speaking assessments. Even if these are not used by SQA they will give us key information for pupils as they progress to the next level.

### **S3 Progression**

This is another vital area where we need young people to engage with learning and the tasks set. These courses are the foundations of Nationals so pupils who do not complete this will put themselves at a disadvantage when they move to National Courses in S4.

### **Pupil online learning**

We appreciate that our young people are all at different stages in their ability to access online learning and in relation to the equipment they have. As you know from our communications, we surveyed young people to establish what ICT access they had. This allowed us to provide hardware for most to take home. Our teachers know that pupils' ability to use and access equipment varies and we have asked them to ensure they take this into account in their work. There is a wealth of material and tasks available and this can be hugely daunting for pupils and parents. We encourage you to set routines

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but also be realistic around the time your child spends on schoolwork. This can be very intense and 3-4 hours a day with suitable breaks is sufficient though older pupils can manage more. Physical exercise and active tasks are also crucial.

Moreover, we have also found that, just like in a class environment, pupils are rushing into tasks. A number are only partially reading the instructions and we would ask you to support them to avoid this. Where they are unclear, they can go back to staff for clarity through the online environment. Where they are struggling to access online learning we can see this through Teams, Google Classrooms and GLOW and we will attempt to make contact and support them.

## **School Trips S1 and S2**

We understand this is a significant area of worry for parents of pupils in S1 and S2, particularly in the current financial climate. We are working with Aberdeenshire Council colleagues to clarify the position around contracts and insurance. The difficulty is where we make the decision to cancel a trip this means insurance is unlikely to pay out as it is deemed as voluntary despite the situation. Companies view it in the same light and are unlikely to return money they already have. Travel companies are also reluctant to cancel as they would then forfeit any money already paid. There are also some concerns that travel insurance companies may use a phrase in contracts called "Natural Catastrophes" and not make payment on any claims. A further complication is that we are contractually bound to companies with clear deadlines and financial implications around these. The position regarding trip cancellation and how we progress it is here <http://portlethenacademy.aberdeenshire.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Parents-Trip-Handbook.pdf> I would refer you to this and assure you we are working with colleagues in Aberdeenshire to reach a resolution as quickly as possible and we will do our best to recoup any money that we can.

## **Vulnerability and Pupil Well Being**

Our Guidance, Additional Support for Learning staff and other members of the team have been working to identify particularly vulnerable young people and to put in place measures to make contact with them. This work is ongoing and will inform a limited level of provision as we go forward. It is likely to mesh together with Key Worker Childcare. Guidance staff are also going to issue an online form for all pupils gauging their wider Health and Wellbeing. This will go out next week and we would then aim to use it at roughly two week intervals after the Easter holiday period is over. This will allow us to establish where young people are having difficulties and we will then work to address these. Young people can also contact their Guidance teacher directly through Teams if they have support needs or wish to discuss anything concerning them.

I am sorry that while I have covered a number of points, there are some I have not been able to provide clear answers to at this stage. I will clarify them as soon as I can. Our focus remains on providing the best for our young people through whatever means are in our power.

In the meantime, please keep safe in these difficult times.

Neil Morrison

Head Teacher  
Portlethen Academy