

# Portlethen Academy

Learn and Improve. Get Involved. Think of the Consequences. Respect All.

Dear Parent/Carer

## Parent/Carer Update 27 August 2020

Last week saw a successful return of all pupils to Portlethen Academy. It has been fantastic to have pupils in school and to see them back into their learning and having social time together. Behaviour has been great with young people being overwhelmingly responsible in the new setting and we have seen good involvement in classes, a really positive start from our new S1 pupils and their buddies and uniform has, generally, been excellent. Most pupils have adapted very well to our new procedures and had already developed a good understanding of these from reading the advice on our website. I know many parents have shared this and we want to thank you for that, it has been invaluable. We are constantly reviewing our procedures and adapting these as advice and patterns develop. This letter will cover both areas we are adapting and wider areas where you can support us.

### Face Coverings

The current Scottish Government Advice published on 25 August 2020 is that Face Coverings are required to be worn in certain school settings from Monday 31 August 2020. The advice is here <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2020/08/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020-version-2/d>

As a school we were already encouraging and supporting this in busy areas such as the canteen, corridors and stairways. As of Monday 31 August, pupils will be required to wear face coverings:

- When moving in corridors and around school
- At breaks and lunchtimes
- In all social and communal areas
- On any transport provided by the school

As per Scottish Government advice young people and staff can choose to wear face coverings at other times and will be supported to do so.

We also feel it would be very beneficial in practical subjects such as Home Economics, Technical, Music and Art so that staff feel less vulnerable and can circulate around the classroom to support young people. A number of schools have been reluctant to start practical work due to difficulties of supporting young people and the health and safety requirements to ensure young people are safe. We can overcome these barriers with the use of face coverings. As such we will require young people to wear their face coverings while undertaking practical activity in these settings (except for PE). We would stress that this is during the practical activity as, at other times, the teacher or Pupil Support Assistant can ensure 2m distancing from pupils. Our staff are very sympathetic to the needs of pupils and the difficulties of communicating with face coverings and are taking this into account to communicate with young people and to allow them to communicate with staff and peers.

In light of the above, we ask that you support your child to wear a face covering in the above settings in school. We do appreciate this will be difficult for some young people and Guidance staff are actively working to support them. Young people who are concerned should discuss this with their

Guidance teacher or you may wish to make contact on their behalf. The Scottish Government advice is here <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/face-coverings/> and gives a list of reasons for exemptions. Where there are concerns about the cost of items, a particular requirement (eg clear face coverings) or young people forget their coverings, we will have a limited supply of both cloth and disposable coverings which pupils can access via their Guidance Teacher or Year Head.

We are very optimistic that all our young people will work together with us to ensure coverings are worn and we do not envisage issues. However, if young people are not willing to follow the advice and wear face coverings, we will work with them and yourselves to explain the rationale and resolve the situation. However, pupils who habitually do not wear face coverings in corridors and communal areas will have to use the school's outside spaces. In practical settings we will provide theory work in place of practical work for pupils who are not exempt and arrange for this to be done in a location where suitable distancing can be achieved.

We appreciate this is another change and that we are having to put it in place quickly. We will continue to review it along with all our approaches and we value your support as we adapt our procedures and safety measures.

### **Pupil and Staff Health**

This week we have seen a growing number of young people with colds and coughs that usually come later in the session. We suspect it is the natural mixing and transmission that occurs when young people come together. One of the key factors in all the above is keeping our young people and staff healthy and reducing opportunities for transmission. It can be very hard to tell the difference between Covid 19 symptoms and other ailments and we would ask that you carefully follow the Scottish Government advice on symptoms, take medical advice, where appropriate, and we would also urge caution. You will know your child and how they respond, and we know you will not want to put others at risk. While absence of pupils impacts on their individual learning the absence of teachers can affect whole groups of pupils. Use of face coverings should reduce this but if significant numbers of staff are absent, we may not be able to run classes for all pupils and it is possible that we could have to send pupils home (see below under contingency planning).

### **Contingency Planning**

We have been asked what the situation would be for learning if there were cases of Covid 19 transmission in the school. You will recall that we issued details of our Blended Learning Plan before summer. This was premised on a social distancing of 2m. It is important to appreciate that this is unlikely to be the scenario we would move to in the event of a significant Covid 19 outbreak. In a Covid 19 outbreak we would be guided by Public Health experts who manage the situation and would advise. If the situation showed extensive community transmission the most likely scenario would be a limited time closure of school, as we are seeing elsewhere in Scotland. In this situation we would need to revert to online learning rather than the Blended model (which had pupils in school roughly 1 week in 3).

The other obvious scenario is where members of the school community need to self-isolate for either 10 or 14 days. If this were the case for staff, it could impact on our delivery of teaching as there is no depth of supply cover. In this scenario the most likely solution is to close to particular year groups, usually this is in S1-3, until we have enough staff to resume formal classes. Clearly, we want to avoid these scenarios as they would be disruptive to learning. As well as disrupting learning we appreciate it would have childcare implications for many of you. It is why we are so keen that our

pupils follow every safety measure possible, coupled with the national advice, so that we do not find ourselves in this scenario.

### **Parent Council Thursday 27 August, 7.30 - 8.30 pm**

Our first Parent Council Meeting of the session takes place on the above date. It is a Google meet as we cannot meet in school. You should have received a separate letter re the meeting however I have highlighted the agenda below. We extend a welcome to new S1 parents and hope to see many of you in the virtual meeting.

#### **Agenda**

1. Fiona Squires, Parent Council Chair: Welcome
2. Neil Morrison, Head Teacher: Welcome and update
3. Kirsty Campbell-Robertson, Acting Depute Head Teacher: S1 update and year group Q and A.
4. Craig Cowie, Depute Head Teacher: Scottish Qualifications Authority results and appeals process and Course Choice update
5. General Q and A responses from the Senior Leadership Team (Neil Morrison, Craig Cowie, Tom Liversedge and Kirsty Campbell-Robertson)
6. AOCB

#### **Visitors Car Park Area**

We have had a number of calls regarding the safety of the front carpark which has been very congested at 3.30pm as parents pick up children. Traffic has tailed back onto Bruntland Road and cars have occupied the disabled spaces required for picking up some pupils or have blocked the bus lane. The car park is also busy with pupils making their way around the building. Currently pupils are exiting the building via a variety of doors and many exit closer to the staff carpark at the side of the building. This has much more space and we ask that you use that if possible. We would also encourage you to ask your child to walk a safe distance from school to another suitable pick up point if it is not possible for them to walk all the way home.

#### **Odds and Ends**

We have noticed a couple of minor issues around school this week which we want to flag up.

1. We have a few pupils who have incredibly long false nails. This is proving to be a problem in HE for some as the gloves we ask pupils with nails to wear cannot cope with the sharpness of the nails. It is also incredibly dangerous for PE so we would ask that this is resolved so that pupils do not have safety issues or barriers to learning.
2. Uniform: we have a very small minority, mainly boys, who are wearing tracksuits trousers/joggers instead of uniform trousers. They usually have the trousers in their bags. Our uniform is one of our key security measures as it allows us to identify anyone who is not a pupil. This is a particular issue at present due to the need to have doors propped open for longer periods of time to facilitate safe entry. Guidance staff will contact home and we would appreciate your support. Where young people are unwilling to adhere to our dress code, we will have to ask them to have breaks and lunch outwith the building.
3. Anonymous calls: every year we receive a small number of anonymous calls which appear to be from concerned parents or members of the public reporting issues. It is extremely difficult to confirm whether these are genuine so we ask that anyone calling gives their details. We want to assure you that this information is treated confidentially and does not

go further unless you agree for this to be the case. Unfortunately, we cannot respond to complaints without this.

4. Use of reception: We are advised to reduce footfall at the reception and ask that parents do not use this as a drop of unless absolutely necessary. Our break times are currently 10.25 - 10.45 while lunchtime runs from 12.45-13.45 so parents can arrange to meet with pupils outside school at these times to drop of any items.

### **Communications**

Our formal lines of communications are via letters like this, the school website and, for parental enquiries, the school office and email [portlethen.aca@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:portlethen.aca@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) The office will pass your query to the person best able to respond and we try to deal with issues at the most appropriate level possible with Principal Teachers of Faculty, Principal Teachers of Guidance and Depute Head Teachers all involved regularly in responding.

We would also encourage you to follow our Twitter feed @PortyAcad or Facebook PortlethenAcademyOfficial if you prefer that platform. We use this to highlight a wide range of school items. We are currently running Porty Top Tips which are Covid 19 focused and pick up on issues we encounter in the day. We have had some great videos by former pupils promoting the use of the Scottish Government Advice and hope to add more. These will give you themes for discussion with your child. We do not respond on this channel and if it generates any questions from you, we ask you use the formal channels above.

The year ahead will undoubtedly be a challenging one. We will have to adapt and some of the practices and procedures we have previously been used to will change, however, our goal is to get the very best for your child.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Neil Morrison

Head Teacher 27 August 2020