



Dear Parent/Carer

Reopening Schools – Further Information

Further to my letter to you on 27 May 2020 we have now received the latest Guidance from the Scottish Government. It is an extensive document and I have provided the link to it here <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-re-opening-schools-guide/pages/overview/> I've provided it for your information and you will see that it is a hugely complex situation and one that we are working through. Each school has its own variables and a read of it will probably leave you with more questions than answers. We are currently in discussion with Parent Council to find the best way to engage with you and to answer some of your questions. We will be in touch when we have agreed this and have done more planning.

Change of Timetable

Next week sees the start of our new timetable with all year groups moving on. This has been a significant body of work by our staff team and I want to note my thanks to them. It is always a difficult task but has been more so this year. Unlike most timetable changes it won't have that usual physical changeover but we hope there will be the anticipation and excitement of new things. We hope it will run fully at some point but need to be realistic that this is unlikely to be the case in the near future. However, what the change does is create the pupil groupings for new courses and, for many young people, allows them to move on to the certificate course they have chosen. With that in mind I would like to cover two key areas that apply to all but are particularly critical for those entering S3 and above. I mention S3 as this lays the basis for the senior phase in S4-6. I would ask that you share these points with your child.

1. Engagement

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. This is particularly important at the start of new courses as the basics are often covered. All of our new S4-6 should have been doing this with the various pieces of preparatory work we signposted. We understand that it can be difficult physically and motivationally to work in a home learning situation, but we ask that young people make every effort to do so. We know you are supporting them in this.

A further reason behind pupils needing to engage from the start is that there is no guarantee that there will be a formal exam diet next year and we will be collecting evidence of pupil performance and attainment from the start of session as evidence in the event this is needed. We will receive more guidance on this from the SQA and will forward that when available.

Our staff have set up online tracking of pupil engagement and have established new Teams or Google Classes for the new timetable. This means we can identify when a pupil is encountering difficulties and then our staff team can make contact to establish the issues and provide support. If pupils or parents also identify difficulties please make contact via the relevant Guidance Teacher or the school email portlethen.aca@aberdeenshire.gov.uk ensuring you highlight the nature of your query in the subject line.

2. Pupil Time Commitment

In terms of the amount of time a young person should spend on a course this is a complex one as we all work at different paces, have different abilities and have different situations that we are trying to do that work in. We are aware some young people can work well in an online environment while others do not. We are also aware that some have to share equipment. Our rule of thumb is **that the minimum work in the online environment should be 50% of the class contact time**. So, for a National class with 4 timetabled periods a week we should see young people working for a minimum of 2 x 50mins per week. An S2 class with 2 timetabled periods a week should work for a minimum of 50 mins per week on that subject. This model applies to all year groups as the work should be at the appropriate level. More is great, while some young people will require longer to gain mastery of some work or topics. Others may get through it quickly and can move on to reinforcement of the learning. This can seem a relatively small amount of time and I would stress it is a minimum. We would encourage our young people to commit as much time as they require to complete work fully and to the highest standard they can. The other reason the time can seem relatively short is that, in the class environment, there is teacher and pupil interaction and the movement time from one area of the building to another. The online one can be much more focussed.

Once again, if your child realises they are struggling or is unsure about that commitment they can raise it with the class teacher, their Guidance teacher or you can email on their behalf. Our tracking, as described above, will also allow us to intervene.

I hope the above is helpful and we look forward to our pupils taking a running start to their new courses next week. As I write this it is the start of what looks like a glorious weekend and lockdown has been relaxed a little. I hope you and your families have a happy, safe and relaxing weekend.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Morrison

Head Teacher

Portlethen Academy

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