

Dear Parent/Carer

Covid-19 update 19 March 2020

As you will have noted from the media, the situation regarding COVID-19 continues to evolve rapidly. Please be assured that as announcements are made that affect schools, we will relay communications to parents and carers to ensure they are as up to date as possible. Although both National and Scottish decisions are being announced the implications and guidance around how these impact can often take some time to clarify. Some will also require local solutions which will need to be worked out. As soon as we have clarity and are able to put these into action we will communicate with you. As mentioned in previous correspondence the most up to date information regarding the national situation can be found via the links that were provided.

School Closure

As you will know we will close to all pupils from 3.30pm on Friday 20 March and are currently open to S4-6 pupils. This situation with S1-3 was precipitated by staff absence and self-isolation. We are sorry for the inconvenience it will have created for so many of you. Alongside the closure non-essential meetings, activities and events planned for between now and until further notice. All Work Placements and College courses have also stopped.

SQA Exams

This is an area of considerable anxiety for pupils, parents and staff. This afternoon the Deputy First Minister announced that there will not be an exam diet and the Scottish Qualifications Authority will move to exceptional circumstances arrangements. We are seeking clarity on what this means for pupils and any outstanding course requirements and will pass this on when we receive advice. In the meantime, we have put a focus on S4-6 this week and have gathered as much evidence of pupil work and completed as much assessment as has been possible. I would ask that pupils keep any evidence that they have at home in a safe place in case it is required. This would include jotters, marked essays/task/assessments. If we require this we will arrange for it to be submitted to school.

Pupil Home Working Arrangements

Our staff are working to make as much home learning available as they can. We will not be able to replicate the classroom setting and timetabled approach though practice around this may emerge.

All pupils will have online access to content and resources through Microsoft Teams or Google Classrooms. Links to both of these are available on the Portlethen Academy Glow page. Staff have been ensuring that all pupils have access to Glow and are able to access all the necessary resources for working from home. Unfortunately, there is no parental access to this therefore I would encourage your child to show you how they go about accessing these online resources from home. They will be able to show you all the materials that are in place and through Teams and Google classrooms there will be opportunities to link with teaching staff. We have also created a pack of S1-3 Broad General Education links which should reach you today.

We are aware that not all pupils will have suitable devices to access home learning and we have carried out a survey to establish this. Using the results, we will work to put in place solutions. We are also exploring the provision of suitable materials for young people who do not have any access to technology.

Keeping Contact with Young People

Our Guidance staff and others who work to support the pastoral side of our work have been meeting regularly and have planned for how they will keep in touch with young people. We will establish key links to vulnerable young people and will have regular contact with them. In terms of all pupils we are also looking at using online forms to keep in touch with pupils around the Well Being or SHANARRI Indicators. When these plans are in place we will contact you with full details.

Keeping you updated

Our formal communications will remain by email. As well as sending these directly we post these on our Website in the letters section. We also Tweet regularly and will continue to do so. This is informal and we will post relevant items. As we know some parents prefer Facebook we have created a page which can be found by searching Portlethenacademyofficial or here <https://www.facebook.com/PortyAcad/> This will mirror our Tweets. Apologies if it is a bit clunky to start with as I get used to it. As both are informal and not always monitored we do not respond to queries on these and would ask that you use the school email address for specific queries.

portlethen.aca@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

School Trips

The trip situation is one we know parents would like resolved as quickly as possible and we are working with colleagues in Aberdeenshire to get the clarity we need to respond properly to you. We know it is a priority. The most likely scenario is that there will be no trips or Goose Week. We still await clarity after the UK Government announced foreign trips would not take place. We do not know the duration of this ban or the payment implications. It is also likely to extend to UK based trips. We are working with Aberdeenshire to establish the position on cancellation of trips by schools or the provider and around insurance for payments already made. I'm sorry I can give clarity at this point but will do so as soon as we have this.

Friday 20 March Dress Down Day

As this may be the last formal day for some of our pupils we are allowing pupils to dress down. Our aim is to give them a little lift in what may be a difficult day for them. We don't intend collecting money for charity but will continue to take items for Integrate Foodbank if young people would like to contribute.

These are hugely difficult times with implications for us all. As a school we will do our very best to continue contact with you and your child. We will also endeavour to provide the best learning we can in the circumstances. Much of what we are entering into regarding learning is in its infancy and I'm sure we will have to learn and adapt.

As Head Teacher I have been struck by the hard work and commitment of all staff to provide the best they can for our young people and the community. I have also been overwhelmed by the support from young people. They are under huge pressure in uncertain times but have responded with understanding and compassion. I would also like to thank you as parents and carers for your support and understanding when faced with so many uncertainties yourselves. I am sorry I cannot give you more clarity at this time. I assure you I am actively seeking this and will pass it on to you when it becomes available.

As always if you have anything that you wish to discuss with the school please do not hesitate to get in contact via the school office who will direct you to the person best able to answer your query.

Neil Morrison
Head Teacher