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Dear Parents/Carers

With the new term now well underway, our schools across Aberdeenshire are highlighting the importance of wider community support for children and young people.

With many extra-curricular activities still on hold, many indoor social experiences off limits and young adults in some cases struggling to cope with the ongoing pandemic, what we are trying to do is encourage respect, understanding and cooperation across our communities. Lunchtime gathering in town centres has been highlighted as a particular issue.

We all empathise with the elderly, the lonely and the frustrations sometimes voiced by our peers, but it's easy to forget young people are also struggling to make sense of the world at the moment too – whether they voice those concerns or act out in a different way.

From the vast majority of our young people, we couldn't ask for more. They've adapted to different arrangements in school, they have taken to wearing face masks and they are following all the rules... but that's not to say it has been easy for them.

Please remember the young people from our secondary schools who you notice out and about in our town centres are also coping with the regular challenges of teenage life, trying to be supportive of each other and inclusive and friendly, and when they don't have to stay 2m apart at all times in school it can be difficult for them to remember why it's so important when they are out and about. We're continuing to work on that with them.

As we are all well aware, schools are doing absolutely everything in their power to prioritise health and safety and reinforce messages directly with young people as well as with yourselves. Every school has its own tailored risk assessment measures, in many cases they have staggered beginnings, breaks, lunches and ends of days, and in some communities secondary school lunch times have been reduced to typically 30-40 minutes, decreasing the time young people may be out of school.

We are now moving into the time of year when schools would usually be getting ready for end of term festive events, such as Christmas concerts, plays, parties, dances and pantomimes. Again, this year will be very different given the advice our schools are following, for example in relation to singing. Schools are looking for creative ways to mark the season with some online activity being planned in a number of schools. I would ask for the support of parents and carers at this time. I know some schools have had quite vociferous complaints from parents because Christmas concerts are not going ahead. This is not the school's fault in any way. We continue to live alongside a very serious virus where we have seen a recent increase in cases across

Aberdeenshire and as such we must do all we can to follow the guidance and the advice which has been put in place to protect everyone.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the vast majority of parents and carers who have been so supportive of staff as we navigate through these difficult times. Please remember that our office staff are doing their best in very difficult circumstances and from time to time responses to questions from parents may take a little longer than usual. I must also underline a zero tolerance approach to any queries of an abusive or aggressive nature – this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated and is most unhelpful in terms of providing a positive example for our young people.

Yours sincerely



**Laurence Findlay**  
**Director of Education & Children's Services**