



October 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

As the term nears its close I would like to update you on a range of issues.

Feedback on Learning

As part of our drive to raise the attainment of pupils we are currently looking at the use of feedback. Research shows that this is one of the most effective ways of improving learning and understanding and I love the following quote from a book I have been reading. "Feedback is in effect the rocket fuel that propels the acquisition of knowledge (and skills) and without it no amount of practice is going to get you there", Matthew Syed, *Bounce*, 2010. Recent assemblies have looked at the types of feedback that teachers provide and how pupils can use it to improve their learning. An example would be repeatedly looking at past exam papers but not checking your answers with your teacher to find out whether your answers are any good or asking what you can do to improve them. The presentation on Feedback can be accessed in the Pupil Area- Home Learning and Pupil Revision section of the website should you wish to discuss it with your child.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Pupil Assessment

Senior pupils have been experiencing a heavy assessment load, this is due to the requirement by the Scottish Qualifications Authority that the levels that pupils will sit their May final exams at must be decided by 10 November. This primarily affects National 4 and 5 but also the boundary between National 5 and Higher. The SQA are clear that any changes after that date are an exception. We will come back to you with our recommendations in November. The timescale for returns will be very tight due to the holidays and we will only be asking for returns where you are not in agreement with our assessment of level.

The heavy assessment load that pupils are finding themselves involved with can put them under pressure and we aim to support pupils through the process both in class and through the work of the Guidance team. The flip side of this workload is that we are seeing pupils working with a far greater focus at this stage. Often we have been concerned that they have not started studying or reinforcing learning and revision early enough and have then had to cram in March and April. Our mantra is that consistent application through the school year and from S1 to S6 is crucial to success. Steady application throughout the year will mean that pupils in S4-6 are far better placed for prelims in January and the final exams in May.

SQA Questions and Answers and Raising Attainment Evening 8 Nov 2017

So that you can gain a better understanding of the changes to National 5 this year and Higher next year plus the procedural issues we have invited Robert Fraser the SQAs Liaison Manager to do a presentation for parents. This will be on **8 Nov 7-8.30pm** in the Staffroom at the Academy. We will also take you through our Raising Attainment Strategies and Approaches and a short presentation on the current trends in the Job market both nationally and locally. These are designed to enable you to support your child's attainment and decision making around careers. While this is most useful for parents who have children in S4 and 6 it will be very relevant for parents of S3 pupils who will be entering national courses in June 2018.

Staffing

You may recall that my last letter highlighted further changes with Mr Evans and Mr Rigg leaving us. We have been successful in recruiting replacements for them and Mr C Wilson has joined us this week in the Business and ICT Faculty while Mrs K Matheson will join us after the October break to teach modern Studies in the Humanities faculty. Unfortunately Dr Luchoomun has been successful in securing a Physics post closer to his home and he will leave us in mid-November. Cover is in place and we are currently recruiting for a permanent replacement. I have to go into hospital for a short planned procedure which is likely to be in November and expect to be off for a short while to recuperate. We will alert you to this when the timing is confirmed. Mrs O'Brien will be Acting Head Teacher in my absence.

Sponsored Walk

Our annual sponsored walk took place around Durriss Forest and was a great success. The sun shone and over 600 pupils and staff completed the walk. A number of pupils have still to return their sponsor forms and money and, if your child is in this situation, we would ask that you ensure they do as soon as possible so that we can announce the figure raised and make donations to local charities involved in supporting Mental Health issues. We are currently exploring whether it would be possible to set up a Just Giving page or through the Aberdeenshire website for next year so that parents could pay directly into that rather than having to submit envelopes of money.

Portlethen Academy Parent Council Meeting

The next meeting of the Parent Council is on Wed 15 November at 7pm. Please note this a **change** from the date in the last letter. The meeting schedule for the remainder of the year is:

Term 3 Thurs 18 January Wed 28 February

Term 4 Thurs 26 April Wed 6 June

All meetings are in the Academy staffroom from 7pm.

School Website

As highlighted in my last letter we are redeveloping the website. We are making steady progress and now have a number of items in the Parents and Pupils sections that have a focus on revision and raising pupil attainment. I would encourage you to visit these and discuss the content with your son/daughter.

S1 Parents' Information and Experience Evening Thursday 16 November

We would like to invite parents of S1 pupils to an information and experience evening at 7 pm on the above date. There will be a lesson experience in Music, input from our community learning and development colleagues on Safe use of Social Media and information on current job market trends to help parents support their child over the years ahead.

Twitter

Since I last wrote we have developed a range of Twitter feeds for faculties and if you access the school feed @PortyAcad these are regularly retweeted and you will be able to follow each of them. While Twitter is not something everyone is keen on the items we regularly tweet will give you a window into the daily activities of the school with examples of learning and teaching, pupil achievements, study tips and notification of letters and events plus general educational news. If your son or daughter has an achievement outwith school that you would like to share with us please let us know by tweeting yourself and using the @PortyAcad link in your post or email us at portlethen.aca@aberdeenshire.gov.uk Thank you for your support.

Calendar dates for next term

Wednesday 8 Nov	Scottish Qualifications Authority Presentation and Raising Attainment Talk, Academy Staffroom
Monday 13 Nov	In Service training Day
Tuesday 14 Nov	In service training day
Wednesday 15 Nov	Parent Council Meeting Academy Staffroom 7-8.30pm
Thursday 16 Nov	S1 Parents' Information and Experience Evening 7 pm Academy Theatre
Thurs 23 and Tues 28 Nov	Senior Phase Parents Evenings (Parents attend one or the other date)
Wed 13 Dec	Annual Xmas concert
Mon 18-Wed 20 Dec	School Panto
Friday 22 Dec	School closes for end of term at 3.30pm.

I hope your son/daughter has good break during the October holidays and we look forward to seeing them back in school on Monday 30 October.

Yours faithfully



Neil Morrison
Head Teacher