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Dear Parent/Carer

### **Working Together to Get the Best Grades for our Young People**

I'm writing to you following our recent S4-6 Parents' Evenings and before we begin prelims in mid-January. Firstly, thank you to all parents and carers who attended these evenings. The conversations which happen there are crucial in supporting our young people to gain their best grades. Discussions there between parents, pupils and staff highlighted several areas where more information might prove helpful, hence this letter.

The first point is to highlight again the advice we have available about revision approaches which are available on our website:

**Study Leaflet: this is a short leaflet highlighting key approaches to study**

<http://portlethenacademy.aberdeenshire.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Raising-Attainment-in-the-Senior-Phase-Booklet.pdf>

**Study Booklet: covers a range of revision approaches and detailed advice**

<http://portlethenacademy.aberdeenshire.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Study-Skills-Booklet.pdf>

Guidance staff emphasise these materials with pupils in Personal and Social Education. Subject staff, too, constantly reference suitable work to go over and approaches to take.

There are a number of on-line supports which Senior Phase pupils can access. For some subjects Scholar is available. This is a great resource and all pupils have been in sessions which have shown how this works. We ask that you encourage your child to use the available resources and to have create structured time to complete classwork; to read over work to check for understanding; to do sections of past papers; and to do any homework set.

Sadly, the old adage "fail to prepare and you prepare to fail" is often true. My second point is to stress the need for planned revision time. Many of our pupils have clear structured revision plans already but a number do not. It is crucial that those who do not yet have study plans, or who are not committing enough time, do so as a priority.

National 5 courses are demanding and on average only 34% of young people each year will pass Mathematics nationally and around 60% will pass English. If your child is aiming for Higher – and many of ours do - they will require an A or a B at National 5 to enter the course. One of the key ways to support this is to complete 45 minutes of revision/Past Papers/reading over their work per subject on top of any set formal homework.

When pupils move to Higher the expectation, if they are to be successful, would be a minimum of an hour or, ideally, more per subject. Young people can struggle to manage this time and stay focused on their work. It is here that you as parents or carers, can play a hugely supportive role. This can involve helping with planning; creating a study area; ensuring they have the resources; and quiet time. We would encourage our pupils to build in screen-free time as exams are predominantly screen free and it is crucial they practice working under those conditions.

A further topic which arose from the Parents' Evenings is pupils resitting National 5 or Higher. Many do not appear to have changed their habits or approaches from their first attempt the previous year. They assume perhaps that they are repeating the same ground so will pick it up. Using another adage "if you keep doing what you have always done, you will get what you have always got". It is crucial that they review what they did or did not do and change those approaches to more effective ones. Usually, though not exclusively, this means a greater emphasis on past papers and revision.

Many young people find the senior phase stressful and can be anxious about exams. A key way to remove this is to ensure that they revise, gain understanding from the start of the course, and are prepared. Reading over work, practising exam questions and then asking their teachers for support at an early stage gives reassurance and stops difficulties building up. Staff are always available during class for this and will explain difficulties that pupils come to them with. Many faculties run lunchtime or after-school support sessions as well or make themselves available in their non-class contact time. Many of these sessions are poorly attended despite pupils asking for more of them so it is essential they take advantage of the ones offered. Pupils are aware of these and after New Year and the prelims we will publish a full list of the options.

I hope the above proves helpful in clarifying some of the expectations and supports available and please do not hesitate to contact the school if you wish to discuss how best to support your child's studies.

We, like you, are keen to help them in the words of the school motto: *Be the best you can be.*

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Neil Morrison', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Neil Morrison**  
**Head Teacher**