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Dear Parent/Carer

We are now into our second term and I'd like to take the opportunity to update you on some of our news from the last term and some key areas of information for you. I will start with two sets of congratulations.

The first of these is for all pupils who sat exams and received results back in August. Many of our pupils did very well and are now progressing within the school or beyond school in employment and further training or education. S4 (now S5) did particularly well and there were a significant number of As. This was the case, most notably, in Maths with many pupils excelling. This is a great testimony to pupils and staff. A key request we would have is that you reinforce the message around attainment. This is that all work in the Broad General Education (S1-3), and S3 in particular, provides the building blocks for exam success in the Senior Phase. It is essential pupils apply themselves at all times and realise that knowledge and skills learnt here directly relate to S4 – S6.

The second area for congratulation is in relation to pupils' attitude and effort this year. Overwhelmingly it has been excellent: there has been a really positive atmosphere in school. Uniform is tremendous with virtually all pupils consistently smart and complying. Only a handful are in non-black shoes and if we can crack that we will be sitting at 100% of our pupils in full uniform. The sense of community and common purpose the uniform gives us is vital and is another factor that builds our reputation, impresses visitors and receives favourable comment when our pupils are out and about. This does not happen without effort and I want to thank parents and carers for your support in this. It is important that pupils sustain this as they grow, need new clothes and shoes and we ask that replacements are in line with our uniform code.

Staffing

You may recall that our pre summer letter highlighted significant staff changes. A number of new staff joined us after summer. Since then, Ms Hudgins joined us as Principal Teacher of Science and Mrs Anderson as Principal Teacher of the English Faculty. Mr Barrera left us in Maths to return to the Oil and Gas sector and Mrs Duncan (Drama) has moved from the area. We thank them for their efforts on behalf of our pupils. We have cover arrangements in place and have been very fortunate in being able to secure experienced staff for this (including some of our own staff who have increased their part-time commitments). We are in the process of recruiting for replacements. Teacher recruitment and supply cover in the event of absence or vacancies are significant issues across Scotland. In the North East they are particularly difficult and we are fortunate that we have, so far, been able to fill vacancies and secure cover. This is in no small part down to the positive reputation that our pupils, staff and wider community create.

Sponsored Walk

Despite a poor forecast and disappointing weather on the day, our annual sponsored walk took place around Durris Forest on Friday 22 September. We shortened the route and slightly delayed the start and over 550 pupils and staff had a successful walk which has raised over £7,000. This will enable donations to charity (those supporting Cancer are the main recipients this year). It will also allow funds to support opportunities for pupils beyond the normal curriculum.

Portlethen Academy Parent Council Meetings

Our Parent Council is currently in the process of reshaping itself. The previous office bearers have had to step down from their positions due to changes in circumstances. They have worked hard to support the school and the Parent Council. We wish to thank them for this. We are now in an interim process where I will work with new office bearers to establish a new committee and way forward. All parents are able to attend Parent Council and if anyone is interested in one of the office bearer posts and wishes to discuss this, please do not hesitate to contact me via the school office.

Our Parent Council supports the school both financially through their fund raising and by working in partnership around school matters. They have recently been involved in consultations around reporting, the school's vision and the Scottish Government's School Governance Review. They are always keen to recruit new members and the practice is to allow new members time to settle in before picking up posts. All parents are welcome and we look forward to seeing new members at the meetings. The remaining dates for this session are:

Term 3

Thurs 10 January

Wed 27 February

Term 4

Thurs 25 April

Wed 5 June

All meetings are in the Academy staffroom from 7pm.

Senior Phase Attainment

Pupils in the senior phase (S4-6) are at a key time in the school year with course work building to prelims soon after the New Year. Homework and structured revision is key to success and the two booklets below offer advice and help.

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>

Senior phase pupils can also access on line support through Scholar and all pupils have been in sessions which have shown how this works. A number of subjects already offer revision or catch up sessions and these are advertised to pupils in their subject time. Usually we offer more of these after the Christmas holidays and we will provide a full listing with timings then. In the meantime we ask that you encourage your child to use the resources that are available and to have clear structured time to complete classwork, to read over work to check for understanding, to do sections of past papers and to do any set homework.

ICT Changes

Over the weekend of 11 and 12 November the school will migrate from our current ICT servers to a cloud based system which will give us access to Microsoft Office 365, all the functionality of Microsoft Teams for Education and Cloud based data storage. I am sure many parents will have experienced these ICT migrations in their own workplace. We have put significant resource and planning into the process and our choice of timing is so that staff can test the system and familiarise themselves on the INSET days before young people return on 14 November. The major change for pupils is that they must store all their work in GLOW and staff have worked with them to highlight how to do this so that, by now, they should all have transferred any work they need to retain.

Calendar Dates

In-service Day	Mon 12 Nov
In-service Day	Tue 13 Nov
S4/5/6 Parents' Evening	Thur 22 Nov
S4/5/6 Parents' Evening	Tue 27 Nov
Christmas Concert	Wed 12 Dec
End of Winter Term	Fri 21 Dec

Parents Evening Booking System

As parents and carers of S4-6 pupils will know we are currently introducing a new web based booking system. We have had a number of issues with the system and want to thank you for your patience while we have worked with technical support to resolve these.

Contacting the school

We always try to respond to parental contact as quickly as possible. We have recently had a few occasions when parents have arrived at reception hoping to see staff about their child and we have been unable to manage this due to meetings or timetabled teaching commitments. We ask that you phone and make an appointment to avoid disappointment and so that we can respond to you when we do meet. This can be done through the school office (01224 782174) who will direct your calls to the most appropriate person. This will normally be your child's Guidance Teacher. If emailing the school please use the general email Portlethen.aca@aberdeenshire.gov.uk highlighting whose attention it is for and this will be forwarded by the school office.

Email Communication with Parents/Carers

As you will be aware we have made a significant effort to ensure we have up to date emails for families (although our Management Information System only allows us one per family). We now have emails for the families of over 800 of our 819 pupils. This has allowed us to reduce our costs and we are now able to email information and letters rather than ask you to hunt through bag mail and respond to short texts. We will still use text alerts but will endeavour to use email much more frequently. If you have not already signed up or your email changes please contact the school office with details.

Procedures for Pupil Illness in School

We have clear procedures that when a pupil is ill they alert a member of staff and we will then make contact with parents if it is necessary to send them home. Occasionally a pupil makes direct contact with their parent and then leaves the building without our knowledge. It is only after all our various checks that we can establish that they are safe. Your child should not be contacting you in class time and even if they wait until break or lunch we need to know that pupils are safe and have not left for home without our knowledge. We ask that if your child contacts you because they are unwell you ask them to alert a member of staff as per our procedures and that you also alert the school office. We will then work through our procedures and get back to you. This is a key Health and Safety issue and our system is designed to cause the minimum disruption while ensuring safety. At any point in the day that a young person needs to make contact with home we have procedures to allow this which are managed by teaching, nursing and office staff.

Twitter

Many parents already follow the school's Twitter feed which aims to give a window into activities in school. In addition to the main school feed a number of faculties also post items. PE, Home Economics, Design and Technology, Science and Music all post regularly. These are all signposted and retweeted on the school's main twitter feed and I would encourage you to have a look and follow them if interested. Twitter is not our formal means of communication and if you have queries or need to contact the school please do so through the school office or the general email.

Thank you for your support. The success of the pupils - and the school as a whole - is founded upon the partnership with parents and carers. I look forward to meeting many of you at the forthcoming Parents' Evenings and then the Christmas Concert.

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