



20 September 2019

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Dear Parent/Carer

Working Together to Get the Best Grades for our Young People

Now that our courses are well under way and your young person will have a settled timetable I'm writing to you to make you aware of the range of strategies and support materials that are available to you to support your young person in making the most of this academic session.

The first point is to highlight the advice we have available about revision approaches and these 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 have highlighted these materials with pupils in Personal and Social Education and subject staff constantly reference suitable work to go over and approaches to take.

Senior Phase pupils can also access on line support for some subjects through Scholar and after the next two weeks, all pupils will have had a session with one of Scholar's advisors demonstrating how to make use of this resource. Your young person will also have been given a card with their login and password details which they should keep safe.

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.

The old adage "fail to prepare and you prepare to fail" is sadly often true and 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 that do not yet have study plans or who are not committing enough time do so as a matter of priority. National 5 courses are demanding and to exemplify this, just over 40% of S4 pupils nationally managed to achieve a pass in National 5 Mathematics in session 2017/2018, while just over 65% managed to pass National 5 English.

An A or a B at National 5 is the entry level required for Higher. We would expect young people studying National 5 to be doing a minimum of two hours per week 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 two and a half hours and, ideally, more per subject. Young people can struggle to manage this time and keep it focused on their work and it is here that parents can play a hugely supportive role. This can involve helping with planning, creating a study area and 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.

Some pupils will this session be resitting National 5 or Higher courses and will need to change their habits or approaches from the first time they sat it. They may perhaps assume that they are going over 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 to more effective approaches. 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 will always find time to 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 pupil's 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 listing of the options.

In early January 2020, we will embark upon our prelim examinations and I would encourage your young person to ensure that they treat this as seriously as their final examination. Each year, we have some pupils who cannot physically sit a final examination due to ill health and in these cases their prelim examination papers become an important source of evidence. It is hugely important that these examinations are treated as seriously as the final examinations.

Prior to this, you will have an opportunity to meet your young person's teachers at one of our Senior Phase Parents' Evenings which will take place on Thursday 28th November 2019 and Tuesday 3rd December 2019. If it is possible for you to make it along to this, I would encourage you to do so as you may pick up some practical tips on how best to support your young person in each subject that they are studying.

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 to support your child's studies.

Yours sincerely

Craig Cowie

Depute Head Teacher