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11 December 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

Portlethen Academy School Closure 7 December 2017

Firstly we would like to thank you for your prompt response to the closure on Thursday last which meant that no pupil arrived at the school. We fully appreciate the inconvenience this is likely to have caused. Moreover, we are keenly aware that you may be anxious with regard to the reasons for the closure and the ongoing structural integrity of the Academy building. The following aims to provide clarity on these matters.

The reason for the closure was the extraordinarily high wind forecast (over 70mph) for Thursday 7 December and was a precautionary measure by Robertson Eastern who own the building. This was first communicated by them to Mr Morrison/School staff at around 21.30 on Wednesday 6 December. Mr Morrison consulted with Maria Walker, our Director of Education, and on safety grounds the decision was taken to communicate the closure. Our normal closure procedures were then put in place to provide as much warning as possible to pupils, families and staff. Our Twitter account, which is not one of our formal means of communication, proved particularly useful in spreading the word that night and a formal text was issued in the morning.

Throughout Thursday 7 December Mrs Thompson Wright (Support Services Co-ordinator) and I were in extensive consultation with all the relevant parties both within Aberdeenshire and Robertson Eastern to establish the situation with regard to the safety of the building and its reopening. Throughout these discussions the safety of pupils, staff and the wider community were uppermost. Independent structural engineers surveyed the school late on Thursday after the winds had peaked and gave the building a clean bill of health to reopen with the survey stating "there are no obvious signs of movement, distress or deterioration to the external masonry walls".

Further information discussed during the day and relevant to the decision that the building was safe to reopen was that wind gust speeds in excess of 70mph have only been recorded twice in the Aberdeen area in the 12 years the building has been open. Furthermore, a number of structural enhancements were carried out to the building during this year's school summer holidays which included the following:

- Additional head restraints to the tops of walls.
- Installation of remedial wall ties in several areas.
- Installation of wall straps to enhance the connection between the steelwork and the masonry.

After these remedial works, the building is structurally stronger than when these wind gust events occurred in May and December 2011. However, as Robertson Eastern did decide to close the school on precautionary grounds, they intend moving forward the schedule of further remediation work to ensure that the school will not have to be closed in future if extraordinarily high winds are forecast. These works are intended to be completed by 8 January 2018 and will take place outwith school hours. In the interim, Robertson have agreed a clear set of procedures for communication with the school and Aberdeenshire to notify any concerns. In the unlikely event of further extraordinarily high winds being forecast before 8 January this will allow us to better plan and coordinate any closure.

I trust this clarifies the situation and provides reassurance.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary O'Brien', written in a cursive style.

Mary O'Brien
Acting Headteacher