

Dear Parent/Carer,

Social Gatherings, Weekend of 5 and 6 September 2020

After hearing of two extended social gatherings over the weekend, I thought it essential that I write to you. Detail is hard to come by, but each apparently involved 20-30 of our senior pupils, mainly S6. Scottish Government advice is clear that:

“Public gatherings inside or outside are still prohibited except for the following exception:

- *where a gathering is of people from up to five households (outdoors) or three households (indoors). If someone from one of those households requires a carer, from another household, to assist them for their health and wellbeing, that carer is also permitted to attend”*

Clearly these events did not involve all our senior pupils and we wish to recognise the good choices and actions that the overwhelming majority of young adults are making in school and the community. The concern is that some young people do not understand the connection between school and the wider community or foresee the potential implications. These are:

- **Risk to vulnerable members of the school and wider community:** While young people appear to contract mild or minimal symptoms we have vulnerable young people and staff for whom Covid 19 could be much more serious. There does not seem to be any particular rhyme or reason to how Covid 19 can affect a young person so we just do not know who will be susceptible and there is also the risk of transmission to family and the wider community. Evidentially, house parties and large gatherings are spreaders of Covid 19. We saw this in the Portlethen area where transmission at a large social gathering led to a number of pupils missing learning for up to 2 weeks. Fortunately, there was no transmission in school and none were seriously impacted though missing 2 weeks learning at this time is concerning.
- **Potential School Closures:** If these gatherings led to transmission of infection in school whole or partial school closure could result. This could mean pupils reverting to online learning and you will be familiar with the constraints this imposes from before summer. Many of our young people are now just catching up with their learning. We still do not know the assessment procedures that SQA will apply. Anything that disrupts or prevents learning in school can have significant consequences for future attainment.
- **Reputational Damage:** We have seen what happens when the media focus on a story and create a negative impression. I was surprised there was not further negative media coverage about the cases amongst our young people. This negative publicity can have a long term impact on our young people – for example, when they are applying for jobs - simply by association. Employment opportunities are undoubtedly going to be at a premium as the economy recovers from Covid 19 and we want our pupils to have the best reputation, skills and qualifications.
- **Damage to teacher/pupil relationships:** our staff are wholly committed to the school’s return and providing face to face teaching. Many have overcome their own anxieties and are working

in an environment that is tiring and stressful. They have made significant steps to introduce practical work and to provide in-class support for pupils when this is not always the norm elsewhere. We know our young people and try to take account of their age and stage. However, it can be difficult to reconcile our commitment to our young folk, if some of them are perceived to disregard teachers' safety.

The wider implications of increased Covid 19 infection and transmission can be seen through the restrictions currently in place in the Glasgow area and none of us wish a return to any kind of lockdown with all that entails. The Scottish Government advice can seem complex and contradictory at times. Notably, the one around social gathering is clear. I ask that you support us in ensuring our young people follow the Scottish Government instruction so that we can all do our very best to ensure learning and teaching continues without interruption. Furthermore, so that all members of our community can be as safe as possible.

Thank you for your support.

Neil Morrison

Head Teacher

Portlethen Academy

8 Sept 2020