

Dear Parent/Carer

School Update 23 October 2020

I hope the October break has been a happy and safe one for you and your families. As mentioned in my letter at the end of term (available in the letters section of the school website), I was very pleased by the way pupils, staff and parents had pulled together to get us through a demanding term. As we prepare for the new term, I wanted to make contact with you and to ask for your continuing support. We have all seen the benefit of schools being open so that young people can socialise and learn. As the incidence of Covid 19 cases has increased and we move into winter, with the usual health issues and fewer opportunities to be outside, it is crucial that we redouble our combined efforts to ensure we do all we can to prevent the transmission of infection within the school and community. We want to limit any periods of time pupils or staff need to be absent from school and self-isolating and avoid any partial or full closures of school. As such I would ask that you revisit our school procedures with your child(ren) prior to their return stressing the need for them to follow these. They can be found here <http://portlethenacademy.aberdeenshire.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Portlethen-Academy-Re-Opening-School-August-2020.pdf>

In particular, I would ask that you stress the following as reminders before they return. They are our own version of the Scottish Government's Facts and, while they are much used, they provide a sound basis for reminding all in the school community.

- **Face Coverings:** Pupils should wear properly fitting face coverings in all public places in the school unless they have an exemption card or are eating and/or drinking (pupils should not wander about while eating and/or drinking). In classes a Red/Amber/Green(RAG) is used to identify whether a face covering is to be worn. This is to allow staff to support pupils by moving amongst pupils in the class and is at the discretion of the teacher. We are aware that face coverings are a barrier or hinderance to communications and this is particularly acute for some. We use the RAG system to facilitate teaching without face coverings. Face coverings must be used on all school transport and where pupils use public services. They are also essential wear when at the shops for lunch.
- **Avoid crowded places where possible:** School is a busy place with nearly 1,000 pupils and staff in it daily. We ask that pupils follow procedures including keeping left and by moving gradually when warning bells sound to get to classes. We are fortunate in having a lot of space compared to many schools. We ask that pupils use their common sense to avoid creating overly crowded spaces and limit their group sizes. We have opened up the theatre as a social area for S1 and this eases pressure on other areas. Pupils can also go outside unless the weather is particularly poor. The canteen is a particularly busy area and pupils should move on if there is an extensive queue and return later rather than spend the same time in the queue. Packed lunches and online food ordering significantly reduce the crowding in the canteen. Pupils should also avoid crowded places, or creating crowding, when out with school eg at ASDA or other local shops.

- **Clean your hands and surfaces regularly:** Pupils should enter by their year group door on every entry to the school and use the designated toilets/changing rooms for handwashing. Pupils can be forgetful, and rigour is essential with this. We also ask that pupils use hand sanitiser regularly and many bring their own. Pupils will also be involved in cleaning desks and equipment in classes.
- **Two-metre distancing:** The Scottish Government does not, currently, advise that young people observe 2 m distancing in schools (and that would be impractical with the numbers we have in school). However, 2 m distancing applies to all non-pupil adults on the site. Pupils should observe 2 m distancing from staff unless this is initiated, to support them, by a member of staff wearing suitable protective wear as identified by Aberdeenshire Council. Staff will also be observing 2m distancing from each other.
- **Self-isolate if you have symptoms:** It is absolutely fundamental that any member of the school community displaying any symptoms of Covid 19 immediately self isolates to help prevent the spread of Covid 19. The nature of the school environment is such that one person with symptoms could be in contact with a significant number of others in a single school day resulting in them having to self-isolate as a precaution. In this respect caution is best and there can be understandable confusion between Covid 19 symptoms and those of all the other bugs that commonly go around. We would rather a pupil has a day or two to establish the nature of any symptoms than they spread illness.

On a final note, I would remind you that we are advised to ensure good ventilation at all times in school and this leads to rooms being cooler than normal. Please ensure your child(ren) have suitable black jumpers or fleeces to counter this. We also encourage proper outdoor jackets so that young people can get outside at breaks and lunchtimes.

In conclusion, none of the above should be new to our pupils and many of the messages can seem repetitive, however, they are fundamental to keeping young people and staff healthy. This then allows us to keep the school open for learning. We really appreciate your continuing support in reminding young people and in reinforcing the messages. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Morrison

Head Teacher

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