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19th February 2025

Hello,

I hope you don't mind this old-style communication from me. I know that we send lots of information out via the website and Facebook but I fear much of it is lost in the huge quantity of information we deal with every day. I hope this gives you a different insight into the school and what awaits in the coming months.

For all Parents

Attendance

Across Scotland- and other nations- there is a concern about attendance levels in schools and most particularly about the percentage of pupils who have missed more than 10% of available school days. Last year in Scotland it was 31.4% whereas pre COVID it was consistently around 20%. We are very aware of this phenomenon here also- we have always said 90% was the level below which your chances of success start to drop and it is very apparent that significantly more pupils sit below that line now than in the past. My plea to you today is that between now and the summer when at all possible, please get your child into school. If they start to feel better about 10am we would be delighted to have them in for the remainder of the day. If they only feel better at lunchtime- it is still two lessons they aren't missing that afternoon if they turn up.

Since December I have been doing some additional work with the Council to look at attendance processes and policies. Before I can meaningfully improve them, I need to understand the challenges parents face with school attendance. I have designed a questionnaire that will be shared with you soon and I ask that any parent who struggles to get their child into school takes the three minutes it will require to complete it. It will go out to all 29 secondary schools, but I will get and use the Culloden responses specifically to see how we can improve our support and messaging around attendance- thank you for your help with this.

Uniform

Firstly, I want to thank you for the money invested in school dress code- it is much appreciated and it makes a difference. It matters for that sense of community, it matters for removing an opportunity to belittle or bully but it also really matters for the security of every child and adult in the building. By way of example- twice last week I had to challenge pupils who were in school in non-dress code and were walking along with their hood up, meaning that based on the little of them I could see, I could not identify them and not be sure that they are one of our pupils. It has been quite a while since we have had a pupil from another school come here with malicious intent but it has happened. School dress code makes it much easier to identify potential problems. And in case your young person tells you otherwise- Friday is not a non-uniform day!

Secondly, after Easter we will be starting to work with a new supplier. The company will be at the P7 induction evening and we will share details of their website thereafter. They will offer a few new tops for next session but can I be very clear that hoodies- for the reason mentioned above- will never be part of our school dress code and branded hoodies will continue to be swapped for second hand uniform if pupils wear them as classroom clothing.

Mobile Phone ban

Whilst it was a lot of work to get a policy in place, it definitely feels worthwhile in terms of the improved ability of young people to focus in class. I do not regret stepping away from a total ban as I believe lunchtime and breaktime is for the young people to define and I didn't want to drive hundreds of pupils out of the school at lunch to be allowed to use their phones. Thank you for your support- we do still confiscate a few phones every day when someone forgets the rule but it seems to be an accepted part of school life now.

Vandalism

I try to never publish negative stories about our young people in case potential employers hear them and think less of our kids as possible employees/apprentices. However, I cannot ignore the scale and the regularity of the vandalism to the school toilets. If your child is inconvenienced by some toilets being unavailable- I am genuinely sorry. I have no understanding of why some of our pupils think it is okay to pull down ceiling tiles, smoke alarms and metal frameworks and shove them down the toilet but it is happening and the cost and availability of people to repair the toilets means some toilets are currently blocked off. Similarly, I have no idea why some pupils think it is okay to block the toilets with food and bottles- but they do. The actions of these few individuals is extremely disappointing and evidence of such behaviour will be taken very seriously in terms of consequences. If your child knows anything about who is behind it- please tell us and it will be treated with total confidence.

This ends the section for all parents but below is a small extract for parents of each year group

For Parents of S1 Pupils.

Your young people have arrived, settled and are making the school a better place. Teachers report that they enjoy working with them and they are optimistic that this is a year group who will do good things as they move up the school. You will get a report card for your child in May just before they start their S2 timetable after Activities Week. If you or they have any concerns please remember that your child's Guidance teacher is their first point of contact and you can email them or call the office and ask for a call back.

For Parents of S2 Pupils

I'm pleased to tell you that Mr O'Neill has completed the processing of your young person's choice of course information and reports that we have been able to give every child their choices. I hope they will enjoy their more specialist learning when they reach S3- and I hope they enjoy Activities Week in May which is a new addition to our calendar.

For Parents of S3 Pupils

Choice of course forms- minus a few stragglers- all in now and Mr O'Neill will work to ensure that as many pupils as possible get the choices they want for S4. If a subject has low uptake (less than 10) it may not run, or if it is very popular and more pupils want it than we can staff. If either case relates to your child's choices, Guidance will contact them directly to look at other options. Would you please encourage your child to finish this phase of their education well and to be ready for a significant increase in pace of learning when S4 starts.

For Parents of S4 Pupils.

This was the first year that we carried out the National 5 Prelims before Christmas. At the time we were a little concerned that it might be too soon for them in terms of maturity and focus but we hoped that this would be offset by a much better phase of learning January- March. I'm delighted to say that at this stage that appears to be the case and teachers of S4 report a more serious approach to work, revision and homework which- along with attendance- are the key building blocks of success in exam courses. There will be wobbles, doubts and struggles in the coming months but I hope we can work together to build resilience, good study habits, and focused study time alongside rest and relaxation at the weekend. Please encourage your child to sign up for an account on the Achieve website at <https://achieve.hashtag-learning.co.uk>. This resource has notes, past paper questions and exemplar answers to support learning- thanks again to the Parent Council who paid for it. The code has been reshared in the Year Group Google Classroom.

S4/5 Information Evening is on 26th February and we are trialling a new shorter format. Instead of trying to explain all our new courses to you, there will be a much shorter presentation in the Theatre (30 minutes maximum) followed by the opportunity to speak to representatives of most departments in the social area afterwards. Hopefully by the end of it you will have a clear understanding of what S5 and S6 options will best serve your young person's needs.

For Parents of S5/6 Pupils.

We now have the Higher and Advanced Higher Prelim results and it would be fair to say that there is a lot of work to be done by many of our seniors. You will receive a final report card for the session on 27th February and I would urge you to discuss the working grades with your young person. A working Grade of 1-6 is a pass, 7 is a Grade D (course award, not pass) and below that is no award. Much more importantly are the comments which will almost always include details of the Prelim results. If the result is disappointing, please have an honest conversation with them about how much work they did and how they can change their work effort/use their leisure time to make a difference. There are still over two months to the exams and much can be achieved. Without significant effort however, the picture will not change from what the working grade suggests. The short term pain of less social life, less time working and time away from their phone can lead to the huge long term gain in increased opportunities that a few Higher passes can bring. Please encourage your child to sign up for an account on the Achieve website at <https://achieve.hashtag-learning.co.uk>. This resource has notes, past paper questions and exemplar answers to support learning- thanks again to the Parent Council who paid for it. The code has been reshared in the Year Group Google Classroom.

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I hope the information above is useful and please contact us if you want to discuss it further.

Best wishes,



Dr J Vance
Head Teacher