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Contact: Mr J Lothian

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Date: 5th June 2020

Parent / Carer

Dear Parent/ Carer

I sincerely hope that this letter finds you safe and well.

The purpose of this communication is to give parents and young people within the Perth Academy community a weekly update. This week I have chosen to focus on a short review of where we have come in this lockdown period, and I have given some information about the planning currently underway for a return in August to some physical learning in our building.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the support you are providing for your child's learning at home. We appreciate this can be quite challenging. Our staff are working hard to provide resources and we are always keen to receive feedback from you on your experience of home learning. Please feel free to get in touch directly at perthacademy@pkc.gov.uk if you have any queries whatsoever.

Alternatively, you can contact our parent council at pcperthacademy@gmail.com which is also a helpful point of contact.

You will find this week's update below.

Take care and keep safe.

Best wishes from my house to your house.

Johnny Lothian
Rector

Rector's Update Friday 5th June

Looking back – how far we have come!

Since our closure on March 20th due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this has been a very challenging time for the learners, staff and families of Perth Academy. We have together, worked hard to ensure that learning has continued despite these very challenging circumstances.

The creation of Perth Academy's remote learning systems and processes has been a steep learning curve for all of us and we have learned a lot. I believe that over this period we have continued to improve the offer, using learner and parent feedback.

We have streamlined our approach, using Microsoft Teams as our sole platform. We have supported staff with professional learning, and we have shared the emerging and very good practice we have seen. We have seen more and more live learning sessions coming through as we journeyed through the term as staff become more comfortable with this new medium and protocols have become established. We hope to continue to offer more live sessions in the future as part of our blend of pedagogies.

Perth Academy support staff have spent a large amount of time responding to the needs of learners and families. We have distributed over 70 devices into our community to help young people continue with their learning, including 15 laptops provided through the work of the parent council. We have created resource boxes that sit in our local communities for young people to access.

Since the Easter break, we have successfully implemented a new timetable and our year groups have moved up in their courses, three weeks earlier than planned. The Guidance Team in particular have worked superbly to resolve issues with coursing, one of the many aspects of school that has become more challenging remotely.

Another challenge has been to do our best to support learner engagement. I am encouraged that our tracking processes show that over 75% of learners in the Senior Phase (S4-6) are engaging with their learning since the change of timetable on 4th May. We have taken steps to recognise those who are fully engaged, and we are engaging with families where there are barriers to engagement. I now ask that you stress with your child, particularly if they are in the Senior Phase, the importance of full engagement and return of learning submissions. It is highly likely that the format of the 2021 SQA examination diet will be different from the past and that continuous assessment as well as teacher professional judgement may play more of a role. It is therefore crucial that your child engages with Nationals and Higher courses throughout the year to ensure that assessment evidence is in place to this effect.

Reopening Perth Academy to learners on 11th August 2020

As you will know, we are currently planning for our return in August, provided the medical and scientific evidence assesses it as safe to do so. We cannot wait to see Perth Academy learners here again.

We are taking a measured approach, which will ensure we give due regard to all H & S, hygiene and public health advice. We firstly need to ensure that we have the requisite PPE and that physical and social distancing guidelines are adhered to. Based on current guidelines and the capacity of our building this means that we can have around ten learners in most of our learning spaces at any one time. This immediately brings the number of young people we can have in the building at one time into the 30% to 40% mark. We are looking at how we can increase this capacity safely and we are doing some workforce planning to ensure we can deliver on this model, while also ensuring that staff have time to maintain online learning and respond to learners in this sphere. As you will appreciate, some of our staff, like in any other organisation may be shielding.

We want as many children and young people in school, for as long as possible, as safely as possible. The models we are looking at currently are therefore based on learners being in school on a 1:2 ratio (against remote learning) within the blended learning model. We are also considering the best configuration of contact at this time (for example one day in/two days remote, two days in/four days remote, three days in/six days remote, week in/two weeks remote). We intend to engage with parents on this question within the next week and we will share our plans with you when we make this decision, which will be prior to the end of June. How long these arrangements will remain in place is unknown.

We are considering lunch provision, movement around the school as well as a myriad of other considerations to ensure that all members of our community are safe on their return and stay safe. Given the guidance, we will not be expecting young people to attend school in uniform in August. School uniform is not practical given this guidance. Risk Assessment will require pupils and staff to wear a clean set of clothes to school every day. It is recognised that this will be easier if there is a relaxation on uniform insistence. You have enough to think about in these times without worrying about clean uniforms on a daily basis.

Young people will be expected to wash clothing and/or attend school in clean clothing each day. We will also require young people to participate in safe wellbeing activities, without access to changing facilities. We will send you a suggested dress code for next session for guidance.

We are planning for staff to return at points of over the last two weeks of term. We are considering if and how we can safely allow some young people currently transitioning to Perth Academy to experience a visit to the building in June, if possible.

This work has a complexity and scale that is unprecedented, and I ask for your patience, understanding and support at this time.

The end of term date remains Wednesday 1st July, 10 August is now an inset day and 11 August marks the start of the new term for some children. Changes to the end of term dates for next session are being discussed and agreed presently.

Next week I, along with Mrs. Paul, our Depute who has led on the online learning developments, plan to offer some drop-in meetings (virtually) to allow parents to raise questions with us. I will give you dates and times for these early next week.

I have spoken this week to Declan Gilmore, Chair of our parent council. Declan is working to schedule a Parent Council meeting towards the end of June. I am sure that by working together we will ensure the best possible return to school for all our pupils and staff.

Staffing update

We welcome Mrs Bald (Maths) back from maternity this week. I am delighted to introduce Mr Tyrrell as new teacher of Modern Studies and History and Lyndsey Swailes as our new teacher of English. Cherry Elder also joined the team in Biology last week. Miss Muldoon officially began her role within Clunie House this week.

We say thank you and farewell to Sarah Brown, teacher of Technology, who retired last week.