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Contact: Mr J Lothian

Our ref: JL/MM

Your ref:

Date: 30th April 2020

Parent / Carer

Dear Parent/ Carer

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

The main purpose of this communication is to give parents and young people within the Perth Academy community a weekly update. It is my intention to do this at the end of every week this term to keep you informed. The latest update is at the end of this letter.

I am currently at home, during this pandemic, managing the learning of my own four school aged children (P3-S2) as well as manage the Perth Academy virtual school while my wife continues to work with as a keyworker with the NHS. I can fully understand the challenges you may be facing at home during this time. Many of our staff are in a similar position and are doing their very best to support learning under very challenging circumstances.

I realise that within our community there will be families experiencing the full range of challenges relating to personal and social health and wellbeing, as well as other issues such as economic and fiscal challenges and perhaps anxiety about job security.

It is within this context that I write to you today. We want to stay connected with you. We want to ensure we maintain the effective contact we have with our families. We want to do what we can to support where it is required.

We remain committed to ensuring that we encourage and enable all our learners to continue with their learning from home. We realise that this might be easier in some settings than others depending on your own context and what you are dealing with. We fully appreciate how different it is for children to be at home when they would normally be at school. With this in mind, I just want to reiterate the message that we do not want any parent or child worrying or feeling pressure about learning at home. The home learning is there for young people to access and they should do their best to complete the activities that they can within your family circumstances. Everything in moderation and that includes online learning time.

Please don't be anxious about prioritising spending time as a family doing the things you enjoy over learning time, especially during this glorious weather. At this time, while we are tracking engagement and submission to ensure we can do what we can to reduce barriers for young people where possible, teachers are not tracking progress or making judgements about attainment. There will be plenty of time for this when we return, when we will very

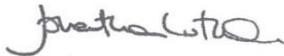
sensitively find out the learning journey each child has taken. This is our job and we will work hard to put time, effort and resources into ensuring children are where they need to be with their learning. No children are behind, no children are ahead. They are exactly where they need to be at this moment. Their mental, physical and emotional wellbeing is currently more important than anything else.

Our staff are working so hard to create learning for your child to engage in. They are ensuring there is enough, but they appreciate that not all young people may be able to do all the work that is set. Tell them not to worry. Please share and discuss this letter with them.

We are all missing your children very much and look forward to life at Perth Academy returning to normal whenever that may be.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact us at perthacademy@pkc.gov.uk if you have any queries whatsoever.

Best wishes from my house to your house.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Johnny Lothian', written in a cursive style.

Johnny Lothian

Rector's Update Thursday 30th April

Online learning

The Perth Academy Online offer has been running for less than four school weeks. We recognise that there is room for improvement in terms of consistency within the offer and within the user experience. Over the next term we are working as school community and engaging in professional learning to develop a blend of online learning that can support our learners across all ages and stages. Over time, we hope to introduce greater interactivity within the online learning offer as we move forward.

Mrs Paul is leading this aspect of our work supported by Mr. Barlow. Thank you to learners who participated in our learner survey. Mrs. Paul will be communicating with all young people via the Year Group assembly Teams to share the feedback of this survey and the actions we have taken as a result.

All learners should check their year group assembly Team at least once a week, preferably at the start of the week to receive updates and key messages from the Senior Leadership Team, Guidance and in relation to online learning. This term there will be a focus on wellbeing and how we can look after ourselves and effectively practice self-care.

Many of our departments are already seeing some superb examples of young people engaging with the learning at home. We aim to share some of these examples with the school community to promote engagement and to spread some sunshine at this time. Our new online twitter feed @Online Perth has been developed for this purpose. Here you will see some examples of learning from within the community as well as some shared resources and advice about learning from home.

Look out for our weekly challenges. Already, our PE department have begun a range of challenges and have been encouraging all of us to stay healthy and active. Look out for the other challenges coming online soon!

Supporting our community

Our community relies on us staying connected. This is a message that I would like you to reiterate with our young people. Connection facilitates mutual support. Please encourage them to stay connected with their friends via messages, calls and video conversations.

Our new Perth Academy Wellbeing twitter feed is an excellent source of advice, strategies and suggestions to support positive wellbeing. @PerthWellbeing

Since lockdown, our support team have been busy contacting and checking in with many of our learners, particularly those who require additional support with their learning. With our partner agencies, we continue to engage with and offer a high degree of support for the families and young people that require it.

Connectivity is essential to learning online and we continue to work with families within our community to remove barriers to getting young people online. So far, we have distributed over thirty tablets to homes and provided some hot spots to allow connectivity. We have additional tablets we can provide to support learning at home on a temporary basis. If your child has a requirement for access to a device at home, please let us know perthacademy@pkc.org.uk

Transition

Regrettably, we will be unable to offer our usual programme of transition for the P7s who will join us in August as the new S1 intake. We recognise that the transition process is hugely helpful for young people prior to what is a significant change. Mrs Birrell is in regular contact with Primary Headteachers to plan for this.

Mrs Birrell and the Support Team are developing an alternative transition process to engage with our P7s over the course of this term. We are developing a YouTube channel for this purpose through which we will share information, make introductions and set some challenges. We will also engage directly with P7s through Microsoft Teams. We know that this can be a worrying time in normal circumstances, so to reduce any current anxiety about transition, P7 children can contact their current teacher with any questions and these will be forwarded for us to answer. Some very helpful general advice about starting secondary school can be found on BBC Bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zj2grj6> We will be in direct contact with P7s and their families shortly with an invitation to join our transition programme.

New timetable

Given that the SQA examination diet has been cancelled, on Monday 4th May, we welcome back our current S4 and S5 students, albeit to online learning. On this date, our current S3 will move into S4. For most, this means a reduction of courses to seven in S4. I will be writing to all current S3-5 students today to advise them what this looks like and give instructions to ensure that this return is as smooth as possible. S1 and S2 will not be changing classes until Monday 1st June.

Term 4 – what’s coming up?

May

- May 4th – current S3-5 students move up into new courses through online platforms
- May 8th – May Day holiday
- May 22nd – Inservice Day for teaching staff
- Over May - Head prefect application process including applications, video presentation and virtual interview. Dates to be confirmed.

June

- June 1st – Change of timetable – All year groups will be moved into new classes and courses through online platforms.
- June 30th - Perth Academy Annual Awards – we will be organising our awards and communicating with the award winners individually. We aim to develop an online / video communication to share the individual and group successes of the year and we will publish lists of winners.

Staffing

The lockdown has not prevented us from recruiting and we have been successful in making appointments through virtual interview processes over the past few weeks. Rosemary Dolan, our current Biology probationer has been successful in gaining a permanent role at Perth Academy.

Hopefully, with recruitment processes running as normal we will have the following new starts joining Perth Academy on 1st June 2020.

Lynsey Swailes – Teacher of English

Thomas Tyrrell – Teacher of Modern Studies and History

Claire Bebbington – Teacher of Music
Cherry Elder – Teacher of Biology

Within the Support Faculty, Mr. Findlay, who teaches in Modern Languages, has now joined Birnam House as teacher of support two days per week and will support Mrs. McGregor with Guidance and pastoral support within the house.

Miss. Muldoon, teacher of English, will perform a similar role within Clunie House on fixed term basis. This starts on 1st June and will last for next session while Mrs. Walker takes maternity leave.

Mr. Ross, DHT Improvement retires at the end of this term and we are currently engaged in a recruitment process for this role, hoping to make an appointment before the end of May. We will keep you informed.

SQA update – teacher estimates

I wrote to all S4-6 parents last week (20th April) providing an update from SQA. This is available on our website. As there are no SQA exams this year, the estimated grade sent to SQA by the school will be the significant factor in the award process. The estimates we send to the SQA this session on the 29th May will be subject to SQA validation and moderation processes. Therefore, Perth & Kinross Council cannot and will not make estimated grades available to pupils or parents and carers until some point after the results are announced on 4th August.

Supporting Parents

Last week, the Scottish Government issued new guidance for staff and parents in relation to learning during this term. Within this documentation there were some helpful resources and suggestions for parents which I link below.

<https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/learning-at-home/covid19/be-at-the-heart-of-your-child-s-learning-during-covid-19/>