

# Harlaw Academy

18-20 Albyn Place, Aberdeen AB10 1RG  
Tel: 01224 589251

E-mail: [HarlawAcademy@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:HarlawAcademy@aberdeencity.gov.uk)  
[www.harlawacademy.aberdeen.sch.uk](http://www.harlawacademy.aberdeen.sch.uk)



Head Teacher:  
Mr R McLaren

8 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

## Headteacher Update

Please can I take this opportunity to wish you a very Happy New Year. I am sure you will agree that this has been a Christmas holiday like no other. Regardless, and despite the challenges that the start of 2021 has brought, I hope you are rested and healthy.

As we look to returning from the Christmas break on Monday 11 January, I write to update you on several key arrangements.

1. **SQA process and prelims**
2. **Keyworker provision**
3. **Distribution of Chromebooks to pupils**
4. **Remote Learning**
5. **Role of Parent and Carer**
6. **Reporting to Parents & Coursing for next session**
7. **Communication from school and ACC**

### 1. SQA process and prelims

My colleague Ms McLellan wrote to you last month detailing the changes to our exam arrangements announced by the DFM, John Swinney, and provided details of our in-school assessment plan, scheduled to take place from Wednesday 18 February to Friday 26 February. This arrangement remains in place but will be revisited in due course.

Clearly there will be implications for our processes caused by this second lockdown. We are working with colleagues across the city and with the SQA to better understand the implications and we will of course adjust our plans. Meantime, in the Senior Phase, it is important that we continue to gather evidence for pupils to support the qualifications they are pursuing. This evidence is required by the SQA in light of the exam cancellations, and staff will be signposting materials to pupils. It is vital that all pupils continue to work on these to ensure they achieve positive outcomes. Teachers will work with pupils to assess progress as we go, and we will issue further advice around SQA assessment as soon as we have the detail from the SQA.

### 2. Keyworker provision

All parents and carers received communication directly from ACC in December outlining the process for applying for Keyworker childcare/support. A number of applications were received and processed with confirmation of places being communicated over the past two days. ACC wrote to all parents and carers on Wednesday detailing this process again and included a link to the latest application process. This letter can be found on our website in the "Latest news" section. I am, of course, happy to discuss any concerns you might have in relation to this process.



### **3. Distribution of Chromebooks to pupils**

As I indicated in my last update of 2020, we began issuing 350 Chromebooks to pupils in S4-6 in the last few weeks of term. Despite the National shortage of devices, we have obtained a further 420 devices. These are due to arrive imminently. As soon as they arrive, we will begin issuing these to pupils in S1-3. We believe we now have enough Chromebooks to ensure that every pupil will be issued with one. Any pupil in S4-6 who did not receive, or initially declined a Chromebook, will be invited in to collect a device in a very carefully managed process ensuring we limit contact and ensuring the most COVID secure practices.

If you do not have access to wi-fi, please contact the school office and let us know. We will be able to provide a wi-fi device that will allow the Chromebook to access the internet.

### **4. Remote Learning**

As you are aware, shortly after we broke up for the Christmas Holiday, the First Minister announced we would be reverting to remote learning for a week prior to a full return to schooling. Nicola Sturgeon then advised on Monday of this week that this would be extended until at least 1 February. Over the past three days, our staff have been working incredibly hard to prepare our online offer.

I would wish to confirm that we are in a better place this time around. Colleagues have been attending refresher training as well as preparing resources which will allow us to provide our remote learning offer starting on Monday 11 January 2021.

It is our intention to share details of this offer today and we will provide specific breakdowns per year group and by curricular area, outlining our expectations of pupils. We intend to refine and update during the course of next week and you will receive a further update next week. At the end of the second week, we will ask you to complete a feedback questionnaire to help us better understand how our offer is working.

I would ask all parents and carers to understand that all teaching staff have been advised by their Trade Unions that no Headteacher can mandate face to face online teaching. That said, I have asked colleagues that they consider it. I have been really encouraged that so many colleagues have indicated their willingness to do so.

I would wish to take this opportunity to thank all staff in school who have worked incredibly hard in a very short space of time to produce an offer that we should all feel very proud of. That said, I think it will continue to grow and adapt as needed.

### **5. Role of Parent and Carer**

Over the coming weeks, please do not underestimate the role you play in this process. That said, I know parents and carers are feeling very anxious about this. We know you are not educationalists, there is no expectation you will “teach” your children, but you can assist them by doing the following;

- i. Encourage positive routines. Appropriate ‘wake up’ and ‘going to bed’ timings.
- ii. Motivate engagement by asking questions like “tell me something you learned today” and asking them to explain it to you. Have them explain what their working week looks like.
- iii. Help deepen understanding by reading through their work and asking questions about it.
- iv. Support them by limiting time on social media platforms. There is no doubt that following the first lockdown, pupil’s ability to form and sustain relationships had been impacted by behaviours adopted on social media. It is so much more difficult to gauge tone and empathy.
- v. Engage in healthy routines that involve regular eating patterns and exercise.
- vi. Encourage pupils to attend interactive learning opportunities offered by teachers.



- vii. Reach out to your child's guidance teacher if you feel something isn't quite right. We are here to support you.
- viii. Be positive about school. Children often carry the feelings of the adults they spend most time with. You are the greatest influence in their lives and your positivity will rub off.

**6. Reporting to parents & Coursing for next session**

We published our reporting schedule in my last HT update. I stated that I felt this was an ambitious offer, but I believe we are still capable of delivering it. Under normal circumstances, we would send "Report cards" home via pupil school bags. We are currently investigating other options but are committed to getting this information to you.

Over the course of this term, we will be carrying out both our coursing processes and a review of our curriculum structure. This follows feedback from pupils, parents, staff and Education Scotland. Plans will be put in place and reflect the position we find ourselves in at the time.

**7. Communication from school and ACC**

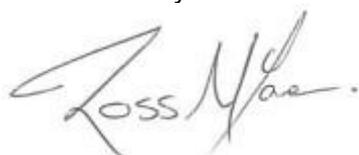
I would wish to thank the 283 members of our parental group who responded to my survey this week. In total there were just over 550 comments across the two sections, there were approximately 150 unique questions. Most of which fell into the six categories listed above. There were of course some pupil specific questions which I will pass on to the Guidance team and ask that they contact parents of those children directly. What was clear is that a number of the questions posed relate to information provided by ACC over the Christmas break or through my two most recent HT updates. I appreciate that these are stressful times and that there is a lot of information to take in. If you feel you still have questions, please do check our school website for our latest news section, visit the Harlaw Academy Parent Council Facebook site or visit the Education Aberdeen Twitter feed. There is a genuine attempt to get the information out, but I fear it is not reaching some of you.

There is no doubt that the coming weeks and months will be challenging. Uncertainty breeds anxiety in us all. The ever-changing landscape we face in each aspect of our lives of course makes it difficult to write to you citing a firm long-term plan.

Please can I take this opportunity to try to reassure you that my colleagues are doing their utmost to react to these uncertain times and, in the most challenging of circumstances, continue to demonstrate resilience, professionalism and dedication well beyond that which is reasonable to expect of them. This effort and mindset are equally evident in our pupils. They remain a credit to themselves, their school and to you.

I wish you the very best for 2021, and together, we will meet the challenges ahead.

Yours sincerely



Mr R McLaren  
Headteacher

