

Harlaw Academy

18-20 Albyn Place
Aberdeen
AB10 1RG
Headteacher: Mr R McLaren



21 December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Headteacher Update

It has been a busy year in Harlaw Academy. The past four months have again flown by as we have worked together across a range of different challenges. As 2021 nears an end, I write again to provide an update on several key matters. Please take a moment to read through at your convenience.

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1. [COVID - 19 Omicron Update](#)

Over the past few months, staff and pupils have worked hard following mitigations and procedures designed to keep us all safe from possible transmission. As society at large has reduced the levels of required mitigation, we too, have tried to return to more routine practices as much as has been possible. That said, the latest information being presented by Scottish Government makes quite clear the dangers we face in the coming months.

Last week, Scottish Government produced updated guidance for schools due to be implemented in January. We have, of course, been working with this over the past week and have drafted an update on procedures and protocols for our January term. That said, we are also aware that further information is due to be published on 28 December. Therefore, given the changing landscape, our School's Leadership team will meet shortly before we return to school after the New Year and we will issue an update **prior to pupils returning on Thursday 6 January**. This will take account of the most up to date information available at the time.

2. Education Scotland Visit

Following the 2019 Education Scotland Inspection, representatives of the HMIE team visited Harlaw Academy at the end of November. The purpose of their visit was twofold; firstly, to see first-hand how the school had responded to the challenges posed by the Pandemic; and secondly to measure our progress against their 2019 recommendations and provide further guidance where required.

Education Scotland visits are a welcome opportunity to quality assure our own self-evaluation processes and help ensure we are continuing to move the school forward. I would wish to publicly thank all pupils, staff, parents and partners who engaged with the process during the visit, but more so for their continued efforts leading up to it. Education Scotland intend to write to parents early in the new term with an update.

3. Chromebook Rollout

Over the past 12 months, we have purchased and allocated a chromebook to all 1000 pupils who attend Harlaw Academy. Around 975 have taken possession and are now in a position to use their device both in school and at home.

Mr Blance has been working with colleagues in school to test and repair our school Wifi. This, along with an upgrade to our allocated bandwidth, means that we are confident all 1000 devices can now access our systems at a time. Consequently, over the coming weeks, you will receive a number of updates regarding our plans to use, charge and store devices in addition to how pupils manage them at home. These are exciting times - our digital offer has never been stronger. Any pupil who has not taken up the offer of their Chromebook can still do so and need only let their Guidance Teacher know they have changed their minds.

4. Senior Phase Prelim diet 2021/22

Following consultation with staff and pupils, it is our intention to undertake a prelim exam diet in January. Whilst we are keen to ensure the use of continuous course assessment provides the mainstay for teacher judgement when producing estimate grades, we are aware none of the current senior school has ever sat a formal exam. Therefore, the importance of having the opportunity to experience this prior to the May exam diet is clear.

Our current plans are in keeping with national Guidance at this stage but are, of course, subject to review and adaptation should advice dictate.

5. Building works – front of school

As you are aware, our new barrier entry system and pupil footpath were installed over the Summer. Over the past few months, we have adapted our procedures to try and ensure that we keep pupils safe from moving traffic whilst balancing the needs of road users. Essentially, we have settled on the principle that vehicles should not be moving in the car park whilst there are pupils there before and after school and during break and lunch times. To this end, our barriers will not be active during these times.

We would kindly ask any parent visiting the school to adhere to this principle. Signage is due to be erected in the new year which will detail this for drivers unfamiliar with our processes.

6. Building works – pupil toilets

I am happy to announce that from the Easter Holiday, work will begin to upgrade our pupil toilets. This will be an extensive programme of improvement. We have six existing toilet blocks which are due to be upgraded along with two brand new refits. At this stage, the plan is to carry out work to one block during Easter, and up to four blocks during the Summer. The remainder of the renovations will be undertaken the following session.

Going forward, a significant piece of work will be undertaken with pupils concerning the importance of respecting these facilities for the benefit of all.

7. Pupil Mobile phones

One of the biggest differences we have seen in pupils following two periods of school closure relates to the use of mobile phones. Whilst this has been an issue for some time, staff report they have seen an increase in the inappropriate use of devices during class time. We appreciate a number of pupils will be hoping for an upgrade over Christmas but ask parents to have a conversation with their children about whether or not the mobile really needs to come to school and if not, could it stay at home. We would really appreciate your support in this matter.

8. School Uniform

There is an expectation that pupils who attend Harlaw Academy will adhere to our dress code.

Please can I take this opportunity again to remind you that our current dress code requires pupils to adhere to the following uniform standards:

S1-3 Pupils

- Black tailored trousers or skirt
- Harlaw Academy polo shirt
- Harlaw Academy sweatshirt

S4-6 Pupils

- Black tailored trousers or skirt
- Blue or white shirt with school tie
- Harlaw Academy Blazer

Our full uniform information can be viewed here - <https://harlawacademy.aberdeen.sch.uk/uniform/>

Whilst we appreciate that uniform can be expensive, I would like to remind you that the school is able to provide assistance with this. If you would like to discuss, please contact your child's Guidance teacher.

As stated previously, the current national picture is evolving. Over the holiday period, we will continue to review guidance as it becomes available and will, of course, keep you updated as required.

I wish you and your families a very peaceful holiday. Please keep safe and healthy. We look forward to welcoming pupils back on Thursday 6 January 2022.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ross McLaren". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and 'M'.

Mr R. McLaren
Headteacher