



ELLON ACADEMY UP-DATE FOR PARENTS/CARERS

To: All Parents and Carers
From: Pauline Buchan, Rector
Subject: Information Up-date
Date: 1st May 2020

Quote of the Week beginning 4.5.20:



Message from the Rector

As we continue with home learning, I thought it would be useful to share some thoughts with you about how this is going, and what we plan for the next few weeks. This has been informed by the dialogue we continue to have with all staff and faculty Principal Teachers, from the contact we have with our pupils, and from feedback and discussions with parents/carers and the Parent Council.

On-line Learning

Having personally spoken to every member of teaching and non-teaching staff this week, I know that teaching and learning continues across the curriculum, and a range of tasks are being set by all subjects. However, because we don't have our learners in front of us currently, we don't have the usual overview of the range and volume of tasks set for individuals. To address this, staff are now working on a weekly plan to share the learning of the week with you and we anticipate that we will be in a position to share this first weekly plan with you on Friday 8th May, in preparation for the week beginning Mon 11th May. It is important, therefore, that you reassure your child that they can only do what is manageable for them. We recognise that everyone's home situations are different, and that it simply may not be possible for learners to complete every task that is set. This is absolutely fine.

We have also discussed with teachers that families' circumstances may be changing quickly currently. We do not always know what some families may be dealing with, and we appreciate that this is an unsettled time for everyone, including our school staff. With this in mind, we will continue to provide teaching and learning opportunities, but we understand that there may be times when pupils are simply unable to engage with lessons or activities. Teachers will always aim to give appropriate feedback to learners, but this might not be within our usual timescales. We also recognise that many parents/carers are also working from home, and we appreciate first-hand (because we too are learning to work from home) the challenges and changes this can bring. For example, families might be sharing digital devices; connectivity might be intermittent; or space for everyone to work quietly might be in demand. Again, we can only expect learners to do what is possible with the time, space and resources that they have. If you have any concerns or matters you wish to bring to our attention, so that we can offer support, your child's Principal Teacher of Guidance remains the first point of contact, so please do get in touch with them if needed.

Teachers continue to plan and set work in ways that we hope reflect the current situation. For example, we are mindful that we don't want learners sitting at screens all day, so we are aiming to set some tasks which are more practical in nature. Teachers across subjects are rising to this challenge with creative, meaningful, yet fun activities. Glow and Google Classroom are the main platforms for work and activities being set, but some of our faculties also have Facebook accounts too, and I would encourage learners to take a look at the range of ideas on here as well.

Having been in touch individually with all of my staff, I realise that like many parents and carers, some staff have very real challenges with home schooling their own children and trying to work remotely. Some have had significant ICT/connectivity issues, some have dependants to look after, and sadly, some have been contracted COVID-19 or have been bereaved as a result of this invisible illness. This insight into all of the challenges for my staff is a reflection on the challenges for everyone in society currently.

What was most encouraging in my conversations, was their positive impressions of pupil engagement in set work, activities and tasks. Some of my staff are parents too and despite the challenges of working from home and home schooling their own children, they said that creating a balance between school tasks and down time was key and to be kind to yourselves as parents too by not expecting to be expert at everything. All we ask is that parents/carers do what they reasonably can.

Teachers also continue to undertake all the other tasks we would be doing at this time of year, including:

- Volunteering to supervise the Ellon Child Care Hub at Ellon Primary school
- Planning courses for next session
- Attending faculty and whole school on-line meetings
- Discussing and agreeing improvement priorities for faculties and whole school
- Contributing to learners' SQA results by submitting estimate grades, and staff are currently working hard on this important piece of work.

SQA Matters

With SQA exams having been cancelled this year, we fully appreciate the stress and anxiety this decision may be causing young people and families. The Director of Education for Aberdeenshire Council, Laurence Findlay, has issued a letter to all parents regarding SQA and this has been up-loaded to our school website, to be accessed in the Parent Zone:

<http://ellonacademy.aberdeenshire.sch.uk/parent-zone/>

School staff across Scotland have now been provided with training regarding submitting pupil estimates to contribute towards final grades and our staff are currently working hard on this as per SQA guidelines and deadlines. Currently, the Scottish Government is yet to make a statement on when/if these estimates can be shared, but we will ensure that you have all information as we receive it regarding this going forward.

'Moving Learning Forward' - New timetable – June '20

As I mentioned in my last newsletter, we have started posting work for the new timetable which will help consolidate the necessary skills required for pupils' progression to the next level, National 5 – Higher for example, in our 'Moving Learning Forward' approach, we are considering how best to move learners on to the next level in their learning. The timetable will change virtually during the first week in June, and learners are asked to access the work up-loaded by teachers, to prepare for progression to chosen subjects for next session. Any issues regarding timetable clashes, over-subscription of courses etc are being dealt with on an individual basis and school staff will be in touch if there are any concerns.

Celebration of Learning

Staff are also working on a Celebration of On-line Learning by compiling a video with examples of work pupils have been engaging in on-line since the closure of schools. Hopefully we will be able to share this with you at the end of next week. We seen some stunning pieces of work from many pupils.

Summary

Here is a list of our plans:

- **Weekly Rector's Newsletter** to be issued to all parents on Fridays via xpressions, up-loaded on the website and signed posted on Facebook, detailing up-dates and on-going information
- **Weekly On-line Learning Up-date** - Principal Teachers and staff are working on this for pupils and parents, detailing the work and tasks posted for pupils
- **Celebration of Learning** – staff are working collaboratively on producing a video to showcase some of the wonderful work pupils have completed during the school closures/lockdown
- **Moving Learning Forward** -Teachers have been asked to post work for pupil progression to next steps in the new timetable. We will virtually change timetable in the first week of June, but in the meantime, our 'Moving Learning Forward' will ask pupils to attempt the work and tasks on their new subjects to consolidate skills, knowledge and understanding, providing a secure basis by which they can start their new courses.
- **SQA Estimates** - Staff have all completed the **SQA Preparing Estimates** training and are now working to strict SQA guidelines and deadlines to take the necessary steps to making estimates.
- **Supporting family engagement in learning**

I know that my staff are working as hard as ever on all of the above, as well as managing their own family circumstances, just as everyone else is doing. Thanks to those parents/carers who have contacted us to say how much you appreciate our efforts here. We are very sensitive to some of the difficulties that some families may be experiencing currently and we will be in touch with those families to offer support next week. Thank you also for working with us in encouraging your child's learning at home, and please remember a range of supports have been devised and shared for families to access at this time, including:

The Parent and Pupil Zones on our school website for information and up-dates, which are listed chronologically, newest posts first and I have included some other signposts to links you may find helpful:

- <http://ellonacademy.aberdeenshire.sch.uk/parent-zone/>
- <https://covid19.nhsgrampian.org/pages/for-the-public/mental-health-covid-19/how-do-you-self-refer-to-the-psychological-response-hub/>
- Aberdeenshire Educational Psychology Service telephone line: 01779 403721

And, of course, contact us, if and when you need to.

We hope that our Ellon Academy families will continue to keep safe and well and that together, we can ensure that our pupils will be able to thrive in these challenging times, and that we will be back to school as soon as the Scottish Government deems it safe to open our doors again.

Warmest wishes,

Pauline Buchan

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Rector

1.5.20