



Our Ref: PB/gs
14 December 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

Emerging Covid-19 (Omicron) Situation

As you will be aware, the First Minister will be addressing parliament this afternoon to set out further restrictions and mitigations in light of the spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19.

It is only Tuesday, but this week, Ellon Academy has seen unprecedented numbers of pupils and a small number of staff who are now self-isolating due to positive PCR tests. Last week we had 9 positive cases amongst pupils across all year groups and this has increased to approximately 20 cases so far. There is no evidence of links between these cases, and the school has not been identified as the primary source.

Due to the new guidelines for self-isolating, this now includes all members of households too and we hope that the families affected recover soon.

Here are the current guidelines for self-isolation:

People who have come into contact with Omicron cases have to go into self-isolation for 10 days, regardless of their age or vaccination status.

From 11 December, household contacts of all Covid cases will have to isolate for 10 days, regardless of vaccination status and even if they initially get a negative PCR test.

The previous rules still apply for non-household close contacts of those who test positive for other strains. As long as they have no symptoms and two weeks have passed since they received their second dose of the vaccine, they must take a PCR test as soon as possible and can then end self-isolation if this comes back negative.

If someone aged between five and 17 years old is identified as a close contact, they will need to take a PCR test - but can end self-isolation if it comes back negative.

This means that sadly, due to the 10-day self-isolation period, some pupils and staff will not be returning to school prior to the Christmas holidays this session.

Therefore, the Senior Leadership Team and I have decided that we do not want a school event to potentially disrupt Christmas Eve/Day/Boxing Day for any of our pupils and staff, so whilst we will continue with our Dress Up Day on Friday, there will not be parades for S5 and S6 pupils because of the gathering of numerous unvaccinated pupils and spectators.

We understand and acknowledge that some pupils may be disappointed, but rather than having to miss out on a family Christmas.

Currently, we are not aware of the Government's new plans for schools, but we hope to learn more this afternoon. Also, today at 3.30pm, there is a virtual meeting for all Aberdeenshire Head Teachers, who will be meeting with the Director of Education, following the FMs announcements this afternoon. We will ensure that parents and carers are fully aware of any implications for schools.

I am aware that some parents have been concerned regarding PE and social dancing, but we can assure you that social dancing is currently compliant with our risk assessment in that pupils are hand sanitising, there is ample ventilation and groups are less than 50.

However, dependant on information this afternoon, this will be under review.

The following is a statement from the Scottish Government regarding the SQA Exam Diet 2022:

Following the emergence of the Omicron variant, SQA has received questions from centres, parents and learners about its plans for exams in 2022. This follows the statement given by the First Minister last week.

We want to reassure you that SQA has robust contingency plans in place that support learners, parents, carers, teachers and lecturers over the coming months, and that we are continuing to work closely with the Scottish Government's COVID-19 Education Recovery Group, and the National Qualifications 2022 (NQ22) Group, which includes learner, parent and carer representatives, professional associations and education leaders.

*When the Scottish Government confirmed its intention for national exams to take place in 2022, we outlined plans detailing three scenarios. We are currently in **Scenario 1**; preparing for the national exam diet with significant modifications to the 2021-22 course assessments – coursework and/or exams – which were announced at the start of the session. These assessment modifications are in place to help learners by taking account of disruption to learning caused by the pandemic.*

*Should there be significantly more disruption to learning and teaching across the country, we will enter **Scenario 2** where we will provide additional support for learners to help them prepare and revise for the 2022 exams, where that is possible. Not all courses will have revision support as some do not have an exam in 2022, or the exam has been reduced in size through the modifications we have already made. However, in this situation, the vast majority of learners will receive help from revision support in one or more of their courses. There will not be any further modifications made to the actual course assessments.*

*Should the Scottish Government cancel the exams due to public health restrictions at the time of exams, we will enter **Scenario 3**. That means the evidence you are gathering through normal in-year assessment to determine your learners' estimates can be used to form the basis of their provisional results.*

Ellon Academy will keep parents and carers up to date with any/all developments as they arise.

Thank you and Kind Regards

P Buchan

P Buchan, Rector