

11 February 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

As we approach the long weekend I would like to wish all families a very relaxing time – this has been an extraordinary term so far. It is evidently different from last March-June when the weather was better and we had more opportunity to get outside. Time for relaxation is therefore required over the next few days, for all of us. We are also planning to address this in our curriculum towards the end of February and through March, should we still be in remote learning – more on this later in this letter.

The school will be closed for all pupils from Monday to Wednesday. Monday is a holiday for all and Tuesday/Wednesday will be busy for staff as they are attending Understanding Standards events in nearly all subject areas. This is the beginning of our quality assurance process to ensure the assessment decisions made are valid and reliable as we move towards certification this year.

A couple of weeks ago around 100 parents/carers completed a survey on remote learning during this latest closure of the school building to most young people. I would like to thank those of you who were able to find the time to do this – I recognise that all are busy at this challenging time.

The survey showed the following:

- Most parents and carers felt that the amount of work was 'just right' with a few subject areas edging towards 'too much' – we have shared this with those subject areas to make them aware.
- Most also felt that the amount of instruction given was 'just right' though some parents and carers did feel a little bit more could be given in areas – again this information has been shared.
- Most work is done online, though there is an increase in offline work compared to surveys completed in April-June.
- Parents have made comment about time to submit work and this has been raised with staff so that there is more flexibility in submission times. They also stated that 'live lessons' were welcomed.
- Some parents/carers wanted staff to recognise the challenges some pupils and families faced with remote learning and be more understanding if work is not completed on time.
- Almost all parents/carers said that pupils had been able to submit work successfully.
- A majority of parents/carers felt that following the timetable was better with only 8% saying it is worse.
- Some parents/carers commented that they would like some more flexibility to give pupils some time away from screens, to get outside and to catch up with work missed.

Pupils completed a survey at the same time and we held four pupil voice sessions at lunchtime during last week – the pupils told us:

- That the amount of work and instruction was mostly 'just right'.
- They liked Google Meets with teachers as they are able to answer questions immediately.
- They felt that some teachers speak too quickly and need to slow down.
- They felt that, sometimes, it was difficult to complete all work in the period after a live meet.
- A small majority favoured following the timetable.
- The use of voice recordings for feedback was welcomed.

- The pupils we spoke to recognised the need to speak with friends, take exercise and participate in activities other than school work to support their own mental health.

With these results in mind we are looking to make some small changes to the curriculum after the February holiday and in-service days. To support pupils' mental health, give some more time away from screens, to encourage pupils to take some exercise and, for some, to give time to catch up on work we will be introducing 'Wellbeing Days' every six school days. On these days pupils will be 'off timetable'. There will be no classes and no additional work will be set for S1-3 pupils. Instead, a choice of activities will be posted on the year group Google Classroom page for pupils to choose from. In the Senior Phase no new work will be posted, but teachers may invite young people to classes and tutorials to support them, if required.

We plan to start this from Wednesday 24th February and, if pupils are not able to return to school, then again on Thursday 4th March, Friday 12th March and Monday 22nd March.

We hope you and your child(ren) find these days of benefit during this long term. We will, of course, welcome any feedback both on the proposal and on the days themselves.

Please take care and stay safe.



Mike Paul
HT, Bucksburn Academy