

Our Ref LF/CR
Your Ref

Please ask for Caran Richardson
Direct Dial 01467 533305
Email caran.richardson@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Laurence Findlay
Education & Children's Services
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
Aberdeen
AB16 5GB
Tel: 01467 537438

21 December 2021

laurence.findlay@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Dear Parent/Carer

As we near the end of the year, I'd like to take a few moments to reflect on the last 12 months and thank you for your patience and ongoing support for our schools and services.

As if the pandemic was not enough for our schools to contend with, Storm Arwen caused further disruption right across Aberdeenshire. Power outages impacted many schools and damage was inflicted across our learning estate. I would like to give a huge thanks to all those involved in the response to the storm, and to all families for your forbearance during a very challenging period.

The blanket closure of all schools is not something we do lightly and thankfully is a rare occurrence. With an estate of over 170 buildings, it was not possible to assess all the damage fully until the start of the new week. Impacts were felt right across Aberdeenshire, from the very north right down to the south and both rural and urban schools were affected. While we managed to get the vast majority reopened on Wednesday 1st December, a small minority remained closed for the full week due to the power outages which affected so much of the North-east.

As we are all too aware, the Covid-19 pandemic is very much still with us and continues to impact on our everyday lives. The knock-on effect of absences and self-isolation has resulted in some year groups being asked to work at home from time-to-time. Schools are doing everything they can to avoid this, but at times it is essential. This is likely to continue to be the case due to other winter illnesses and viruses which lead to absence. We have not been as badly affected by this as some other parts of the country, but I am fully aware of the disruption that can be caused as a result.

I am very pleased and thankful that Aberdeenshire's staff and young people are really 'doing their bit' in the overall response to the pandemic. Our rates for LFD testing among young people and staff compare very favourably with the rest of the country and it is really important that we keep this going as we go into 2022. It all makes a difference in combatting the spread of the virus. Concerns about the new Omicron variant have obviously raised many worries among communities, so it is important that we all continue to do our bit by adhering to all the mitigations currently in place. Some people have complained about the extra litter in and around schools caused by discarded face masks so if your son/daughter is using a single-use face mask, please encourage them to dispose of them in the bin.

The guidance in place for schools has once again prevented events being arranged in school for external audiences such as concerts and nativity plays. I appreciate that this has been disappointing for many parents and carers. Schools have come up with innovative and creative ways of marking the festive period and whilst it is great to see such innovation from our schools, I know it is not quite the same as being able to go to your local schools and see your child's performance.

The majority of our parents have been very understanding about this – after all, our schools are simply following national guidance – but there have been a minority who have displayed a very aggressive stance. As a service, we aim to take a trauma-informed approach to our work and we appreciate the life-changing impact the pandemic has had on our daily lives. However, we will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour towards our staff and we will take further actions as necessary.

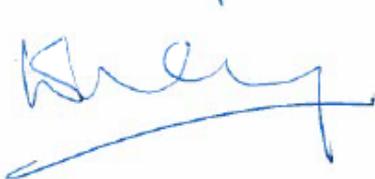
On behalf of senior officers and councillors, I wish to say thank you to all our school staff and the teams behind the scenes who have once again worked so hard over the past 12 months in the most challenging of circumstances. Thanks also to parents and carers for your continued support of your local schools and thank you to our young people for sticking in and continuing to achieve so much over the past year. You are all brilliant.

Let's look out for all of those around us during the winter months – for some, Christmas can be one of the most challenging times of the year. For anyone in need of a little bit of support, please remember there are services you can access:

- Mental health and wellbeing support – <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/community-care/living-independently/mental-health-wellbeing-services/mental-health-wellbeing-support/>
 - This includes links to www.kooth.com for 10 to 18 year olds and www.togetherall.com for everyone aged 16+.
- Contact details for local children and families social work teams: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/children-and-families/children-and-families-team-offices/>
- Preparing for and dealing with emergencies: <https://ready.scot/>
- Council services: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/contact-us/contact-by-phone/>

I know that many of our parents and carers are also essential workers – thanks for all that you do and continue to deliver. But I hope everyone manages to have at least some time to relax over the Christmas holidays and I wish you and your family and friends all the very best for 2022.

Yours sincerely



Laurence Findlay
Director of Education & Children's Services