

Vincent A Docherty

Head of Education and Chief Education Officer

Education and Children's Services
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
Aberdeen AB16 5GB

Tel 01467 535512

Vincent.docherty@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

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Dear Parent/Carer

Welcome back to a new school term in Aberdeenshire. I hope all of our children and young people are enjoying their learning and I would like to wish all of our students sitting exams this term the best of luck.

As parents and carers, I would like to thank you for your ongoing patience as schools adapt to ever-changing circumstances with regards to Covid-19. Throughout the pandemic, schools have followed national guidance on reducing risks in schools, including having thorough risk assessments in place and carefully considering the needs of their school community. This continues, and school and support teams are doing a really excellent job of balancing everything as pressures on staffing continue.

I know our schools are looking forward to welcoming parents and carers back to in-person events, as guidance allows, but what I would say is please continue to be patient and understanding in terms of all the competing demands on colleagues whose first priority is to ensure children and young people and staff are safe and happy at school. We would expect there will be some impact on staffing as the requirement to self-isolate following a positive test remains, although we hope the impact will be lessened now.

For exams, we are in a strong position with lots of independent invigilators on hand and these should run smoothly as planned.

In terms of mask wearing, schools will be continuing to closely follow updated national guidance. For now, this means the emphasis has changed from a 'requirement' for the use of these in communal areas for secondary pupils to 'consideration of'. I appreciate this is suitably vague but what I would say is our approach will be one of encouragement to be considerate of our fellow human beings and not enforcement. We will continue to support all of our children and young people to adapt to new arrangements and are mindful of those whose personal circumstances mean they are more cautious than others.

In terms of what to do if your child is ill, the option to book a PCR test for Covid-19 symptoms remains. More broadly, common sense is as important as ever and if your child is unwell in themselves then they should remain at home. The www.nhsinform.scot is a reliable source of advice or a wide range of symptoms and in signposting to support available.

I hope those who took part in easter study camps at school and/or easter play sessions, or benefitted from help from our e-learning school e-Sgoil as part of the National e-Learning Offer enjoyed their experiences. A big thank you to all of the staff and volunteers who made these options possible.

We recognise families continue to face significant challenges and I just want to underline that health and wellbeing comes first when it comes to supporting children and young people with their learning. I'm really pleased with the lengths schools are going to, to help all children and young people whether they are sitting exams or not.

We are very proud to be developing a wide range of qualifications young people can gain in Aberdeenshire and continue to encourage a focus on lifelong learning. We hope everyone recognises achievement and attainment does not begin and end with exams, although we completely understand this will be a worrying time for many. Remember the SQA will be taking a more generous approach to grading this year and we, your teachers and all of those around young people are right behind them.

Any young person who is struggling to cope is encouraged to reach out. There are a range of supports available, both within school through guidance teachers and those trained in interventions for anxiety, as well as externally. It really is okay not to be okay and young people will be met with support and understanding.

In terms of a list of external supports:

Aberdeenshire Council has commissioned two online mental health and wellbeing tools suitable for young people aged 10 to 18 (www.kooth.com) and 16+ (www.togetherall.com)

Young Scot has some really good health and wellbeing resources on their website: [Campaigns | Young Scot Partners | Young Scot](#) and a series of YouTube videos with mindfulness activities.

Specific exam stress tips from Mind, [Information for young people – Exam stress - Mind](#)

Visit the mental health page of Aberdeenshire Council's website for more information on mental health support available locally, [Mental Health and Wellbeing support - Aberdeenshire Council](#)

Finally, I hope this finds you well and you managed to have at least a bit of a break during the holidays. All the best for the term ahead.

Kindest regards



Vincent A Docherty
Head of Education and Chief Education Officer