



1. General Update

COVID Update

Last week was our most challenging in terms of staff absence since the start of the pandemic. We were able to offer all classes as timetabled but had to rely on goodwill to do so. The total number of available cover periods within our teaching staff sits at around ninety. Last week we had over one-hundred and twenty classes to be covered. Some teaching staff exceeded their maximum teaching contact time while other staff who would normally undertake non-teaching duties (e.g., Pastoral, DHTs, HT) covered classes. There are natural knock-ons when a situation such as the above occurs i.e., prioritising tasks against legislative obligations, turnaround times, issuing of reports, propensity, and willingness to also offer extra-curricular input.

Projections for this week are better in terms of the volume of cover required but things can quickly change day to day.

I am hopeful that in the event of a further spike in absence, staff goodwill can extend to the Christmas break and that we will not need to revert to contingency plans.

I am to understand that compared to other local schools, our cover situation has been relatively stable for most of the year. This is a matter of chance rather than design.

It should be noted that not all absence is COVID related. Bereavement and general winter illness patterns are also contributory factors.

Pupil COVID numbers sit at between 10 and 15 per week.

SQA Appeals

The SQA upheld the professional judgement of our teaching staff in respect of all appeals submitted by young people. All pupils and parents/carers were informed of the SQA's decision.

Prelim and Assessment Calendar

The prelim timetable and an assessment calendar covering the month of December were both issued to all pupils and parents/carers last week.

Individual pupils in receipt of alternative assessment arrangements (AAA) will receive a personal timetable from Mrs Hoy in advance of the Christmas break. Most pupils in receipt of AAA will still sit their papers on the days stated in the main timetable, with timings and locations shared via individual timetables.

Working Time Agreement and Parents' Nights

The Working Time Agreement was signed off by school level professional association representatives earlier in the month. Loudon Academy and Kilmarnock Academy reported positively on use of an online tool for Parents' Evenings. Our intention at the time of writing is to run parents' nights online as per the dates previously shared with parents/carers.

Online Learning Contingency Planning and iPads

Significant work has taken place internally to audit pupil device access. Over ninety iPads were issued to those with no working device at home.

Work is ongoing at the time of writing with those in S1-S3 around access to Teams and Google Classrooms. Almost all pupils can access both in school but many report issues using apps on tablets or phones. Staff are supporting pupils to sign in when on site.

This week we will begin the second stage of our iPad audit. Stage one had been to ensure all devices were accounted for/still in the possession of those they were issued to.

Stage two is around resolving iPad issues. Drop-ins are scheduled for the Wednesday of each week until Christmas. The majority of issues are easily resolved and instructions on our website will resolve the issues, but some pupils struggle to apply the instructions we have shared previously and will be supported on site.

We have gathered from staff all codes to access online learning Teams and Google Classrooms. In theory, codes should be unnecessary but sometimes pupils report being asked for codes on new devices. The directory will be posted to our website once complete. It should be noted that not all online learning groups are active while school remains open. In cases where staff are not using online groups, the codes shared would be used in the event of a school closure e.g., Weather related, contingency measure, national lockdown.

Extra-Curricular Activity and Supported Study

Following the easing of restrictions very recently, staff are now able to offer extra-curricular clubs and supported study at their discretion.

We have audited staff intention around both. Supported study sessions need to be funded via either PEF or the school fund this session, and work with finance is ongoing to determine our remaining PEF budget (there were some savings against delayed start dates for some staff). At the time of writing, thirty-nine supported study sessions per week can potentially run, but this comes at a cost of around £975 per week. For this reason, supported study in the long term is less viable. Once finance can update in terms of budgets, we will share all session timings with families and young people.

Around twenty extra-curricular clubs are also listed on our draft calendar.

It should be noted that the recent discovery of a new COVID variant as well as ongoing staff absence rates may have an impact on guidance and/or viability in the case of both supported study and extra-curricular activity.

It is also important to recognise that neither could run without staff volunteering to do so over and above their normal duties.

While not likely to be of relevance this session, funding of some of the above could be aided by relaunching the fundraising wing of our Parent Council in keeping with standard practice in most of the Parent Councils across the country. I appreciate that COVID and issues around signatories is a barrier at the time of writing.

P7 Transition

Mr Boyle and Miss Cathie have visited all associated primary 7 classes and shared information pertinent to transition. Follow up visits will take place in the New Year. Plans around transition visits depend upon COVID restrictions in the New Year.

LearnWell

Mr Boyle invited all parents/carers to attend an online meeting where he shared some detail about our LearnWell launch. Mr Boyle will attend the next Parent Council meeting where he will share the same presentation as that offered last week.

Prom

The date of the prom has been agreed as Tuesday 21st June at the Brig o' Doon hotel in Ayr. The prom is for S6 pupils only and will go ahead if mitigations at that time allow.

2. Staffing

Jetta Becker was a PEF funded Classroom Assistant and has now taken on a permanent position within the school in place of Catherine Lightfoot who retired in August.

Maree Hughes was temporarily employed to cover the above post and is now employed in what was Jetta's PEF funded post until the end of the session.

Rebecca Baxter started in her role as PEF funded attendance assistant on Monday of this week.

Amy Kennedy will continue in her role as administrative assistant in our school office until at least Christmas.

The following staff will join us soon, hopefully before Christmas:

- Fiona McCrindle (AP base maternity cover for Chloe Millar)
- Caroline McLean (CA backfill for Jean Walker)
- Simona Nica (CA PEF funded, replacing Leah Higgins)
- Sharon Fawcett (Clerical Assistant, replacing Lynne Dickson)

The following vacancies are out to advert:

- Classroom Assistant – Permanent, four days per week to replace Claire Conroy
- Maternity Cover – Teacher of Modern Studies from March (potentially earlier)
 - To cover for Miss Gibson while on maternity leave

The vacancy we had advertised for a 0.5FTE teacher of Inclusion has attracted one applicant.

Mr Kane will take two weeks' paternity leave in late January/early February. Mrs Shearer, Mr Boyle and Miss Quigley will share HT responsibility during Mr Kane's paternity leave.