



19 March 2020

Dear Parent,

### **COVID-19 and Scottish Government/SQA and Schools**

Given today's announcements the focus of my update this evening will address SQA matters. Meanwhile, as a School we will be in contact tomorrow, 20 March, regarding plans for childcare support for families of critical workers/ essential services.

With reference to the School being closed to pupils from Monday 23 March, Senior School parents will shortly receive information on arrangements for remote learning from the Senior Deputy Rector, Mr Kenneth Robertson.

### **SQA**

Following the Deputy First Minister's (DFM) statement today, 19 March, and having now received further official communication this afternoon from the Chief Executive of the SQA and a letter from the DFM, I can now share the following.

Despite schools receiving a joint statement from the SQA and Scottish Government on the afternoon of 18 March stating that contingency planning was in place to proceed with the SQA exam diet from 27 April, all schools were met with the news at 2pm this afternoon that the SQA exams would now be cancelled. Whilst I appreciate the current COVID-19 health crisis is leading to fast moving decision-making by officials, to learn of this significant change in just over 24 hours from the Scottish Government, and without any prior notice to schools, has understandably caused significant anxiety to pupils and families. However, I do hope that the following detail will help to provide some clarity and reassurance. In addition, I took the opportunity this afternoon to speak to all S4, S5 and S6 pupils who were in school about the following and I took a number of questions from pupils by way of clarification.

In the absence of exams, the SQA have informed schools that to address grade awards they will be using the following arrangements. First, the assignments and coursework (including folios, dissertations, projects) which pupils complete in school and which are submitted to the SQA, will be marked and verified as normal by the SQA. Secondly, teacher estimates will be provided which will be based on "*available evidence gathered throughout the year*", and finally for pupils in S5 who sat National 5 last year and for S6 pupils who sat Higher last year and National 5 in their S4, their prior SQA attainment record will be considered in establishing grade awards.

Understandably a number of pupils are concerned about the role their January Prelim results may play in the 'teacher estimates' element of the above arrangements. However, it should be noted that 'estimates' are based **not only** on the prelim but also on "*evidence*

*gathered throughout the year*". In turn, this wider definition of evidence, in addition to any on-going current assessment planned by subjects over the forthcoming weeks, will furnish a range of evidence to establish estimates. In addition, the submitted coursework and SQA prior attainment data will also be included in informing SQA grades.

When speaking to the senior pupils this afternoon I shared in their understandable concern, upset and anxiety given this unprecedented news. I let them know that I and their teachers were there for them and that we would be doing all we could to support the best outcome. I reminded them that they were not alone in experiencing such feelings, as all young people across Scotland and the UK who had anticipated exams and had been working hard to achieve in the summer were now in the same position given the extraordinary events we are facing. I also highlighted that the SQA and the Scottish Government, stated that they would do *"their utmost to ensure that (pupils) hard work is rightly and fairly recognised, and allows them to proceed to further learning and work."*

At the High School, we will support our SQA pupils over the next weeks, prior to estimates being collected on 24 April, to ensure their hard work and attainment evidence is *"rightly and fairly"* recognised by the SQA. This may involve individuals or groups of pupils being given the opportunity to come into school to complete coursework or to obtain additional evidence to support their estimate. Where this is not possible, for example due to self-isolation, pupils should make direct contact with Mr Kenneth Robertson at the following address [seniordeputyrector@hsog.co.uk](mailto:seniordeputyrector@hsog.co.uk)

From the beginning of next week, subject departments will be in communication with pupils and home as we seek to address any individual concerns. I am briefing Heads of Department and teaching staff tomorrow on what additional support and arrangements we can provide for our S4-S6 pupils over the coming weeks.

I am hopeful that we will receive further information from the SQA, and as I said to the pupils this afternoon, I will immediately update them and home with any such information.

These are understandably not comfortable times for our young people in the light of this SQA news, but we are here to support each to the best of our ability in the circumstances.

I am sorry that this communication is late in the evening, but as I hope you will understand the news this afternoon has required a good deal of additional consideration.

Once again, I am grateful for your patience and understanding in the circumstances. We will do all we can to assist our young people in the time ahead.

Kind regards,  
Yours sincerely,

John O'Neill  
Rector