

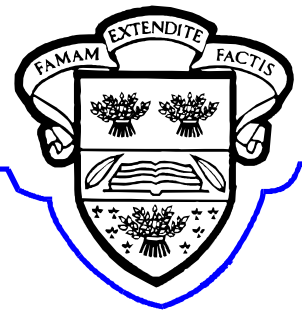


ELLON ACADEMY

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Tim McKay BEd (Hons) MEd SQH (Rector)

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Dear Parent/Carer

I write to update and inform you of a number of issues regarding your child's education at Ellon Academy. I apologise for the length of this letter, but hope that you find this information useful!

Should you wish to discuss or seek clarification on any of the matters, please do not hesitate to contact me at Ellon Academy. Copies of this, and other school related information, are available on our revised School website: www.ellonacademy.org.uk

Yours sincerely

Tim McKay
Rector

Additional National In-Service Day

The Scottish Government has allocated an additional In-Service day to all schools. In Aberdeenshire this additional day will be taken on **Tuesday 16th August 2010**. Therefore the first pupil day after the summer holiday will be **Wednesday 17th August 2010**.

Curriculum for Excellence

The new national *Curriculum for Excellence* programme continues to be the focus of development work in all Scottish schools.

Ellon Academy has a strong local and national reputation for excellence. We have been working closely with our local primary schools, employers and voluntary organisations to build upon this strong positive reputation to ensure that our new curriculum enhances, rather than replaces, the current provision. We are confident that our *Curriculum for Excellence* programme will continue to provide the very best learning experiences for all pupils, regardless of their skills, interests or abilities.

Whilst next session all Ellon Academy pupils will benefit from changes to their curricular and learning experiences, the new *Curriculum for Excellence* programme will mainly build upon the current changes to primary school provision and 'roll out' over coming sessions, starting in 2010-2011 with the new S1.

Over the past three years, the design of our new curriculum has been further 'shaped' through consultation with pupils, parents and staff. The Parent Council has 'Curriculum for Excellence' as a standing agenda item and minutes from these meetings and other documentation related to the new curriculum are available on the school website.

Ellon Academy Working Week

You may recall that in September last year, I wrote to all 1300 parents/carers (including those in our local Primary 7 schools) to consult over the proposed school working week. Parents/carers with questions or concerns were invited to respond. 18 parent/carer responses were received. Of these responses, five were not in favour of the proposed changes. Further consultation and discussion took place with:

- The Ellon Academy Parent Council
- Aberdeenshire Council
- Non-Teaching Staff
- Catering Staff
- Community Learning, Leisure and Recreation Managers
- Pupil representatives across the school
- Local Primary School Head Teachers
- Teacher Union Representatives.

Following clarification over a number of issues, no objections to the proposed changes were raised.

To formally assess the support or otherwise for the proposed changes, extensive consultation took place with all Ellon Academy teaching staff. An Aberdeenshire requirement for change to the school working week is support from a minimum of two-thirds of the voting teaching staff. This majority was achieved with 74% of teachers supporting the change. Therefore from August 2010, a revised school working week will take place. Full details of this change are provided in the enclosed diagrams. From the start of the new session in August, bus contracts will reflect the changes to the start and finish of the school day.

To provide the maximum number of teaching weeks over an academic session, the new school timetable starts at the beginning of June each year. Therefore, whilst the new working week (i.e. changes to the start and finish of the school day) begin in August, throughout June we need to adapt our new arrangements into the current structure. Therefore two timetables are enclosed, one for June 2010 and one for August 2010 and beyond. All pupils will receive their new timetable in the coming weeks.

It is important that concerns raised by parents/carers (and others) are addressed as fully as possible. To provide clarity and reassurance, I wrote to all parents/carers who responded to the consultation and over the past six months held further meetings with pupils, our Parent Council and other professionals. Whilst I hope that people feel generally reassured with their feedback, it is important that the school continues to monitor the implementation of this educational change.

The majority of parent/carer questions and concerns were in three main areas. These were;

- *'Reduced lunchtimes to 50 minutes, will this have an adverse effect on lunchtime activities?'*
- *'The early finish of 2.50pm is difficult for me as my husband and I both work'*
- *'In your consultation letter you spoke of educational benefits – what are they?'*

Reduced Lunchtime

The original proposal was to reduce all five lunchtimes from 1 hour to 50 minutes. This was rejected and the shorter lunchtimes of 50 minutes will only operate on Mondays and Tuesdays. This allows these two longer days to finish at 3.30pm rather than 3.40pm, providing for part of the year, extra daylight for our pupils' homeward journeys.

Following further discussion with a number of staff who currently offer lunchtime extra-curricular activities, we have agreed that a 'pass' system will operate. This will allow pupils to go to the front of

the school canteen lunch queue and then attend their activity. Staff are confident that this will not then reduce the overall activity time. It is also anticipated that the early finish times of 2.50pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays will also provide additional extra-curricular activity opportunities.

Early Finish – Working Parents

Understandably this is a concern for some parents/carers, particularly if their son/daughter is in first or second year and perhaps lives outwith the town of Ellon. To address this very genuine concern, from August 2010, the following opportunities will be available to all pupils at the end of the school day on Wednesdays and Thursdays:

- The school library will remain open and supervised by Aberdeenshire Library and Information staff. Pupils will have the opportunity to complete homework tasks, revise, carry out on-line research and use various study skill packages which are available through our school intranet.
- The earlier finish times will enable numerous extra-curricular sporting, cultural and musical activities to take place and thus ensure that the wide range of experiences continues to be a feature at Ellon Academy
- Following an extensive consultation of young people in the Ellon community by our Community Learning and Development staff, focussed youth work will take place in the coffee bar between 2.50pm and 4.00pm. This will be targeted at S1/S2 pupils on a Wednesday and open to all ages on a Thursday. Throughout the year planned activities such as art, music, hip hop and drama activities will be available in the Coffee Bar and at the Ythan Centre
- The community coffee bar will be open at 3.00pm, thereby offering pupils snacks and drinks at the end of the school day
- To support the above provision, the school will fully fund 'late transport' on Wednesday and Thursday nights - this will cost approximately £4,000 per session. Buses will transport pupils home (free of charge) at 4.00pm. This ensures that all pupils entitled to school transport, regardless of where they live in our community, will have equal access to after-school opportunities.

Educational Benefits

It is important that the educational benefits are at the forefront of any curricular change. Now that the 2010-2011 timetable is nearing completion, I can share in practical terms the impact of this new arrangement on pupils' learning experiences. As you may recall from the original consultation letter in September, the small change from the current 30 periods to 32 periods per week provides greater staffing efficiencies across the school. In the current national economic climate, these efficiencies have been welcomed, particularly when many schools and Local Authorities across Scotland have been making significant budget cuts. I am delighted to inform you that staff savings from this re-organisation of the working week have been fully re-invested into the curriculum. The following information provides more detail of this re-investment into teaching and learning experiences:

- No reductions to courses offered to S2, S4 and S5 pupils at subject choice time
- An expansion to the curriculum at most ability levels, including additional courses in Media Studies, French and Geography
- Continuation of recently introduced courses in Politics, Gaelic and, in partnership with Banff and Buchan College, Skills for Work courses in Construction, Engineering and Childcare

- The continued delivery of smaller than maximum class sizes in all year groups
- The expansion of our hugely successful 2009-2010 pilot S1 *Curriculum for Excellence* Elective programme. Courses for 2010-2011 cater for a wide range of pupil interests including; Maths in Motion, Debating, Dance, Radio Ellon, Total Rugby, Presenting Science and Advertising
- Reduction in class sizes for S1 pupils. In S1, classes will have an average size of 18/19 pupils, where classes are larger, for example for Modern Languages or Humanities, the average class size will be 24 pupils. This significant reduction will provide greater teacher – pupil interaction.

Methadone Awareness

You may be aware of the recent legislative changes with regard to this drug; I hope you find the enclosed leaflet useful. Whilst we have not had any incidents at Ellon Academy, I am aware of the use of this now illegal drug in many communities. As for any other illegal drugs, the school has a zero tolerance view. Any pupil caught bringing any illegal drugs into school will be dealt with through our exclusion procedures and the police. Further drug information and advice for young people is available via; www.talktofrank.com

Alcohol Awareness

The school (**including pupils**), Parent Council, health partners and local police are keen to emphasize the importance of alcohol awareness in our community. Following the recent tragic death of a young person in our community, it is even more important that we are vigilant over the dangers of alcohol.

Ellon police highlight under age drinking as the single biggest risk factor and cause of inappropriate behaviour in our community. Disturbingly, they comment on the wide availability of alcohol to young people. The police have stated that most of this alcohol is **not consumed in pubs or purchased in shops, it is taken from home**, often mixed into potentially lethal ‘cocktails’ and consumed in remote areas of our community.

It is important that we all take steps to ensure our pupils, your children, stay safe and do not become a tragic alcohol statistic. Asking yourself the following questions may help reduce the risks to your child.

- Do you know how much alcohol is in your house?
- Do you question your child as to what they are doing when socialising during evenings?
- Do you check with the other family when your child says they are staying overnight with friends?
- Do you wait up at night to ensure your child returns home safe, well and drink or drug free?
- Are you aware of the signs of alcohol abuse?
- Does money go missing from your home?

I am aware that some parents/carers might find this list a little patronising, but I can assure you that as Rector, supporting a family going through the tragic circumstances of a senseless alcohol related death is far worse than any potential criticism of the above information. Further support is available throughout the year during our Parent Evenings where the police have an alcohol and drug awareness stall in the school staffroom. Other drug information and advice for young people is available via; www.drinkaware.co.uk or www.bootslearningstore.com or www.nhs.uk