

Friday 20 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

Further to my correspondence of 13 March, I write to update you in respect of issues related to the Minister of Education's directive that schools are closed to pupils from Monday 23 March.

### **College Communication with Home**

- Home/College communication will be via Text Alerts and Parent Mail. Key information will also be shared on the College website: [www.portadowncollege.com](http://www.portadowncollege.com).
- I would request that any parents/carers wishing to communicate with the College during school closure do so via our info account: [info@pc.portadown.ni.sch.uk](mailto:info@pc.portadown.ni.sch.uk).
- Please note that College staff will not be available during the Easter Holidays (Monday 6 to Friday 17 April 2020 inclusive).

### **Student Access to Learning Materials**

- Our staff have worked exceptionally hard over the last fortnight to prepare learning resources for students in the event of closure. These resources are being provided as the College endeavours to meet statutory curricular/specification requirements and maximise learning progression for students outside the school environment. Work will be available from 9:00am on Monday 23 March for that week and updated weekly.
- The College website will be the key platform for students and Parents/Carers to access subject-specific information. This information will be located on the website under the tab STUDENTS and "Work for Home Study" in the drop-down menu. Students have been advised on how to access this work from home and issued with an instruction hand-out (also available to view under "Work for Home Study"): [Accessing C2k files and Google Classroom \(2020\)](#).
- Parents/carers are therefore encouraged to ensure, in as far as possible, that their son/daughter structures the day to mirror their daily school routine during home study. Students have been informed that they should complete work set by teachers during Home Study unless there are exceptional circumstances which prevent this.
- "Work for Home Study" will contain links to Google Classrooms or other online learning provision. For example, some teachers will use Collaborate Ultra, guidance on which is accessible by following the link: [COLLABORATE ULTRA Student Guide](#).
- Students have been advised to ensure their C2k log in details are working. Should they have any difficulty accessing the C2k services, students should email Mr Robinson (ICT Technician) at [crobinson946@pc.portadown.ni.sch.uk](mailto:crobinson946@pc.portadown.ni.sch.uk) between 9:00am and 4:00pm Monday to Friday.
- Please refer to the "Working from Home" FAQ questions document (attached) for further clarification on the above guidelines.
- Please note that some teachers will use email for submission of work. In these circumstances, teachers will only communicate with students using C2k email addresses. Similarly, students must only correspond with teachers regarding school work via the C2k email addresses which teachers have shared with particular classes.
- Please note that students and staff have been made aware of the etiquette and protocols for online learning and communication: [Portadown College Online Safety Policy - Appendix 1 \(Netiquette\)](#).
- Teachers will not set/ monitor work during the Easter Holidays (Monday 6 to Friday 17 April 2020 inclusive).

## **External Examinations**

We are particularly mindful that parents/carers and students naturally have many questions in respect of external examinations and future pathways at this uncertain time.

At the time of writing, the Minister of Education has informed schools that the Department of Education will not proceed with GCSEs, AS and A Level examinations this summer.

In this rapidly evolving situation, the College will continue to liaise with CCEA and other awarding bodies, as appropriate, to update parents/carers as promptly as possible in respect of the awarding of grades.

Due to the unforeseen and exceptional circumstances with which we have been presented, it is not logistically feasible for the College to operate the Internal Appeals Procedure as published. Please be assured that, where awarding bodies require controlled assessment and coursework marks, the College will liaise with awarding bodies, as appropriate, to safeguard the process to ensure no student is disadvantaged by school closure and associated issues.

## **Internal Year 11 Summer Examinations**

Internal Year 11 Summer Examinations will be contingent upon the duration of the school closure and other operational matters within College. As this is a fluid situation, parents/carers will be updated accordingly.

## **Student Well-being**

As a College, we are especially mindful of the significant impact these unprecedented and difficult circumstances may have on the well-being of our students, staff, parents/carers and the community at large. Following whole-school events in the Autumn Term to enhance holistic well-being, all students are encouraged to follow the *5 Steps to Well-being* promoted by the College:  
<http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/5WaysToWellbeing.pdf>.

Additionally, the Links Counselling Service is keen to find a way to ensure that ICSS (Independent Counselling Service for Schools) can continue to be delivered to meet the needs of students even when they are not in school.

Counselling and assessments will operate by appointment only and students will be sent a text or an email (depending on preferred method) to confirm an appointment 24 hours in advance. Should your son/daughter already be attending counselling in College and wish for this to continue during school closure, please send the request via the College info account.

Please note that students can continue to refer themselves for counselling via the website ([www.linkscounselling.com](http://www.linkscounselling.com)). Appointments during school closure will be via telephone or other channels offered by Links.

Reach Mentoring is also exploring ways of maintaining a connection with students during the period of closure. Any information in this regard will be communicated to parents/carers via Parent Mail.

Please see attached “Telephone Support Lines for Young People”, provided by the Education Authority, with contact details for external agencies providing support for young people and their well-being.

#### Vulnerable Young People

Please be assured that the College remains committed to facilitating the needs of vulnerable young people and awaits guidance from the Minister of Education in respect of this provision during school closure.

#### Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

Please be assured that eligible students will continue to receive EMA during school closure.

I trust the above information is helpful in addressing some of the queries and concerns that you and your son/daughter may have at this time. The College will continue to communicate with home as further information is made available.

At this time of uncertainty, I commend our students and staff for their resilience, perseverance and commitment. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude for the goodwill and forbearance of parents/carers, as well as the unstinting support, wisdom and guidance of our dedicated Governors.

May I take this opportunity to convey my best wishes to you, your family and friends as we face the challenges of the weeks ahead.

Yours faithfully

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Gillian R Gibb  
Principal