



NEWS RELEASE

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Schools go the extra mile to support young people

As a new school term gets into full swing, secondary schools across Aberdeenshire are highlighting the importance of wider community support for children and young people.

With many extra-curricular activities still on hold, many indoor social experiences off limits and young adults in some cases struggling to cope with the ongoing pandemic, education bosses are calling for respect, understanding and cooperation. Lunchtime gathering in town centres has been highlighted as a particular issue.

Aberdeenshire Council's Director of Education and Children's Services, Laurence Findlay explained: "We all empathise with the elderly, the lonely and the frustrations sometimes voiced by our peers, but it's easy to forget young people are also struggling to make sense of the world at the moment too – whether they voice those concerns or act out in a different way.

"From the vast majority of our young people, we couldn't ask for more. They've adapted to different arrangements in school, they've taken to wearing face masks and they're following all the rules... but that's not to say it has been a walk in the park for them.

"Please remember the young people you notice out and about are also coping with the regular challenges of teenage life, trying to be supportive of each other and inclusive and friendly, and when they don't have to stay 2m apart at all times in school it can be difficult for them to remember why it's so important when they are out and about. We're continuing to work on that with them."

Schools are doing absolutely everything in their power to prioritise health and safety and reinforce the message directly with young people as well as with parents and carers. Every school has its own tailored risk assessment measures, in many cases they have staggered beginnings, breaks, lunches and ends of days, and in some communities school lunch times have been reduced to typically 30-40 minutes, decreasing the time young people may be out of school.

Cllr Gillian Owen, Chair of Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children's Services Committee added: "Let's do our best to support all members of our communities during the

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dark winter months. A number of our secondary schools have a capacity of around 1,000 students and in some cases these buildings have canteens which can only cope with 200 at a time. There will always be a need for us to enable young people to enjoy breaks within their communities and I think that's a good thing. It helps to develop their sense of independence and it's good for town centres too. We all have a responsibility to remember the FACTS and avoid crowded places, and enable businesses to benefit from the custom of all throughout the day."

Vice Chair Cllr Rosemary Bruce added: "We hope to engage further with our local business associations and ensure that access to takeaways and eateries is managed carefully by premises' staff on the ground. We are also working in partnership with Police Scotland who are actively engaging, educating and encouraging all members of the community to comply with the rules. Let's work together on this – it's absolutely a job for us all to work on our resilience and humanity during these continually challenging uncharted waters."

Typically speaking, what do Covid-secure secondary schools look like?

- One-way systems in school for pupils and staff.
- Signage across the school to support messaging.
- Separate entrances for different year groups.
- Hand-sanitising stations and face-covering checks at all school entrances which are staffed at all times.
- Staff patrolling corridors throughout breaks and lunchtimes.
- Community responsibility reminders for all students.
- Adjusted school transport times.
- Regular reminders to students, parents and carers.
- School timetables simplified where possible to reduce contacts.
- Changed arrangements for PE/HE/Music/Technical and other practical subjects.
- Wiping down of surfaces at the start of every lesson in classrooms by students and staff.
- Additional site cleaning throughout each day.
- Mitigations in place around sharing of resources.
- Taped reminders about encouraging (but not requiring) social distancing in school.
- Prefects in corridors and in the community to monitor student congestion.
- Removal of trips / extra-curricular activities from the schedule.
- Avoidance of visitors in schools – only core staff who deliver learning and teaching or other essential support.
- Additional technology and pastoral support provided to families post-lockdown.
- Individual risk assessments for staff and pupils in vulnerable categories.
- Head Teachers' participation in weekly meetings with NHS Health Protection Team, as well as local authority leadership teams, sharing practice, experiences and advice.

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- Records of any student out of class / retaining of class seating plans to ensure records for Test and Protect.
- Removal of large gatherings (e.g. assemblies) and replacement with video technology/Skype to ensure key messages are received.
- Designated areas internally and covered outdoor areas externally for different year groups to gather.

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