



Executive Head Teacher:
Peter Bain MA (Hons), MSc.

Oban High School / Àrd-Sgoil an Obain
Tiree High School / Àrd-Sgiol Thiriodh &
Tiree Primary School / Bun-Sgiol Thiriodh
enquiriesobanhigh@argyll-bute.gov.uk
enquiries@tiree.argyll-bute.sch.uk

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Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope this letter finds you and your family all safe and well again this week.

Thank you

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude for all the warm wishes of support we have received from everyone across our community. My thanks too for the dedication of our staff and pupils. They're all doing a grand job.

School life within the "new normal" continues to be progressing well. Since my last letter a fortnight ago, we have continued to develop our ways of working and have gained valuable experience in how best to ensure the safety of our school community, whilst at the same time ensuring the learning and teaching is of the highest standard. Although we have not had any significant updates from the Scottish Government for me to share with you, I thought it best to still reassure you all is well; though still quite different from when we were all at school. Hence the phrase, "New Normal".

School Transport

Let me walk you through the school day to help frame my update. School transport issues are few. Our transport providers are doing an excellent job ensuring that there are sanitising products available on entry and departure; and our youngsters are all wearing face coverings I have been informed.

Two things to note however. Please remember that some adults and children are exempt from wearing face coverings for medical reasons. Please don't always assume that a child without a mask is being disobedient. Secondly, if you are travelling on school transport yourself, please remember adults must sit at the front of the bus and not mix with the children.

On the way to school pupils are well behaved on the whole and they are social distancing by and large from our observations. Remember our pupils are taught in year group bubbles and are used to a year group being together, so they are likely to keep this bubble going when out and about. They should revert back to the wider societal rules when out of school.

Arrival at school

Our school doors open at 8.50 am. We cannot allow pupils in earlier than this because we do not have the staff to supervise a huge school prior to the day beginning any earlier. Our staff are now coming into school 15 minutes earlier already to start supervision duties. I did notice in the first few weeks relatively few pupils waiting outside before 8.45. Despite the weather turning I now notice this number increasing. I have agreed with West Coast Motors and Education transport's mini bus drivers that the buses will keep pupils on board during inclement weather until school opening. For those who have to walk, please do not send them too early and if need be, make sure they wear a jacket or have a brolly. This is Argyll and it rains, a lot.

As you know from a previous letter or two, we had been trying to buy marquees. This was proving difficult because of hire costs and safety concerns. Instead, I have been working with the Special Projects Team, who led the building of the school, on putting in a permanent, large and safe bus shelter and additional coverings to keep our children dry. The size of this project will take some time but is being progressed without unnecessary delay.

Guidance for parents

I have also noticed a "small" number of parents coming into the school grounds in the morning and at the end of the day. Please remember that no parent is allowed on the school grounds, by car or on foot without prior agreement. We simply cannot have adults mixing with our children for obvious reasons. If you need to meet or collect your child, please make an arrangement to do so, at a safe distance and at a safe location outside the school. Emergency collections are permitted given the miniscule number involved.

To avoid queues at the door in the morning, we have removed the automated hand sanitisers and instead have four staff, one at each door, in PPE, manually pumping gel into each pupils' hands. This is much quicker and indeed welcoming because every pupil gets a good morning and friendly welcome. Having taken my turn on this duty, I have to say that the vast majority who reply with a "Thanks Sir" is amazing. What a polite and courteous group of children we teach!

As you know the eight period day has been replaced with ten sessions, for S1-4 each session is split into two further blocks. Pupils do not move class within blocks unless they need to attend a specialist class like Tech, Science, Engineering, PE etc. Teachers move to classes wherever possible. There are three significant effects of this strategy:

1. **Safety.** By keeping pupils in year group bubbles and further limiting their class movement, we reduce the chance of any potential spread of Covid; and make it easy for track and trace to work. In the event of a suspected case, the numbers potentially at risk would be far lower than allowing the kids to mix by moving class multiple times.
2. **Learning.** By not moving the pupils so much, we have created many extra hours' worth of learning time; saved by not having to pack up, move about the building, get set up in the new class, re-tune pupils' minds to a new subject eight times a day. The net result of this has been that we are moving swiftly through our courses, with some teachers reporting we have closed the gap created from the lock-down. The pupils and staff are also enjoying the longer blocks as staff can now also go beyond the key basics of the course and start to explore further areas of interest in that subject and provide a wider

range of knowledge and experience because of the un-interrupted learning. There will always be some pupils and staff who won't like the change.

3. **Calm.** Visitors to our school always noted how pleasant and calm our school was previously. Now it's almost serene. Not moving around 1200 people eight times a day is having a dramatic effect on the ethos of the school with significantly less relationship issues leading to Guidance involvement, less Duty Rector calls to deal with behaviour issues and our pupils more focused on their studies more.

To learn more about this, have a look at Kevin Champion's survey results video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p04eEZRI6sM>

Breaks and Lunches

One of my initial concerns was the way we constructed breaks to be in class. There are now two breaks instead of one and pupils can get out for the toilet (one at a time) any time. These measures helped calm the jitters. I went round pupils asking their views on this. In short, they've learned that sitting chatting with pals for 15 minutes and not having to stand in a queue with a thousand others is far better. They have asked for this to continue when (if) we return to normal. Again, some would disagree.

Lunches are ordered first thing in the morning and delivered to classes for ease of distribution. Pupils then carry their lunch to their bubbles designated area; Atrium or games hall. They sit front facing, now with masks on when not eating. Some more than others need reminded not to face each other but we have far more staff on lunch duty supervising. The numbers attending these lunch areas, and the conversations still ongoing between pals, would suggest our pupils are living with this less than ideal situation.

Given the reported numbers of pupils across Scottish schools having to self-isolate because of breaches in their bubbles, especially at lunchtimes, then you will appreciate our insistence that we maintain all these measures.

At the end of the day our staggered departure also seems to work well, ensuring that flow of pupils exiting the building helps maintain the bubbles in school. Even without school bells (another calming effect throughout the day), six different departure times is smoothly executed.

Clans, Prize-giving, parents' evenings and Supported Study

As much as we have constructed a new normal, we also absolutely must ensure a continuity of the old normal and we still have our senior pupils (Senior Pupil Leadership Team) running assemblies (albeit online), running Clan Challenges and seeking to support the younger ones in the clan wherever the need arises. You can watch the recent Clan videos made by our seniors here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqVauXoUp5efv8sm1zBk0ig>

Our SPLT are also geared up to preparing for our online Prize-giving. With the restrictions to meeting up clearly continuing, we have moved to the creation of a recorded version and staff have been meeting up with former pupils (old S6) to award certificates and take videos. Next week, we'll do the current S5 and S6 video and then add the speeches from our guest speaker, our School Captains and myself, as well as some recorded musical items.

With less significant change coming in on a weekly basis we are a bit more settled in the last two weeks, this has allowed us to focus on more traditional issues. We are now planning to hold online parents' evenings and supported study sessions, so things are beginning to get back up and running. These are all significant changes to how we previously operated and so will take a little longer to organise.

Help and Support

I am aware that some of our youngsters are either off ill (not Covid) but also that some are off isolating awaiting test results from a family member or friend being tested. Please remember we are here to help whenever we can. If you are ill, don't worry about school work; if isolating, please remember all our lessons are on Google Classroom and you can keep up-to-date online. If anyone has any problems with IT, lessons, or anything else at all, please contact your Guidance Teacher.

As always should anyone have any questions or wish to contact us for any reason please email your child's Guidance Teacher or use the contact us page on the website. Please remember to give us some details as to your request or concern. This allows the pastoral team to be better prepared to help you. Please only call if urgent as our staff are either teaching or supporting our pupils. They will reply to an email as soon as they are free.

I hope you all have a lovely week ahead.

Yours faithfully



P A Bain
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Oban High School, Tiree High School & Tiree Primary School