

Dear Parent/Carer

September 2013

S4 Advice, Information and Next Steps

Now that your son is in S4, he will be looking ahead to the new Scottish Qualification Award and (SQA) examinations in May/June 2014. I apologise that this letter is lengthy and detailed. However, it provides information, if followed, which will help assist your son achieve the very highest academic success this year.

I would be grateful if you would discuss the contents of this letter with him to ensure he is clear on the advice and information provided.

S4 SQA 'Prelim' Examination Diet Information

'Prelim' examinations are important and your son should prepare thoroughly for them. They provide him with the opportunity to gain experience of this formal SQA process and to demonstrate the required knowledge and skills to pass the new National examinations. Detailed timetables and expectations with regard to attendance, punctuality, and behaviour will be issued shortly before these examinations in January.

Unlike previous years, with the introduction of the new National Qualifications, the format of prelim study leave for S4 pupils is changing and will be dependant on which level of course your son is studying in a subject. Pupils following a course a National 4 will not have a prelim exam, whilst those following a course a National 5 will have a formal prelim exam in January. Further details of revised arrangements will be communicated following the October holidays.

SQA Appeals

The opportunity for schools to appeal SQA results in August has now ceased. A new two-stage process has been introduced.

- **Stage 1 – The Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service.** This will be applied at the time of an examination if the school considers that a pupil has been

disadvantaged, e.g. a close family member bereavement. In relevant cases, a medical certificate may be required.

- **Stage 2 – The Post-Results Service.** After results are published in August, the school can request an administrative review of a pupil's examination and/or request to have the marking of the script checked. There is an SQA charge for unsuccessful requests and a candidate's grade can go down as well as up.

This SQA change makes it even more important that your son is best prepared for his SQA examinations in May 2014.

National Courses – Unit Re-Assessments

All National courses are judged through a mixture of internal (school) assessment and, for National 5 courses, external (SQA) examinations. The required standards for both internal and external assessments are set by the SQA and the school will be scrutinised to ensure it is reaching them. For your son to receive an overall course award, he is required to pass all SQA assessments for that course.

It is, therefore, essential that your son is well prepared for internal Unit assessments. Any pupil who fails a Unit assessment will get one further opportunity to pass. Failure of this re-assessment will result in your son failing the overall course, regardless of how well he completes any other Unit assessments or, in the case of National 5 courses, the final examination in May.

Unit assessments take place throughout S4. Most courses have three Unit assessments. If your son fails any Unit assessment, a letter will be sent home to notify you of the seriousness of the situation in that subject and the re-assessment date. If you receive such a communication, it indicates that your son is underachieving and we are concerned that he will not gain an overall course award.

It is crucial that S4 pupils prepare well and treat Unit assessments as importantly as the final examination in May/June 2014.

Each year there are very upset pupils (and parents/carers) when they realise that a Unit failure means that their child cannot get an overall course award.

Academic Progress and Advice

This section in this letter provides good examples of how you can further support your son's learning. Following this advice will provide your son with the very best opportunity to improve his potential attainment.

1. **Absence**

Pupils cannot help being ill, but it is essential that they take the responsibility to 'catch up' on missed work. This lost teaching and learning time can never be recovered. Please consider:

- ***Has your son been absent from class(es)/school? If so, has he caught up with missed work?***

2. **Lateness**

A minority of pupils arrive late for school (missing the bus, sleeping in etc). This not only impacts negatively on their learning but may also be highlighted in a school reference. Please consider:

- ***Does your son leave home on time for the start of the school day?***
- ***Do you leave for work before your son leaves for school? Is he out of his bed in the morning?***

3. **Homework**

An important life skill is meeting deadlines. As part of all S4 courses, your son will be set homework tasks with specific completion date deadlines. Details of these are available on "Show My Homework" via our website, with further information being available by using the log-in details you received last week.

In addition your son has also been issued with a School Planner to further assist him in the completion of his homework, target setting and revision. Please check this regularly to ensure he is using it appropriately and challenge him should you find blank pages, as everyday there are things he should be noting down from his teachers and at the end of lessons.

As part of our school learning strategy, your son's class work and homework will be assessed in a variety of ways. These include: traditional teacher assessment (which may or may not include comments or grades), self evaluation (pupil marking their own work) or peer assessment (pairs or groups of pupils evaluating class work/homework). All these strategies are equally valuable in contributing to your son's overall progress.

4. **Revision**

As your son will be aware, all pupils are expected to continue their studies at home. Listed below are some key questions you might want to raise with him:

- *Does he regularly spend time each school evening revising and/or completing homework tasks?*
- *Practical subjects like Technical or Art and Design may have practical tasks to be completed. Does he work on these also?*
- *What about part-time work? Whilst part-time work can provide meaningful work experience, this is often one of the greatest reasons for students academically underachieving.*

I trust you take this opportunity to discuss these questions and advice with your son.

Thank you for your ongoing support in ensuring he reaches his full potential and level of academic attainment this session.

Yours faithfully

Evan L.Ritchie
Head Teacher (Acting)