

Dear Parent/Carer

September 2013

S5/S6 Advice and Information

Now that your son has settled in to his new courses, I write to offer advice and information which I hope will help him achieve academic success this session. I apologise that this letter is lengthy and detailed. However, it provides information, if followed, which will help assist your son achieve his very best academic performance.

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.

Looking at recent national and local media reports, ensuring your son reaches his academic potential is more important than ever. In the current economic climate, next year, Colleges and Universities are again expecting a large increase in applications for even more limited places. In addition there may well be fewer employment opportunities across Scotland. Inevitably this may result in some school leavers being unsuccessful in their plans for further education or employment.

S5/S6 'Prelim' Examination Diets

'Prelim' examinations are important and your son must prepare thoroughly for them. Again they provide him with the opportunity to experience this formal SQA process and to demonstrate the required knowledge to pass Intermediate, Higher Grade and Advanced Higher courses.

All S5/S6 students will be on Study Leave during the "S5/6 Prelim" examination diet, which will be from Monday 27th January to Friday 7th February 2014 (inclusive).

National Assessment Bank (NAB) Assessments

All Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher courses have NAB assessments. These assessments are set by the SQA and sat under examination conditions in school and it is essential that your son is well prepared for these assessments.

Any student who fails a NAB assessment will get one further opportunity to pass. This information will be intimated to parents/carers in a 'Failed NAB' letter and will intimate the re-sit date. Failure of this re-assessment will result in a student failing the overall course, regardless of how well he completes any other NAB assessments or indeed the final examination in May/June.

It is also essential to note, that passing a NAB does not indicate your son will definitely pass the final exam. Passing a NAB only indicates that he has passed a test equivalent to a C award in the relevant subject and level. To ensure an A, B or C award, he will need to sustain a high level of commitment to his studies throughout the course and not get complacent in a subject because he has passed a NAB in it.

It is crucial that S5/6 pupils prepare well and treat NAB 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 NAB failure means that their child cannot get an overall course award.

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.

Academic Progress and Advice

This section 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.

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?***

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?***

Homework

An important life skill is meeting deadlines. As part of all S5/6 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.

Revision

As your son will be aware, the academic requirements of S5/S6 SQA courses, particularly at Higher and Advanced Higher levels, far exceed those at Standard Grade. The main changes in academic demands relate to:

- Study time
- Time management
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Homework
- Shorter length of course

Listed below are some key questions you might want to raise with him to assist him adjust, to the increased demand levels:

- ***Does your son regularly spend between half and one hour per subject per school evening revising and/or completing homework tasks in each subject he is studying?***
- ***Does he have a quiet area to study at home?***
- ***Practical subjects like Technical or Art and Design may have practical tasks to be completed. Does your son 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)