



May 2020

Dear Parents / carers,

Since the closure of schools across the country from March 20 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been a very challenging time for the pupils, staff, parents and carers of Grove Academy to ensure that learning continues despite the unprecedented circumstances.

During lockdown, our school has been one of the Hubs in Dundee providing childcare and learning for some of our most vulnerable young people and also for the children of key workers. Our hub's numbers have increased steadily over the time, and the four cluster schools have worked very well together to provide a safe and welcoming place for those young people who need this support. Staff from Grove have supported the Hub on a daily basis and this has involved 40-50 colleagues per week. In addition, a large number of staff are self-isolating or shielding at home and are unable physically to be involved in the Hub. Nevertheless, they are still working remotely at home, as are all other colleagues and providing quality on-line materials for young people. On-line-learning has been a steep learning curve both for Grove teachers as well as for our young people. Everyone has had to learn how to use it and what it can and cannot do, and this, I think, applies to parents/carers, too.

To help pupils and parents/carers access on-line learning more easily, we launched the Grove Home Learning Portal on May 4. This Portal indicates work for each class, the time required to do the task and the link to the work, which can be on Microsoft Teams, Show My Homework (*Satchel One*), Google classrooms or GLOW. It has been a huge challenge to get this set up and it is running relatively well, despite some hiccups and IT restrictions. We are now looking at expanding live learning, and some departments have already dipped a toe in the water in this regard. This will possibly be a part of the return to school in August, however there are also some limitations and barriers that may mean it cannot be rolled out across the school.



We are a Microsoft School



My staff have spent a huge amount of time in responding to pupils' needs and requests for help and support, especially with reference to their health and well-being, and there is a lot of advice and help on the portal, the website, our social media accounts and the app in this regard.

Another issue is to ensure that all pupils have access to devices from an equity point of view and I have to say that just about every spare laptop and iPad we have at Grove is out to pupils and staff so they can work at home. Another big challenge has been the lack of access to the Internet for a number of young people. I am pleased to say we have used our remaining PEF money to purchase through DCC a further 50 laptops for pupil use and we hope to receive them soon. Some of these laptops may have inbuilt SIM cards allowing pupils to access the Internet even if they have no internet access at home.

Since the Easter break we have also been preparing for and executing the move to the new timetable. We changed timetable a full three weeks earlier than planned. This was hugely challenging as we had to do this remotely. The Guidance Staff have been excellent in ensuring pupils get their curriculum right for the new session.

Getting the new courses ready and on-line has been challenging and involved a very significant amount of work for staff. Yes, it may not be perfect, but we are in unprecedented, totally unusual circumstances. We have at times had to think out of the box and as with all other schools we are developing our approaches to this.

Another challenge has been to get pupils engaged and I am heartened that over 80% of Senior Phase pupils (new S4-6) have engaged with their learning since the change to the new courses and new timetable on May 11. However, the engagement of pupils in S2-3 in their new courses has not been as good. I would now ask you, as parents/carers, to encourage your child to engage with the learning materials. I would particularly ask you to do so, if your child is now in the Senior Phase (S4-6). It is highly likely that the format of the 2021 SQA exams will be different from the past, and that there may be a high level of continuous assessment and teacher professional judgement throughout this year. It is therefore crucial that your young person engages now in their National courses, be it National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, to ensure we have appropriate assessment evidence for their courses.

As you will probably know, schools are set to return in August, provided the medical and scientific evidence indicates the R number is under control. We are looking forward to seeing our Grove pupils again, but there is a considerable number of challenges ahead before we get back to every Grove pupil being back full time at school.

Firstly, we will have to ensure that PPE is in place and that everyone respects social distancing. Based on current guidelines, this means that we shall probably only be able to have 10 pupils in a classroom at a time. This immediately means that, as we are almost at full capacity, we can only ever have a limited number of pupils in the school at a time, possibly between 30% and 40%. We are identifying how we can safely increase this percentage to accommodate bigger numbers. We may also have to look to alternative accommodation in the Ferry.

Secondly, there will also be restrictions on staffing which will affect our capacity:

- Some staff will still be self-isolating or shielding, having received a letter from the Government
- Staff will also be required to be on duty at the Hub for vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers, as they may not be in one of the groups who will be in school on a particular day
- Staff will require time to put work on-line for pupils who are not in school and to respond to their requests for help and support. This inevitably will need to be balanced with the amount of time available for in-school teaching.

In school, we shall have to consider how we do lunches. As we shall not be able to provide everyone with lunch, and the eating places in the Ferry are currently closed, we shall probably be looking at pupils bringing their own packed lunches, unless they are eligible for a free school lunch, and with lunch being eaten in a classroom.

Movement around the school will also be restricted, due to social distancing. We shall have to institute a one-way system, which will be very difficult, given the layout of the building, and that we have not been able up till now to institute one in the school.

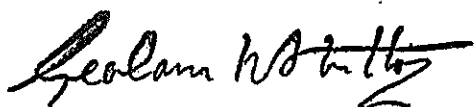
In her statement last week, the First Minister also said that schools would begin to re-open in June to allow support with the transition for some children and young people. We now await confirmation of the date in June we can begin inviting children, parents/carers and staff into our schools. Once we receive this information, we shall begin to invite some children and families in to visit the school.

We are still in the initial stages of planning the return in August and I hope to give you fuller details sometime in June when we know exactly what the return will look like. As the First Minister has said, it will be a blend of in school and on-line learning.

We are, however, now beginning to address the practicalities of pupils returning to school. There are a number of challenges in this regard, particularly in that we must ensure we prevent further spreading of the disease. Based on current guidance from the Scottish Government, it is likely that initially Grove pupils will only be in school for at most up to a third of the week on average, which is roughly 1.5 days. The curriculum offered in all years may also have to be restricted; for example, we may not be able to provide core PE due to restrictions on bus transport to Dawson Park or provide practical lessons in some subjects such as CDT, HE, etc. How this will all look has yet to be decided and this will be done in consultation with the Leadership Team, colleagues in school and DCC. However, once we have examined all the options I will update you through the usual social media (School Website, Twitter, Grove App, etc.) and explain why we have made these decisions.

Hopefully as the session progresses and the virus is contained, then we shall be able to increase the amount of in-school learning as we head back to what we previously regarded as normal. I look forward to working together to ensure our young people get the best possible solution to their learning in these difficult and challenging times.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham W Hutton', written in a cursive style.

Graham W Hutton

Rector

