



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 and pupils (please share this information with your children).

I hope this letter once again finds you and your loved ones safe and well.

Thank you

May I begin by thanking all the staff and pupils who have continued not only to engage in their normal lessons but who have also contributed to the many Christmas activities and events that have helped provide festive cheer and a positive ethos in our school over the last couple of weeks. My thanks to all the parents who have continued to send their children to school. Our attendance rates are higher than in previous years: an illustration of the confidence shown by parents to keep our school a safe learning environment. The exceptional level of cleaning in the school is clearly keeping the cold virus at bay, as well as the potential threat of Covid. My grateful thanks are also due to the many community partners who support our school and who feature in the numerous videos posted on our YouTube channel. I would encourage you to log onto this site, where you can find videos showcasing all the superb school community events, including our first online Christmas Service. I'm sure that watching these videos will bring a warm smile to you all.

Oban: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqVauXoUp5efv8sm1zBk0ig?pbjreload=102>

New term dates, who will attend and when?

Following on from my letter on Sunday, the Scottish Government has now issued more detailed advice to schools for our return after the Christmas holiday. You can see the full details here:

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-re-opening-arrangements-for-january-2021

All Argyll and Bute schools will reopen as planned on the Thursday 7th and Friday 8th of January. On these days we will only be open to support the children of key workers and children we have identified as being vulnerable. All staff will attend school on these days to prepare for delivering online learning from the 11th January.

Between the 11th of January and 15th of January all lessons will be taught online. Vulnerable and keyworker children will also receive online lessons but in a school classroom.

If you were previously identified as a keyworker during the last Lockdown in the Summer, you will receive a letter from the Council to confirm arrangements for your child(ren) from the 7th January. If you are a parent of a new pupil or you have changed career and are now classed as a keyworker please apply for a place at seemis@argyll-bute.gov.uk. Information about eligibility can be found here:

<https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20200816084856/http://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-guide-schools-early-learning-closures/>

Parents/Carers of children eligible for a free school meal will receive an automatic payment to their bank account which will cover the period up until the 18th January 2021. This will include pupils in P1-P3 who are currently receiving payments through the holidays.

How will online learning work?

We already upload every lesson to Google Classroom (GC). Our children are used to online learning. We do this to ensure that any child absent can keep pace with the class lessons when absent. They can also use GC when absent to ask questions of the teacher. The further advantage of uploading each lesson is that pupils can revisit the lessons in their own time and at their own pace. This forms a useful revision tool; revision materials that are always available and never lost. I would note that some GC materials are more extensive and detailed than others as our teachers develop their skills and experience in this still, relatively new, mode of learning.

Unlike the Summer Lockdown, when we blocked lessons, this time we will try and keep the pupils in a routine and keep them attending their classes at the same time as if they were in school. This is because of the shorter duration of the online provision. A lesson learned from before was that pupils (and parents) preferred the work spread across the week, instead of sometimes causing anxiety by uploading everything at the start of the week.

S1-3 pupils will have their lessons uploaded to GC on a period-by-period basis, linked to their current timetable. At the start of a period they should log on, read and begin the tasks set. Throughout the period, teachers will be on GC, available to answer questions and give guidance as required. Just like in a class environment, pupils asking questions may have to wait their turn for the teachers to answer so please be patient.

S4-6 pupils will also use GC but also Google Meet. Google Meet is a live-learning tool where the teacher can both see and hear the pupils in their class. We use Google Meet every day to teach lessons to Tiree, Dunoan and Lochgilphead; and from Tiree into Oban High School. This adds breadth and wider subject opportunities between our schools. It works very well and many of our staff have a great deal of experience in using it. All staff will be given extra training, as necessary, for it to be used with every senior class during the first days back.

All S4-6 will follow their current timetables and log onto their Google Meet class at the start of each period. Teachers will spend 10-20 minutes explaining the topic of the day, setting the tasks and answering questions. Google Meet will then cease and pupils will work on their tasks and communicate with their teachers over Google Classroom by texting. Mid-way through the lesson, the teacher will gather the pupils back into a live session on Google Meet to check

progress and offer support, before resuming with the tasks and supporting individuals through GC. The class will end with the teacher summing up and providing next steps, again by using Google Meet.

This may seem daunting and unfamiliar to some at first. However, experience shows that the pupils cope with it well. Using live learning over Google Meet continues the relationship between teacher and pupil more fully and helps with engagement and understanding. It's easier to have a conversation 'in person' rather than over the phone and this is similar.

Some subjects like Core PE and Practical lessons cannot be delivered online. During these periods, the pupils are free to enjoy that down time or use it to study for other subjects. The choice is theirs / yours. Similarly breaks and lunches will obviously not involve any online time with teachers.

IT Support

Of course, the obvious questions and concerns about IT access need to be addressed. We are already aware of who had connectivity issues and we have issued (and will issue more) Vodafone "Dongles" to help connect to 4G where the wifi is weak. We have already issued Chromebooks to those who may not have been able to afford such a device. We also offered, and will continue to offer, IT support to any pupils or parents who need help logging on from home or can't get a device to work.

If you need a data "Dongle"; if you need a device; if you can't use the software; or if you have a problem with your device (belonging to you or the school) then please use the "Contact Us" page on the website, and one of our staff will contact and support you as best we can.

Pastoral Support

In addition to pupils having difficulty using IT from home because of technical reasons, we are aware that some pupils will not be keen to engage in learning online for other reasons. If this is the case, again, please contact us and one of the pastoral team members will support you and your child in an effort to try and overcome the barriers. I would also note that many pupils thrive on online learning, preferring it to being in school with all the relationship issues that that can bring; such is the diversity of needs and opportunities in such a large vibrant school.

I am also aware that many of you will also be working from home, or still on furlough. I am therefore conscious that having parents and children all in the house, all competing for limited devices/broadband and all under the strain from the uncertainty that Covid can bring to our lives, means that there will inevitably be tensions at home on occasion.

I would ask you to remember that, although we have set a timetable structure for our children to make sure they get up and continue their routines and to ensure there is regular learning slots going on, there will be times when it is not possible to engage in a lesson. If pupils are not logging into lessons, the teachers will let the Clan pastoral teams know. A Guidance Teacher or Family Liaison Officer will then call home. This is a supportive call to ask if we can help you and your child somehow. There may be difficulties we can help you overcome; there may not. Please chat to the staff and let us try and help you.

What will happen week commencing the 18th January?

The Scottish Government statement said that online learning will be used until “at least the 18th of January”. The expectation would be that we would all return to school as normal on the 18th. However, it seems prudent to me that, as we are already planning for online delivery for a week, we should actually be prepared and plan for a longer online provision – just in case.

I tell you this, not because the online delivery will continue, but to re-assure you that if it does we are prepared. Our current blocked timetable was written to accommodate both online learning (when all pupils are at home learning) and for blended learning (where some pupils will be in school; and some at home). No matter what happens we will be able to cope because we have planned for many possible scenarios. If all goes to plan, and we all return, all the better.

I hope you feel as re-assured as you can be in these uncertain times. I shall write to you all again on the 8th January with finer details for the online delivery the following week. Until then, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas.

Yours faithfully



P A Bain
Executive Head Teacher
Oban High School, Tiree High School & Tiree Primary School