

ANNAN ACADEMY



11 JANUARY 2011

Dear Parent/Carer,

Firstly, I wish you all the very best for 2011. The next few weeks and months are crowded with information, meetings, deadlines and examinations. I have brought all of this together in this newsletter - I hope you find it informative and useful. As always, please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any queries.

F D Davis
Rector

2011 Important dates including Holiday and In-service dates for Terms 3 and 4

Term 3

Wednesday, 5 January 2011 – Friday, 1 April 2011

Additional Holidays and In-service days:

Monday 21, Tuesday 22 & Wed 23 Feb

Other important dates:

24 Jan '11 – S1 Parent Consultation Evening re Curriculum for Excellence
24 Jan '11 – S4 Prelims begin
16 Feb '11 – S4 to S5 Transfer Information Evening for parents
07 Feb '11 – S5/6 Prelims begin
28 Feb '11 – S2 to S3 Transfer Information Evening for parents
02 Mar '11 – S4 Parents' Evening
07 Mar '11 – S2 Parents' Evening
17 Mar '11 – Junior Show (The King and I) begins
22 Mar '11 – S1 Parents' Evening
28 Mar 11 – Achievement Evening

Term 4

Monday, 18 April 2011 - Friday, 8 July 2011

Additional Holidays and In-service days:

Easter Weekend:

Friday 22 and Monday 25 April 2011

Other important dates:

18 Apr '11 – S3 Examinations
03 May '11 – SQA Examinations diet begins
03 May '11 – Parent Forum AGM
06 Jun '11 – New timetable begins
28 Jun '11 – School Show (The Sound of Music) begins

May Day Holiday

Monday, 2 May 2011

Inservice

Friday, 10 June 2011

Note: School reopens for pupils on Thursday, 25 August 2011

Absence Line - 0845 227 0336

Severe Weather arrangements and arrangements for School Closures

Given the time of year and the unpredictability of the weather conditions it is timely that we remind parents/carers of the arrangements for such emergencies. As you will be only too well aware, we have been fortunate in that we have not, as yet, been subject to school closure as many schools around the country have been. Already many young people across the country have missed out on a considerable amount of their schooling. This will no doubt impact on their education in general and their success in any examinations for which they are currently preparing – i.e. Prelims, SQA examination, etc..

Accordingly, it is always our first priority to keep the school open and it should not be assumed, simply because school transport may not be able to run in certain areas, that the school will be closed. Many of our young people live in and around Annan and are therefore within walking distance of the school. As long as the school can be adequately heated, staffed and meets health and safety requirements, it will remain open. In the event, however, of the school having to close either before school begins in the morning or during the school day, parent/carers will be notified directly via the School's Group Call Texting Service and information will be posted on Dumfries and Galloway Council's website (School closures - <http://www.dumgal.gov.uk>) and through the local media.

In adverse weather conditions, or other such emergencies, it is sometimes necessary to close the school early (e.g. to allow pupils to return home safely). To be prepared for such possible emergencies, parents/guardians are asked to ensure that they have:

- (a) provided the school with an emergency address (and telephone number, if possible), to which children may be referred if their home is locked and/or unoccupied. (A nearby relative or neighbour is usually quoted).
- (b) informed the school of any particular problems where a child is 'at risk' during emergency conditions (e.g. where a pupil has a long walk after getting off the school transport and the parent/guardian would be required to be telephoned to up lift a child from a particular place).
- (c) impressed upon their child(ren) exactly what to do should they ever be sent home unexpectedly.

During extremely bad weather, where children from outlying areas may not be able to travel to and from school safely, parents/guardians can exercise the responsible option of keeping them at home, and informing the school accordingly. Where a child does set out for school in such conditions, he/she should be instructed not to wait at road-ends for lengthy periods. If transport does not arrive, he/she should return home.

Prelim Examinations

Parents/carers are reminded that the Prelims for S4 begin on Monday, 24 January 2011 and the S5/6 Prelims begin on Monday, 7 February 2011. For S4 this is now less than two weeks away and for S5/6 less than 3 weeks away. Parents who attended the support evenings we offered recently for both of these groups, will remember the importance that we placed on candidates performing as well as they can in these examinations and therefore, preparing for them appropriately is paramount. I also remind parents/carers of the classes that are available outwith class time (lunchtime and after school) details of which were distributed to all S4-S6 parents and are posted on the school website (Annan Academy news – What's on? – Study classes).

S3 Examinations

S3 parents/carers are reminded that there is a formal diet of examinations scheduled for the third year beginning on the first day back following the Easter Holidays (i.e. Monday 18 April 2011). As for the prelims above, careful and planned preparation for these examinations is very important indeed and we ask that parents support their young person in these preparations.

S1 Parents Consultation on the implementation of A Curriculum for Excellence

As the current first year is the first cohort that will be moving through the new structures associated with A Curriculum for Excellence, a consultation evening has been scheduled for Monday 24 January 2011 from 6.30 to 7.30pm. During this session we will review the changes we have made this year and consider the proposals for the further implementation of Curriculum for Excellence into S2 and beyond.

Newspaper Article

Some people may have noticed an article in the Annandale Observer (Friday, 17 December 2010) entitled '*Support in bid to boost exam results*' that reported on the December meeting of the Annandale and Eskdale Area Committee, at which a representative from Dumfries and Galloway Council (Department for Education and Community Services) delivered an annual report regarding the performance of all of the schools (4 Secondary and 30+ primary) in our area.

Clearly we accept that the journalistic focus in a local newspaper will be on the local school, but it appears from reading the article that particular focus was given to Annan Academy - to the exclusion of all other schools and I feel it is, therefore, important to put the record straight on some of the impressions given.

The article suggested that the recent visit to Annan Academy by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) was in relation to the number of Standard and Higher grades achieved by S4 to S6 pupils. On the contrary, HMIe visited our School - at my invitation - as part of the nation-wide support programme they were offering to all schools, regarding the implementation of 'A Curriculum for Excellence'. As one of seven secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway who requested such a visit, we wished to discuss, in a detailed way, our plans for the future and ensure that our proposals articulated with national expectations and guidelines. I am happy to report that the visit was highly successful and HMIe thanked us for the 'openness and transparency' of the programme and the discussions - involving a wide range of staff from both the Academy and our cluster - that developed throughout the day. Our meeting was joined by two officials from the Education Department - one of whom was Mrs Baxter who is quoted in the newspaper. The meeting was **not** in relation to Standard and Higher Grade results.

Furthermore, the article suggested that these officials "talked to all members of staff" during their visit on 8 December 2010 and that they took a lead role throughout the day. This is simply not the case. A cross-section of staff was involved in discussion groups and the Council representatives were able to contribute to these discussions as and when appropriate - on an agenda that was set solely by us and that was firmly focussed on **our** plans for the implementation of 'A Curriculum for Excellence'.

The 'Annandale' article went on to say that 'in the past year Annan Academy has had additional support from another head teacher' and I feel it is important to put this in context. As part of our ongoing improvement agenda, the school has had several discussions with a former head teacher who was seconded by the Education Department, partly to fulfil that role. The dialogue that has ensued from these discussions was - and continues to be - valuable, as part of our Quality Assurance and planning procedures.

As also reported in the article, Mrs. Baxter's final statement, 'We've also gone into the school with our statistician and drawn down all of these statistics and identified subjects and classes where performance needs to be improved' is potentially misleading. Routine meetings take place in all schools at which the Education Department's statistician is present - as he was at our meeting on 17 September 2010. The data presented by him, and that presented by the school via its own self-evaluation procedures articulated exactly with areas for improvement already clearly identified in the School Improvement Plan 2009 - 2011. That meeting bore no relation to our meeting with HMIe.

It is most unfortunate that the article and especially the meeting it reported did not accentuate the improvements made in the past year and the amazing achievements of our young people. I am happy to start re-dressing that balance and offer some statistics that might interest you:

Exclusion rates for the session 2009-2010 have decreased by 66% on the session 2008-2009 and 38% on the previous year.

The number of referrals of pupils to the Area Review Group has reduced significantly since the Academy adopted its multi-agency approach to pupil and family support.

Attainment in SQA examination:

Out of 17 subject areas in S4 Standard Grade there have been improvements in:

11 at Credit (1-2) level over the previous year.

14 at Credit/General (1-4)

17 at Credit/General/Foundation level (with 13 subject areas achieving 100% in grades 1-6)

Out of 21 subject areas in S5 Higher Grade:

13 improved the number of A passes

16 improved the number of A-B passes

15 improved the number of A-C passes

Out of 21 subject areas presenting Higher in S5/6:

14 improved the number of A Passes

19 improved the number of A-B passes

18 improved the number of A-C passes

The number of candidates in S5 and S6 who did not achieve passes in their Higher examinations (D or No Award) was reduced by 45%.

The HMIE report 2009 (available online at www.hmie.gov.uk) states in Section 2 that one of the particular strengths of the school is 'Successful inclusion of a large number of young people experiencing difficulties with their learning'. This year a significant number of such young people achieved certification at Access 2, ASDAN, Youth Awards etc. - levels which match their abilities and recognise their successes. Unfortunately, these results are not recorded in the published National Statistics.

Option Choices

Parents / Carers of S2, S4 and S5 young people are reminded that the options process for next year begins mid February and concludes early in March. This is an especially important time to make decisions about the right course(s), the right number of courses and to ensure the right level of study where appropriate. Subject Teachers, Pupil Support and Careers Staff will be available to advise throughout. However, the conversations between young people and their parent/carer are of crucial importance and we ask for your continued support throughout.

FDD
11.01.11