



MacIntyre Academies Discovery Academy

Putting children and families *first*

27TH May 2022

Dear Parents, Carers and Pupils,

I hope this finds you well and ready for half term fun. It has been a less disrupted half term for our school, now that COVID restrictions have been removed. We are still using a common sense approach regarding COVID 19 with staff and supporting them to be away from school if they test positive or are unwell. This has created some pinch points with staffing, but overall we are maintaining provision and consistency for pupils.

Achievements

I wanted to take a moment to comment on the exam period that we are currently in and to recognise the tremendous effort and focus that the majority of pupils have displayed all of the time in the exam conditions. Considering that many of our pupils have not sat a formal exam since their SATs, if at all, they have been focussed, despite their expected anxieties. Thank you all for doing the “right thing, right place, right time”, as it helps everyone. Exams would not have been a reality for a number of our pupils in the past, due to issues they may have faced, so for them to approach them with such maturity is a testament to their efforts and those of their fantastic class staff and subject teachers. I also want to give particular due recognition to our exams officer Amy Garnham, who has done an exceptional job of co-ordinating the process, ensuring every pupil has all that they need and making sure that our pupils have the very best chance of success. We also know from some moderation work that has been submitted that some pupils have done exceptionally well in teacher assessments too. Well done everyone and keep going!

Another success that I wanted to ensure you all knew about was our football team, who from very small and informal beginnings, went on this half term to win the National Engage Network Cup. The Engage Network is made up of schools like ours from up and down the country and for our team to come out on top of that highly competitive field speaks volumes about their skills, commitment and comradery. They also carried themselves on and off the pitch as fair and dignified sportsmen. We are all very proud of their hard work and achievement and that of their coaches.

Governance, Leadership and Effectiveness

The governing body have already met once this term and will meet again next half term. They have undertaken the following activities linked to our development planning;

- Staff wellbeing visit
- Parent voice telephone meetings
- Health and safety audit follow up
- Safeguarding audit

We are very grateful to our chair and board for their continued commitment to our school. We have also begun work with a school improvement partner, working with the Eastern Partnership for SEND and this is supporting the leadership team to plan strategically for the improvements we want to make in the year ahead. Tony leigh is remaining in post as Head of School and I am continuing my support of both Discovery and Venture Academies for the foreseeable future.

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Staffing

We have formally welcomed Jinny Cumiskey to our team from Easter, as a permanent Assistant Principal for SEND. Jinny has been working exceptionally hard with colleagues from the family footings team to ensure that EHCP planning has priority in the school at all levels and that communication with the local authority through our Plan Co-ordinators is strengthened so that over time we face less delays in getting our pupils what they need.

We have also welcomed back Jay, who has returned to Discovery as our lead for construction. Pupils and staff were delighted to see Jay return to Discovery and he has already made great strides in our provision for pupils who relish the chance to work on practical and vocational activities in construction and design. Additionally, we have a number of staff enjoying maternity leave and most recently our Occupational Therapist Jemma has given birth to a gorgeous baby girl. We look forward to most of those colleagues returning to us over the autumn term and early next spring.

Sadly, we have some farewells to say too in the next couple of weeks. The first is Naomi Hurst, who is our School Business Manager. Naomi has been given the opportunity to follow her passion for finance and take on a purely finance senior role with a local non-profit organisation after the break. We wish her well and are thankful for all that she has done in her time with Discovery. I have certainly found Naomi's help and support excellent since joining the school and she will be missed. Over the remainder of the school year Jennie Nicholls the SBM from Venture Academy will be supporting both schools, which we review the role and agree a permanent solution.

Another member of staff moving on from us at the end of our first week after the holidays is Danielle Land. To our pupils Danielle has been a supportive, compassionate and committed professional, who has advocated for them, helped them and challenged them to be their best selves. As a colleague Danielle is very much a radiator in every room, giving out warmth, energy and positivity. Danielle will be much missed by all of us, but having been offered a role at Oakwood Special School as a lead practitioner for Mental Health she has made the difficult decision to follow her ambition and take her abundant skills to a new group of children and young people. We wish Danielle every success and we will all get the chance for a good, goodbye when she sees out her last week with us, by leading on the 'colour run' event after the half term holiday. Recruitment for Danielle's post is taking place and we will let pupils know the outcome of that, after the holidays.

Attendance and Safeguarding

Please note that term dates 2022-23 are now ratified by the governing body and shared on our website to help you plan for holidays in the year ahead. Also, in terms of attendance, please be aware that we are no longer able to use any codes related to COVID 19 to justify non-attendance. Additionally, the approved absence codes will only be used for absence for which clear reasons or reasonable evidence is provided such as illness, bereavement or appointment letters. All other absence, unless approved through professionals' meetings and agreed with the local authority, will be marked as unauthorised. I know so many families have fought long and hard to gain a place for their child in our schools and I do not want to give the local authority any reason to question that decision when they ask for our attendance figures. If you are concerned about attendance or need support, please speak to your child's class team in the first instance or a member of the safeguarding team.

Feedback from some, parents, pupils and staff has highlighted the desire for the school to have CCTV, which it currently does not internally. We would, of course have policy around this and other parents, pupils and staff could not ask to look at footage without going through a proper process in line with data protection policy. We know a number of our pupils struggle to remember things that happened when they were angry, upset or anxious, and we would hope using this to work through restorative conversations about what happened, why and how we can support them in the future will be helpful. Additionally, adults can make brilliant decisions and sometimes make the wrong ones and as a training tool, dissecting incidents step by step and learning from them, would be really valuable to us as a school. We also know that when things are heightened it can be hard for everyone to recall what happened, in what order and by whom and this can lead to misunderstanding, upset and relationships breaking down. With CCTV we can review things quickly, look at the facts and take the right actions for everyone's sake. Can I please ask that you follow this link to give me your views about CCTV. This will close next Friday.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ErPCoggesk25hFL9oOVT0fru5DyNltZlhqit47C1uLZUOUJBOUFWWUkzSkhLR0hJSVE4MUNUUUZyTy4u>

Finally....Thank you all for your continued support for the school, our team and our pupils. We have all had 2 very challenging years in and out of school and it is only through working together that we have been able to maintain what we do here each day. I look forward to us moving forward together and helping our pupils towards being their best future selves, ready for life.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emily Hopkins-Hayes', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Emily Hopkins-Hayes
Executive Principal