Important Dates

NB: THE 24TH APRIL IN-SERVICE DAY IS CANCELLED. The Virtual School’s Friday schedule will operate as usual.

April
20-24 Grade 10 Mock IGCSE & Semester 2 Exams

May
1 MS House Challenges
8 MAY BANK HOLIDAY – NO SCHOOL

From the Head of School

Dear Parents,

Exams are a routine part of our lives. In school we take them to see how our learning is progressing, and then to get into university; at university, for a degree so we can enter a profession; in our professions to qualify us for specialist tasks or to aid promotions. They are also part of our personal lives: to allow us to drive for example.

The first exams took place nearly one and half thousand years ago in China. Three ranks of exams qualified students for the three ranks of imperial administration: district, provincial and central. They were how the emperor chose his civil servants; he could have selected from family members and people he knew, or by recommendation and reputation; exams must have seemed a neat solution in a large country with a large population with a lot of governing to do. The British and other Europeans copied the idea in the nineteenth century as their own populations got larger, and with them the problems of governance. Unlike the Chinese they expanded the idea into lots of other areas of life as well.

Exams were invented and adopted by authorities. Neither Plato in his academy or Aristotle in his lyceum ever considered exams as the goal of the education they provided or even necessary; nor did medieval universities for academic knowledge, or guilds for vocational skills.

This year, exams across the UK and the wider world have been cancelled: Scottish Highers, A Levels, IB Diploma; National 5s, GCSES and IGCSEs. For many students the focus of years of study has suddenly been taken away. They are quite rightly disorientated, asking what this means for their education.

The examination authorities including Cambridge (IGCSE) and IB are making sure that students will still receive valid qualifications and that they can progress unhindered to the next stage of
learning. But it is also an opportunity for us to step back and remind ourselves that learning is more than just preparation for a final exam designed for some external authority to pass judgement on us, to select or reject us. Like an ancient emperor choosing who would help him rule. I am not dismissing the value of that or pretending that schools shouldn’t prepare students for the world as it is; but we should have greater ambitions as well.

Learning leads us to self-actualise, to grow in awareness of ourselves and the universe around us. Yes it increases our earning potential as we pass exams and gain pieces of paper, and it is no bad thing to have a more comfortable life; but it is more than that: it enriches our potential to engage with life and make the world a better place.

On Wednesday, we started our clubs programme. We are calling it ‘Wellbeing Wednesday.’ Some students will use the time to catch up on assignments, others to explore their interests. For all, a chance to catch our breaths in the middle of an intense week on online learning; to engage how we want to. Sometimes we can learn for the simple pleasure of it, and not worry about the outcomes.

Best regards,

Nicholas Little
Head of School

From the MS/HS Principal

Dear Middle/High School Parents,

It will have been a different break to what many of us had planned, and I am sure there are a lot of very tidy cupboards, pristine gardens and well-painted walls in our community right now. Hopefully, whatever you did, you were able to do it as a family and everyone is keeping well.

There has had to be some reactive decision-making in recent weeks in response to edicts from exam boards that are trying to navigate the fall-out from the cancellation of written exams. Our Grade 12 students have had all their required assessments submitted to the IBO, and our Grade 10 teachers are identifying evidence from the two years of the IGCSE course to share with CIE, so the Boards can determine final grades. Our senior class is still following our Virtual School timetable, exploring ideas and concepts off-syllabus, and our Grade 10 students will shortly be embarking on pre-IB projects after their upcoming mock and semester exams (timetable below).

With these exams and other assessments, we are trusting our students to maintain the high level of academic honesty at home that we would expect on campus. Any assistance you can offer in terms of ensuring they are in a quiet space and stay focused at their workstation for the duration of a test would be greatly appreciated.

Please encourage your son or daughter to join the activities offered on Wednesdays. It is a valuable opportunity to stay connected. HS Student Council has done a great job in putting together a ‘virtual’ Field Day for Friday, and we are trying to make the most of our advisory sessions. An MS House Challenge will run on 1st May. Along with this focus on well-being we do still want to maintain high academic expectations. Students should approach their online lessons and assignments diligently and maturely, and recognise that it is in their interests for meaningful learning to continue even through this uncertain and sometimes challenging period.
Grade 10 Mock IGCSE and Semester 2 Exam Schedule (April 2020)

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Exams will be taken at home. Students registered for the IGCSE will sit a mock exam, everyone else will take a semester exam. Mock exams will not count towards the semester grade; other assessments this week may be factored in. Students will be eligible for additional time, etc., as per their exam accommodations.

Courses not listed have in-class projects *in lieu* of exams.

**Angus Carmichael**  
MS/HS Principal

### From the Elementary Principal

Dear Parents,

*When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves.* - Victor E. Frankl

To be clear I don’t like virtual learning. Social distancing is unnatural and computer technology is a poor substitute for the emotional and intellectual connections that come from direct human contact. But this is our situation and we have to make the most of it.

What has been inspiring since the lockdown has begun is how quickly our school community (and much of the wider world) has found ways to compensate for the impact of social distancing. It’s also brought about some surprising benefits. (How many of you have reconnected with friends and family you haven’t been in regular contact with before the lockdown?) In the great ISA tradition, parents, students and teachers have arrived at similar conclusions as to what works and where to make adjustments to our teaching arrangements to foster virtual learning. Even as surveys were coming in from all parts of the school community, teachers were making changes to their Learning Grids, the use of Google Meets, and bringing in new software to allow for more effective student engagement. We continue to alter the nature of assignments to make them practical from home and relevant. Behind our efforts has been an amazing tech team who are non-stop unlocking any glitches that occur with new and existing technology. Over 50 personal deliveries of Chromebooks were carried out during the break. One of the observations I keep hearing from teachers is about the rapidly developing tech skills students are developing.

Wellbeing Wednesday this week was, by most accounts, a big success. Teachers can become exhausted by the demands of planning online and acquiring and reviewing student work. Likewise,
parents are trying to deal with multiple demands from home, including their own working schedules. Students can feel overwhelmed by their assignments and the loss of contact with their peers. Wednesdays give us a pause button to catch our breath. Parents, please remember the health and well-being of your family is ALWAYS more important than school work. It’s OK if your child has to diverge from scheduled activities, spend more time on activities that give easy gratification or just run around. The key to our continued success is to keep up strong communication between the school and home. So, please let us know when things are not going well, when you need some assistance, or when you are seeing success.

On Thursday evenings I so look forward to sharing my appreciation, along with my neighbours, for the work of the NHS and all of those essential workers risking so much to look after us all. It’s important to have plans, things to look forward to, despite these awful times we are all living in.

Thank you to all of our families for what you do each day to keep up the spirits of your children. They are the ones that keep up our spirits. If you would like to share any questions, achievements, or concerns, our incredible ISA staff are always here to support you. On a personal note, I love hearing stories and receiving pictures that show the creative and positive ways individual families/children are changing their routines or coming up with exciting projects to make the most of a situation we can’t alter. If appropriate, I’ll mention individual efforts in my virtual assemblies.

Stay safe.

Best regards,

Don Newbury,
Elementary Principal

From the Fine Arts Department

Stay safe! Stay healthy! Stay positive! Add the Arts to your daily routine! There are loads of great things happening on the Internet for the Arts. Here are a few:


https://www.housebeautiful.com/uk/lifestyle/g32030829/coronavirus-lockdown-stream-musicals-theatre-shows-free/


Keep reading the ISA THISTLE! The ISA Fine Arts Team has some great 'ISA Virtual Events' coming your way in the next two months!

Keep your heart strong! Support the Arts!

All the best,

The Fine Arts Team - Lisa, Catherine, Nicolina, Javier & Kent
From the Library

ISA Library - now offering Ebooks. We hope your children are still able to get some personal reading for relaxation in at this time - and we now have a new ebook/audiobook system so that you can access new books! If you have a child in Grade 4 - Grade 8, we are offering a new system of ebooks and audiobooks that they can download directly from our library catalogue. These work with any Apple or Android device, but unfortunately not with Kindles. You can see the ebooks/audiobooks we now have available on the Destiny library catalogue. We only have about 25 of each so far, aimed at Grades 4-8. If these work well and students like the system, we can quickly add more ebooks and audiobooks over the next few weeks. If your child would like to try one of these ebooks/audiobooks, please:

1. Email library@isa.aberdeen.sch.uk, telling us what password you would like us to add to their Destiny account. Their username will be the same as for their school google login;

2. Help them to download the free Destiny Read app, from your usual app store, to the device that they want to use.

We hope our students enjoy these ebooks. If you would like more information, please contact Josie Crimp and Rosaleen Hay at library@isa.aberdeen.sch.uk.

Josie Crimp and Rosaleen Hay
Librarians
The International School Aberdeen
Access ISA Library Catalogue here

Contact us for access to online ISA Library resources, including e-books, journals and databases.

Thistle Talk is a great way to find out what is going on in the school, but you can get a lot more from our social media sites. Log into us at https://www.linkedin.com/company/international-school-aberdeen and https://www.facebook.com/InternationalSchoolAberdeen/ and get the stories behind the stories.
Learning online at home

As many more of us will be at home and perhaps with increased screen time we need to make sure we maintain open and regular conversations with our children about what they are doing online and who they are interacting with. Set clear rules for them. Here are a few websites providing free content that may help over the coming weeks.

**Literacy Trust**
Split by age group, from birth to aged 12, this website includes ideas and guidance for simple activities to engage your child whilst benefiting their reading, writing and language development.
https://literacytrust.org.uk/family-zone/

**Edinburgh Zoo**
Watch some of the animals live at Edinburgh Zoo through their live cams:
https://www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/webcams/panda-cam/

**White Rose Maths**
White Rose Maths Team has prepared a series of five maths lessons for each year group from Year 1-8
https://whiterosemaths.com/homelearning/

**Phonics Play**
Phonicsplay have made their website free to use during this period.
https://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/

**Twinkl**
Twinkl have created home learning and school closure packs for free.
https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/covid19-school-closures

**Hour of Code**
Try a one-hour tutorial designed for all ages
https://hourofcode.com/uk

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**The Digital Family Pledge**

This is a free online tool from Vodafone to help you as a family set good digital habits.

The Pledge covers four important topics: screen time, online bullying, social media and gaming. It uses a series of quiz like questions to prompt families to discuss and agree some rules on how to use technology and act online. It is aimed at families with children who are aged 5-13 years.

The pledge is best completed on a mobile or tablet and together as a family. The pledge is available here: www.vodafone.co.uk/familypledge

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**Looking for apps?**
This is a great website that allows you to filter your search results to find age appropriate apps for your child. It also allows you to filter by app type (educational or play), by price and device: https://www.goodplayguide.com/good-app-guide/
Instagram

Instagram is used to post photos and videos. Users can also DM (direct message), send disappearing messages, add to their stories (these disappear after 24 hours) and broadcast using IGTV. **You should be over 13 years of age to set up an account.** To create an account you must enter a date of birth (but this isn’t verified).

**Account Privacy**

When you set up your account, it is automatically set as public. This means that anybody can see what you share. We would recommend changing this to private so only those your child approves to follow them can see their content. **To change a profile to private go to profile, tap Settings, tap Privacy, tap Account Privacy and tap to toggle Private Account on.**

**IMPORTANT:** Even if your child has set their Instagram profile to private, your child’s bio (at the top of their profile) can still be seen by everyone. Check they’ve not included any personal information in their photo and bio info (e.g. they should not be wearing their school uniform in their photo).

Other additional privacy settings include:
- Story control – either set allow message replies from ‘your followers’, ‘followers you follow back’ or turn off.
- Don’t allow sharing of your photos and videos from your story.
- Comment Controls – select hide offensive comments.

Make sure your child understands that there is a risk that content they upload can never be removed (other users can screenshot it for example) so they must only share content that they are comfortable with you seeing.

**Safety Features**

Ensure your child knows how to report posts and people as well as how to unfollow and block people, delete and turn off comments. More information can be found here: [https://wellbeing.instagram.com/safety](https://wellbeing.instagram.com/safety).

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Tik Tok challenges

Tik Tok (along with other apps) can be used for social media challenges, lots can be fun but some can be dangerous.

We do not recommend talking to your child about specific challenges (it draws attention to them) but we do recommend talking to your child about challenges as a whole that may appear on the internet and making sure they know that they can talk to you about what they see online. Talk to them about the potential risks that may arise from participating in such challenges.

It is so important to have regular chats with your child about their online life and if they are experiencing peer pressure.

Further information: [https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/online-challenges-and-peer-pressure](https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/online-challenges-and-peer-pressure)

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Online Safety with under 5s

There is a charge for this book.

Childnet have released a new online safety themed learning to read book, ‘Aimee and the tablet’.

You are also able to report photos, videos, comments or profiles that are bullying or harassing via Instagram’s help centre.

**Inappropriate Content**

There are public accounts on Instagram that can include graphic content and therefore your child may come across inappropriate content as well as language. Ensure that your child knows that they should talk to you or another trusted adult if they have any concerns.

**Restrict mode**

This feature allows users to restrict another user. You could restrict somebody (a bully for example) which means they will not be able to see when you are online or if you’ve read their messages. Also, only you (and that user) will be able to see their comments on your post. The great thing about this feature is that they won’t know that you have ‘restricted’ them. This is different to blocking (when you block somebody, you no longer see anything they do on Instagram and they don’t see anything you do either). Learn how to use this new feature so you can show your child how to use it: https://help.instagram.com/2638385956221960

**Need more help?**

Childnet answer parents most frequently asked questions here:
https://www.childnet.com/blog/answering-parents-most-frequently-asked-questions-about-instagram

**Additional Links**

- https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/social-media-guides/instagram
- https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/instagram-safety-a-how-to-guide-for-parents/
- https://www.net-aware.org.uk/networks/instagram/

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It is so important to have regular chats with your child about their online life and if they are experiencing peer pressure.

Further information: https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/online-challenges-and-peer-pressure

Clear Fear App

Do you struggle with anxiety? The Clear Fear app is free and teaches you how to reduce the physical responses to threat as well as changing thoughts and behaviours and releasing emotions.

More information is here: https://www.clearfear.co.uk/
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Ensure that your child knows that they should talk to you or another trusted adult if they have any concerns.
SPRING BREAK
Despite the lock-down, we hope you had a nice break and some time to relax with the family at home. We are now picking up on the virtual school and would like to keep using this space to share information and links to positive initiatives and useful resources for you or your kids. Feel free to share anything you come across so we can add to the newsletter. Stay safe.

National Literacy Trust
We are an independent charity working with schools and communities to give disadvantaged children the literacy skills to succeed in life.

SPARKETH
The Best New Way To Learn Art Online
Learning art with Sparketh is fun and effective. Gain unlimited access to a library of 1000+ bite-sized video lessons for 6 to 18-year olds, taught by talented mentors. With new courses weekly, you will never run out of new things to learn. Spark your creativity. Try now for free for 30 days.

NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST
In response to school closures across the UK, the NLT launched a free online zone for parents seeking ideas and guidance for activities that will engage their children at home, whilst also benefiting their reading, writing and language development. On Family Zone they are bringing together some of the UK’s most exciting literacy resources and activities in one place.

PTO ENRICHMENTS & APPLICATIONS
Although we have suspended most of the remaining PTO activities, we still ask you to submit your enrichment requests (deadline extended until May 31st, 2020) and PTO job applications. Please use the links on both sides of this block. If you have any questions, please reach out. Jobs we have up for grabs are: Secretary, Treasurer, Spirit Wear Coordinator, Spirit Wear Associate, Elementary School CEC Representative, Fundraising Coordinator and Buddy Coordinator. Stay safe! Stay healthy!