

Monday 14 September 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I trust you received my letter regarding a confirmed case of COVID-19, sent last night. Whilst I do not wish to revisit the content of that letter, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the fact that such letters and responses will be with us all for some time. Our zoning of year groups means that a confirmed case will tend to lead to a fairly limited response. In this case, twenty-four students in Year 9 are required to remain at home until the end of a 14-day period. None have symptoms and this is why their family members can continue to go to work and school as normal.

You may be wondering how decisions are reached on who has to self-isolate and who can continue into school. We have to draw up a list of the names of students who have sat next to or near anyone with a confirmed case. We have seating plans for every single lesson and so this is fairly easy to trace. We then have to add the names of anyone who the affected child has been in close proximity with in the days leading up to their first symptoms. This would be anyone who had been accidentally coughed on, or touched (skin to skin) or had longer conversations and had not been more than one metre apart.

In order to limit the effect of a confirmed case the following is essential:

- Students who are not contacted and required to stay at home should go to school as normal;
- Students must faithfully stick to the seat that has been assigned to them by their teacher;
- Students must always spread out when chatting to friends and avoid the huddle that can easily develop amongst good friends;
- Everyone must follow the guidance around face coverings, regular hand cleaning, the safe disposal of tissues and staying at home as soon as they note symptoms of the virus.

I hope you will be reassured with the knowledge that we undertook a deep clean of the entire Year 9 zone, including all specialist rooms. This was completed yesterday afternoon, ready for this morning.

When a student has to self-isolate their teachers will use Show My Homework (SMHW) to set both the homework and any additional classwork wherever possible.

Following this first case, I have asked my teaching colleagues to aim to send any PowerPoints and materials used in their lessons to those children via SMHW and ensure that exemplar work is copied for them to stick into their books and folders on their return. Each subject will have its own way of keeping those children up to date and we shall monitor and refine our approach depending on the scale of any absences and their duration.

Continued...

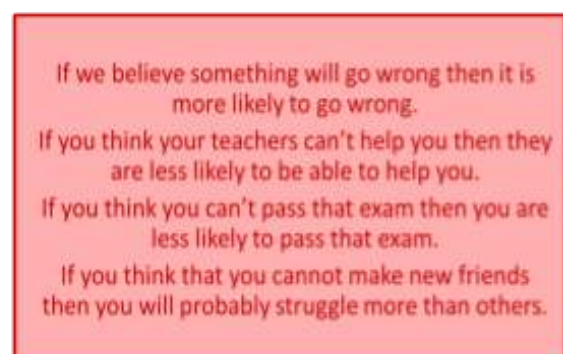
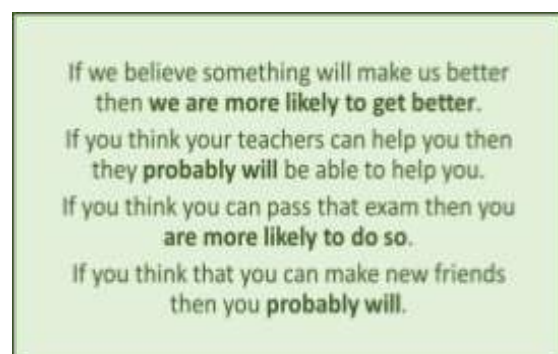
In order to reduce the risk of transmission further may I remind all parents and carers that for the time being they are not permitted on site. This includes dropping off forgotten items (lunches / bags / kits etc.) to the Main Reception. Unfortunately, this adds transmission risks and we ask that for the time being parents and carers only visit the site to drop off and collect their children, or when a face-to-face meeting has been agreed in advance.

My Recent Whole School Assembly

I am fortunate in being fairly unfazed by traditional school assemblies. However, they are being put on hold for now and we have replaced them with live assemblies beamed into tutor rooms by the magic of Google Meets. It was the first thing I thought of when I woke up on Wednesday and was glad to deliver it without making (too much) of a fool of myself. It was great to do something as a school and I was eager to provide a message about how the future is partly ours to define.



My assembly focussed on what we know about how our minds and bodies react when we believe something will make our lives better or worse. I referred to placebos and self-fulfilling prophecies. My message was summarised with these final slides:



I tried to avoid the naïve notion that 'we can all be whatever we want to be'; noting the absence of any call from Aston Villa FC to sign me up *yet again*. Instead, it is trying to say that *if* we believe we might play for Aston Villa, or we might join a particular profession, or we might be picked for a team, *then* we are more likely to be successful than if we doubted all these things will ever happen.



I ended by trying to compare the version of ourselves that is optimistic in outlook against the version that is pessimistic. I might not ever be a better footballer than Jack Grealish, a better runner than Mo Farah, or a better educator than Socrates. However, if I remain positive then at least I will be a better footballer, runner and teacher than the version of me that is less positive or optimistic.

Excellence as Standard

And so, which version of CNS are we right now? Are we a good school or a brilliant school? Last summer's results followed a pattern of very strong outcomes in recent years, on the back of rising standards of teaching and learning. However, standards are rising in most schools and so the questions have been whether we are improving more rapidly than in the past and how long will it take us to maximise our potential?

These questions have been behind some of the changes I have referred to in the past in our pursuit of 'excellence as standard'. It is an attempt to draw attention to everything we do that can and must be better in order to be the best version of CNS we can possibly be.

In the table below, I wanted to set out what those fancy words mean in day-to-day practice and expectations.

Excellence as Standard		
What does this mean for teachers and staff at CNS?	What does this mean for students at CNS?	What does this mean for parents and carers?
<p>We have to make sure that every single lesson and homework we set meets or exceeds the CNS Standards that we have set out for teaching and learning. This focusses on task design, explanations, modelling and practice.</p> <p>It also means that <i>all</i> of us must uphold the same very high standards and expectations with <i>all</i> students at all times.</p> <p>We shall also adapt our lessons to reach those students who find learning more difficult than others, or do not feel sufficiently stretched or engaged.</p> <p><i>If we do this, then all students can look forward to outstanding progress and outcomes in our school.</i></p>	<p>We need every student to turn up on time and be ready to learn every single day. That means having all the right equipment, being dressed correctly and having completed all their homework to a very high standard.</p> <p>It also means that in lessons students must expect to be on time and to work with energy and focus for the full sixty minutes. If they do not complete enough classwork or behave in a way that slows others down, they should expect to be held back at break.</p> <p><i>If they do this, then they maximise their own chances of success in and out of the classroom.</i></p>	<p>We shall provide families with even better information in reports and when meeting tutors and teachers. We shall provide you with greater reassurance that we know your children's social, emotional and academic needs, and are working actively to ensure they can be their best self.</p> <p>We need you to support our drive for excellence and ensure your children leave home with all the things they will need for the day, including homework that is of a high standard, dressed correctly and carrying all the equipment for the day.</p> <p><i>If you do this then we shall have a solid partnership that enables every learner to learn and every teacher to teach.</i></p>

This drive for excellence is about changing our everyday practice, but it is also about shifting our culture so that we choose to be our best and not to settle for being one of the rest. In the term ahead, you will learn more of this goal and by connecting with more voices across our school as follows.

Hearing More from the Leadership Team

In the coming weeks you will hear a little less from me (hooray I can hear) and a little more from my colleagues on the Leadership Team. Below is a summary of who you can expect to hear from in the coming weeks and the topics that they plan to cover with you.

Date	Who?	What?
Monday 21 September	Mrs De Bruyn and Mrs Armistead, Assistant Headteachers	An opportunity to introduce themselves to you and summarise how these new roles are designed to promote higher standards across our school.
Monday 28 September	Mr Doherty, Headteacher	Updates and news.
Monday 5 October	Mr Gent, Assistant Headteacher	More information on why we teach the way we teach, including how we use what we know about memory and recall to prepare students for their assessments, mocks and final exams.
Monday 12 October	Mr Doherty, Headteacher	Updates and news.
Monday 19 October	Mr Trainer, Deputy Headteacher	More information on what we teach and why we teach it, plus an insight into how our reporting to parents will grow this year with the introduction of three Personal Scorecards and Standards Reports and two Academic Reports.
Monday 2 November	Mr Doherty, Headteacher	Updates and news.
Monday 9 November	Ms Hancock, Deputy Headteacher	An insight into the holistic approaches in our Guidance Teams we adopt to ensure our school is focussed on the individual and their needs, rather than forcing square pegs through round holes.
Monday 16 November	Mr Doherty, Headteacher	Updates and news.

Meet the Tutors

One of the changes we planned to introduce this year (and are pursuing in spite of COVID-19) is the introduction of meetings between you and your son or daughter's tutor. These will take place in mid October by telephone or, preferably, by Google Meet. They are partly an opportunity to discuss how the year has started but also to look at the academic goals for the year ahead.

A separate letter will follow but for now, it may be worth keeping the following evenings (5pm until 8pm) in your diary:

- Monday 12 October: Years 7 and 8
- Tuesday 13 October: Years 9 and 10
- Wednesday 14 October: Years 11, 12 and 13

And finally...

It is very tempting to delay or pause our desire to thrive and simply survive this strange and demanding era as we learn to live and work with the virus. We shall not ever become blasé about the need to be on our guard at all times, but this cannot let us halt our desire to be the best teachers, students, parents and carers we can possibly be. We hope we get the tone and the pace right and will continue to listen when we get that wrong or need to change tack.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Doherty', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Barry Doherty

Headteacher