



Monday 16 November 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

RE: COVID-19 UPDATES

Well, we continue to live in very interesting times and the past few weeks have, of course, been no different. From US presidential elections to the cancellation of examinations in Wales, there has been plenty to talk about, as well as the good and welcome news on the COVID-19 vaccine.

November is always a tricky month in schools: summer is definitely over, it is harder to get outside for fresh air, the days are shorter and there are the ordinary bugs circulating. However, as we head towards December and the arrival of Christmas just over the horizon, we continue to be grateful for the way your sons and daughters have adapted and worked with us all year. We have been working hard to raise the expectations in terms of lesson focus, engagement and homework - and have seen little if any resistance to that need to 'push on' and be 'even better' amongst our students.

Whilst attendance is still not back up to where it normally is (we currently hover around 91% instead of 96%), the number of serious incidents of misbehaviour has fallen dramatically and has stayed low all year. I cannot tell you how much easier and happier that makes our school life and our capacity to do more and to do better than before.

This is not to say that we are unaware of the world around us and know that students, families and colleagues have more distractions and worries than in a normal year. This is why we increasingly focus on that core business of getting it right in the classroom, and avoiding things that may distract us, or add unnecessary burdens. We hope we get those balances correct.

During this national lockdown, you will be aware that we have had to suspend some after school activities but look forward to getting them back on track soon. Meanwhile, we have also adapted our risk assessment so that seating plans are now in place during all three breaks. Sadly, this limits student movement but also helps us minimise transmission risks and determine who we might have to track and trace. Up to this point, we have had a comparatively low number of positive cases (four to date) and whilst we are relieved about that, we are also fully aware that this may change very quickly if other school's experiences across the country are anything to go by.

With all of this in mind, I feel it is important to clarify the following. If we were to have two or more cases in a single year group over a short period of time, there is a likelihood of all students in that year group being asked to stay at home whilst we carry out a new risk assessment. My contact with headteachers in other schools shows that such decisions are very complex and take time to get right.

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Therefore, it is worth alerting you to the *possibility* of the following:

- If we learn of two or more positive cases in a single year group, we may ask you (via In Touch) to collect your sons and daughters during the school day, or seek your permission to let them walk home on their own. As in the case with Year 10s last Wednesday, there may be occasions when we are not permitted to let groups of students use the school bus or public transport. If this were to happen then **we would not let your children out of school without your knowledge and permission during school hours**. We would also look after your children until 6pm if you were unable to pick them up.
- In such circumstances, it is likely that your son or daughter might then be asked to stay at home for a single day whilst we carry out a bespoke risk assessment with Public Health England. This may then result in your son or daughter being asked to self-isolate for a longer period or return to school the very next day.

I hope that by sharing all of the above with you, it will increase our collective sense of being in control of events instead of events controlling us. I hope we can calmly and stoically continue to do what we need to do with a minimum of fuss. My own particular fear is that we spring surprises on you that could have been avoided.

And finally...

I wish to end this COVID-19 focussed letter with a few reminders that are really important for us all right now.

1. Every student should have at least two face coverings with them each day, safely stored in a sealed bag or container.
2. Every student should wear a warm coat so that they can spend as much time outside as possible. Fresh air is good for us all and appears to significantly reduce the risk of airborne transmission. Too many students are dressed for September, not November and December.
3. We must all sanitise our hands as we enter and leave a classroom. Students are encouraged to have their own supply but every classroom has a dispenser for everyone to use as they leave and depart.
4. If your son or daughter displays *any* of the known COVID-19 symptoms (see below), then they **MUST** remain at home, seek a test and await the outcome.
5. If a student has taken a COVID-19 test, then they **MUST** remain at home until the outcome of that test is known.

Yours faithfully



Mr Doherty, Headteacher

COVID-19 Symptoms

A reminder of the most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are the recent onset of: a new continuous cough and/or; a high temperature; a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia).