



Friday 14 May 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope that this letter finds you and your family well. This week, I provide confirmation on face coverings but also wish to share some thoughts about the future.

COVID-19 Update on Face Coverings

The Prime Minister's announcement last Monday evening means that from Monday 17 May, we shall be following [the updated guidance](#) as follows:

- Face coverings are no longer recommended for students in classrooms or communal areas.

This will mean that the decision to wear a face covering or not is now left with you as a family to discuss and agree with your son or daughter. As staff, we shall not be expecting or asking students to wear a face covering in lessons or communal areas (e.g. corridors).

Nevertheless, we wish to remind you that the following measures will remain in place:

- Twice weekly lateral flow testing;
- Hand sanitising at the start and end of all lessons;
- Well ventilated classrooms;
- Encouraged to be outside at all available opportunities;
- Special bins remain in each classroom to dispose of tissues;
- Our toilets continue to be very regularly cleaned on a constant rotational basis;
- Face coverings continue to be worn on school buses and public transport.

Please be assured that if local infection rates rise, or if we have positive COVID-19 cases at CNS, then we shall review this and all other elements of our risk assessment with Public Health England.

Looking Ahead to Term 6

In Term 6, we shall have a little more physical space on our site, once the year 11 and year 13 lessons have ended. This is going to lead to some adjustments to our zones and outdoor spaces. The main changes include our year 10s occupying the area currently used by year 11. This will add more space and rooms for year 9 as they embark on their GCSEs and who, therefore, need more classrooms as well. Our year 7s will also be able to access more outdoor spaces and this will include daily access to the MUGA for ball games and so on.

Continued...

We still have two months of ordinary school weeks left in this year. Whilst we do not intend to take our foot off the gas, we are exploring ways to ensure that the end of term contains many opportunities for students to come together, celebrate, and enjoy one another's company in ways we have been unable to consider for a while. I have asked the heads of year to work with the tutors to explore what this might look like and then share their plans with you all after half term.

Life Is A Journey, Not A Destination

Whilst it is exciting and quite tempting to focus on the future, it is also important to say that we will not ignore the journey we have all been on these past 15 months. It seems to be human nature to try to focus on the destination and getting back to normal. However, there is a need to invest more time in 'taking stock' of the impact of the pandemic on us all: students, colleagues and families. In doing so, we can then be even more optimistic about the future because it will be based on what we know and not what we knew.

We are only beginning to understand the longer term impact of the pandemic, lockdowns, school closures and 24/7 news broadcasts on students' academic, social and emotional development. My colleagues have been incredibly resilient and stoic, but we are also somewhat wobbled by this shared experience that none of us could ever have imagined. We are also beginning to fully understand how the past 15 months have affected families.

Drawing from my own experience, the resumption of my children's football practices and matches in recent weeks has brought me back into contact with so many other parents and it has been very unsettling to hear, first hand, the wide-ranging impact of the pandemic on family life. And, of course, we are not yet through the pandemic – but the signs remain hopeful that the very worst is now behind us and we can take stock and look to the future.

School Improvement Goals

It is the time of year when school leaders revise their self-evaluation of their school. In doing so, they look at everything from the quality of education, to behaviour, attendance, and the personal development of students. I cannot think of a year in my career when this process has been more difficult or more important.

A school self-evaluation is a gradual process and helps generate the improvement goals for a school. For us at least, this reflective journey is underway and in Term 6, I plan to share with you an update on that evaluation and invite you (and your children) to join some discussions about our intended journey *and* destinations.

Early indications are that there needs to be several areas for us to focus our energy on in the coming 12-36 months:

- Foster a **heightened sense of belonging** across the entire school community; a worthy goal in itself but even more pertinent given the past 15 months.
- Further **reducing the gap** between the students whose achievement (and attendance since the two are so clearly linked) is the strongest and the weakest at CNS. This is likely to focus on cross-curricular literacy (reading, writing and oracy) and numeracy.
- Raise our expectations so that **excellence as standard** describes the way that day-to-day practices at CNS are conducted: wellbeing, teaching, learning, assessment, engagement, communication, rewards, recognition, safeguarding and staff development. We know that students are happiest when they attend a well-organised school with lessons they enjoy and with happy and supported staff they admire.

Much of the focus of the leadership team right now is thinking about the best ways to strike the right balance between that **courage** to pursue excellence, yet retaining a deep sense of **compassion** and empathy for our students and my colleagues.

Meanwhile...

The serious business of teaching and learning continues. My colleagues are very, very proud of the way that our year 11s and 13s have conducted themselves throughout the Internal Assessment season. Next week will be particularly busy, particularly for the year 11s. It is fair to say that my colleagues are pretty weighed down with a small mountain of standardisation, moderation and marking - but the end is almost in sight, for the students at least.

In Term 6, the attention will turn towards year 10 and year 12 with end of year assessments, that will help your children and us determine how to ensure that years 11 and 13 are truly successful. Their involvement in these assessments will not deny them the same opportunities we intend to put in place for the other year groups as the end of the summer term approaches.

And thank you...

Last Saturday, I was one of numerous colleagues who were honoured to escort one of many year 9 Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award students on their practice expedition. On Sunday, the same students then completed a second expedition, unsupervised. The rain on Saturday was pretty relentless, unlike the excitement and humour of the students who took part. The normality of it all was bliss – as was the red pesto, cherry tomato and chorizo pasta being cooked on one of the Trangias. There are too many staff names to list here and thank, but I have to mention Miss Richmond and Mr Hopkins whose determination to resume the DofE has been wonderful. Thank you. And good luck to the year 10s this weekend!

Talking of which, do have a lovely one when it arrives.

Yours faithfully

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

Barry Doherty

Headteacher