

3 March 2021

Dear Parents/ Carers,

Thank you again for your support and patience in another busy period. As we approach the end of another lockdown, hopefully for the last time, I would like to express my admiration for the way so many of your children have coped and responded. There are 'silver linings' to this period and many have really impressed us with their resilience, problem-solving and initiative. All will have missed school in some respects and it will be great to have everyone back.

As previously stated, we will be staggering the return of pupils over next week. This is so that we can lateral flow device (LFD) test as many pupils as possible before they come into school and into close contact again with others (more on this below). We have pupils in the Sixth Form, Years 10 and 11 testing this week, which means we can have them back into 'normal' school immediately. The plan is below:

### **Phased return**

Monday 8 March                      Years 10, 11, 12 and 13 return to full timetable in school  
*Y7 will be receiving invitations to come into school to do LFD tests at intervals over day*

Tuesday 9 March                      Year 7 also return to full timetable in school  
*Y8 will be receiving invitations to come into school to do LFD tests at intervals over day*

Wednesday 10 March                      Year 8 also return to full timetable in school  
*Y9 will be receiving invitations to come into school to do LFD tests at intervals over day*

Thursday 11 March                      Year 9 also return to full timetable in school

The school remains open from 8 March to those critical worker and vulnerable children in Years 7-9 who have been in school during this lockdown. They should register in Student Services each morning and they will be directed from there. They will basically follow their timetable for lessons in this week, even whilst all of their peers may not yet be back in school.

### **LFD Tests**

Over 80% of you have already given your consent for your son/daughter to take the LFD tests. Thank you! These tests are pretty straightforward and many pupils have already got on with this process, like staff, absolutely fine. Consenting to the tests affords us all another, extra safety measure as the tests further reduce the likelihood of pupils spreading the virus between each other, to staff, or bringing it home.

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Following the first test prior to their return, pupils will be given the opportunity of up to two further tests in school before being given a supply of tests to carry out at home. You will need to help them to do this and to return the results accordingly. However, by this stage your children should be pretty confident and secure with the process. If your child receives a positive test (indicating they have the virus), they will need to self-isolate for ten days at home and you need to let us know this immediately so that we can contact trace other possible contacts as required.

If you do not wish for your child to take any LFD tests, then your child is permitted to return to school when his/her year group returns. However, we and the Government are strongly recommending that you do make use of these regular tests.

## **Safety Measures**

As we get the majority of pupils back in school from Monday 8 March, our safety measures - in addition to the LFD testing - will be very similar to those of the Autumn Term. The principle of keeping pupils in year group bubbles as far as possible remains and we will continue with our staggered first break and separate eating areas and times. The only significant difference, as you have probably heard, is regarding face masks.

### **FACE MASKS**

Staff, visitors and pupils now need to wear face coverings at all times when inside the school buildings, including in lessons, where they cannot maintain a 2m gap from others. I'm very aware of a variety of views on this topic and I respect both sides of the debate. However, despite some misleading headlines, the detailed advice from the Government and Public Health England states:

*Schools **must always** ensure face coverings are used in recommended circumstances... face coverings should be worn in classrooms or during activities unless social distancing can be maintained.*

Most of us do not like wearing masks but this is about prioritising everyone's safety. Teachers and staff will be able to distance 2m from pupils and remove their mask to teach or communicate with pupils at times, and some pupils may occasionally be in groups small enough to allow the same. We will monitor the effects of mask wearing and I think and hope that we will be able to drop this measure by the summer term.

However, I must ask that you ensure that your children **come to school with two clean and serviceable masks** – one as a spare. The last thing any of us want or need is to create a battle ground over masks. If a pupil does forget to bring a mask, they will be sent to Student Services where they will have the option of buying a mask for 20p or handing in a valuable item (phone or keys) to take a mask. If a pupil does refuse to wear a mask without a justifiable reason, we will follow our behaviour policy and ultimately they may be sent home.

Some pupils are exempt from wearing face coverings. If this is the case, they must collect an exemption card from the Student Services and carry this at all times.

## **School routines**

- Everyone must sanitise their hands when they come through the school gates and on entry and exit of the eating areas and each classroom.
- School routines are same as the Autumn Term in order to maintain safety for all: Years 8 and 10 will continue to have a late first break at 12.10, and all pupils have designated areas for break times.
- Pupils must follow the signs in corridors.

## **Uniform**

Pupils are expected to return to school in full uniform. This will help us to create as much normality as possible and instil the routine and order that we need to teach and learn effectively. If you are struggling for any items then please contact your child's Head of Year or Student Services and we can support. Pupils must not return to school in trainers or wearing any non-uniform tops such as sweatshirts or hoodies. A coat over the blazer or jumper (for years 7 and 8) is recommended when it is cold or wet, but hopefully we are over the worst of the weather (famous last words!).

Pupils will need to come to school in their PE kits on the days that they are timetabled for PE as we cannot yet re-open changing rooms. However, PE kit means school PE kit and does not mean the wearing of 'sports casual' wear or the like. Again, your support with this is appreciated as we return to the strong routines and structure of school.

## **Equipment**

Just as a reminder, it would be appreciated if you can check your child has all of the equipment that they should have as they return: A school bag containing pencil case, pens, pencils, ruler, rubber, sharpener, calculator and water bottle.

## **Attendance and First Week Back at School**

Attendance to school is mandatory except for those pupils who are clinically extremely vulnerable and have been directed to shield. We understand that some pupils are anxious about returning and we can support them. Please get in touch if you, your son or daughter have concerns about the return to school.

During the first week we will have a virtual assembly for each year which will remind pupils about the routines of school. Pupils have access to their tutor for support as well as their Head of Year, Student Services, CAL and the Welfare Team.

## **Travel to School**

From Monday 8 March, Devon Local Authority will resume a full network operation for all schools regarding buses. The same protocols will be in place as for the Autumn term. All pupils are required and expected to wear a face covering on buses and trains.

I am sorry for the deluge of information! Thank you again for your support. Last week it was my elder son's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. I felt pretty sorry for him to be honest – I can just about remember my 18<sup>th</sup>. I won't go into any detail concerning the events of that memorable night out but it was certainly better than a night in with my parents having a takeaway! Like I'm sure many of you, I really feel for all the younger generation are missing out on. The good news is that, hopefully, they still have very long lives and plenty of time to look forward to and make up for what they've missed. We're hopefully into the home straight!

Best wishes



James O'Connell  
Principal