

16 May 2021

Dear Parents/ Carers,

I hope that you are well and able to enjoy something of the gradual easing of restrictions in this (so far) very English summer. As you will be aware, last Monday the Government confirmed the next stage of measures in response to the pandemic and published some new guidance for schools to come into effect from this Monday 17 May. We have consequently revisited our Covid Risk Assessment (available on our website under the 'Safeguarding' tab) and a summary of our adapted measures is contained below.

### **Covid Protection Measures**

The [guidance on face coverings in education](#) has been amended to reflect that from Monday 17 May face coverings are no longer recommended for students in classrooms or communal areas. Face coverings are also no longer recommended for staff in classrooms. The Government continues to recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and visitors in situations outside of classrooms where social distancing is not possible; e.g. corridors. Importantly, the guidance also says:

*The reintroduction of face coverings for pupils, students or staff may be advised for a temporary period in response to particular localised outbreaks, including variants of concern. In all cases, any educational drawbacks should be balanced with the benefits of managing transmission. The Local Action Committee structure (Bronze/Silver/Gold) should be used in such circumstances to re-introduce the use of face coverings. Immediate outbreak response (at the level of individual settings or a cluster of settings) remains for local Directors of Public Health to advise on.*

This means that students must still bring a face mask into school each day and if any wish to continue wearing a face mask for their own safety, then they are permitted to do so. Some staff will continue to wear a face mask **and some – for health reasons – will continue to expect students to wear masks in their classrooms.**

Please be aware that students must continue to wear face coverings on all school and public transport – buses and trains. We have disappointingly received several complaints and concerns from the Transport Police about our students on the train between Teignmouth and Dawlish in particular. If your

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son/daughter travels by train in this direction, please could you discuss this with them.

As things stand, we will be re-opening the PE changing rooms from after the May half term, so students will all be expected to come to school in full uniform each day from Monday 7 June. We are looking forward to this as the assorted and mixed 'sports' wear and uniform does not look good and has definitely affected our ethos and standards. Also, lovely and clean as the vast majority of your children are, the odours of 30 teenagers in a classroom after they've done a two-hour session of PE and not changed are not always the freshest!

Extra-curricular sports activities are up and running again. Please encourage your sons and daughters to take part. We will also be starting to run full assemblies in our auditorium rather than only running virtual assemblies. This is definitely something we've missed as a school and we are looking forward to the resumption of performing arts events before too long! We are keeping our staggered break 1 up until half term at least, but we will be reviewing this.

With all of these measures, please be assured that we do not take the balance between risk of transmission and good, 'normal' school routines lightly. We will continue to monitor the national and local advice, and the consequences of any new strains of the virus and developments, carefully.

## Exams and Assessments

We continue to be hugely impressed by the resilience and approach of our students who are taking national qualifications this summer. The Sixth Form team are communicating directly with year 12 and 13 students on plans and I am sending a separate letter out to year 11 students and their parents/carers tomorrow on our plans and the final stage of assessments. Although the 'cancellation' of exams in January and rapid development of a new way for schools to assess and recommend grades to the exam boards has been extremely challenging, there have been some positives in this process. I am extremely grateful for the professionalism, dedication and team work of our staff because I think and hope that, although this process continues to present huge demands for all, it has been going well. We are confident that our students are getting the opportunity to obtain the qualifications they deserve objectively, fairly and supportively.

For students in years 7-10, we will be running robust assessments or end of year exams in almost all of their subjects over the fortnight 14-25 June. We have delayed

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doing this in order to give them time to settle back into school and address any critical gaps. We are looking forward to being able to robustly take stock of where they are currently in their learning and to be able to report this to you – parents and carers – before the end of term. More details on the content of what to prepare and how to revise will be communicated to students in the next couple of weeks.

### Priorities, Parent Survey and Forum

When it comes to school improvement and development, I believe in being completely honest and asking for feedback wherever possible. I will be doing this shortly with staff and students and we would value your honest, constructive feedback.

Our whole school priorities this year continue to be summarised by three goals:

1. Improving learning by focusing on the scaffolding of learning, challenge for all and by providing students with effective feedback
2. Improving ethos by concentrating on positive behaviour
3. Developing a strong team approach

Our first and greatest priority has been improving the ethos which means the daily, routine behaviours which create the conditions for learning and a happy and safe environment for all. We believe we are making good progress in this respect but there are challenges and the pandemic has, of course, impacted on our school as well as wider society. The behaviour of the vast majority of students is improving; however, being completely honest, there is a small minority of students whose behaviours have become more challenging than ever. This is impacting on our school and an area we continue to tackle robustly, fairly and with compassion.

Our staff and student team ethos, despite or perhaps in some ways due to the pandemic, are continuing to strengthen and, although lockdowns have made things very demanding at times, we believe that the standard of teaching and learning is moving very much in the right direction and continuing to improve.

These are my views and I would very much like to know yours. Please could you take 5 to 10 minutes to complete a survey outlining your views of your sons'/daughters' experiences in our school by following the link: [PARENT/CARER SURVEY](#) It would be appreciated if you could complete this by Tuesday 25 May.

Finally, some newer parents may not be aware that prior to the first lockdown – it seems like a different world now – we used to hold a termly 'Parent Forum' where

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parents were invited into school to discuss their thoughts, impressions and concerns on a variety of issues. These were useful for us as a school and well received by a small, committed group of parents. However, one of the silver linings of the last fifteen months is some of the technological developments we have made. Many parents have commented positively on the remote parents' evenings which although not perfect (time is always the limiting factor and the greatest challenge) have made life more efficient and easier for parents to access.

I want to try the same approach with the Parent Forum and we will hold the next one remotely from 6.00-7.30pm on Wednesday 26 May. The forum will consist of senior colleagues and I speaking about some issues raised by parents/carers and then answering some questions live. The topics we discuss will largely depend on what you would like to raise. One topic already decided upon is a discussion of our uniform and I am including this because I am aware that this is a subject of frustration or concern for a number of parents. At the end of the Parent/Carer Survey there is an opportunity to sign up for this Parent Forum and to suggest up to two topics to be discussed. Please do consider attending this if you can. All those who sign up and include an email address will be sent a link and details for this meeting.

Finally, we will shortly confirm options choices for Year 9 students. As I've said before but I continue to genuinely mean, thank you so much for your support in what continue to be turbulent times. We're not through the 'tunnel' yet, but I think and hope that the light at the end of it is now becoming quite bright!

Best wishes



James O'Connell  
Principal