

Important Covid Update, including Masks

November 2020

Dear all,

I hope that you and your children have had a relaxing half term. I apologise for how late this message is coming out to you before pupils return to school. But obviously a lot has changed nationally in the last 48 hours, and myself and the team have been working quickly to respond to the PM's address on Saturday evening.

My thoughts are with you all, as we all reflect and respond to the news of a new national lockdown.

One key thing, of course, has not changed – schools remain open and we look forward to welcoming most pupils back tomorrow, with Years 7 and 8 returning on Thursday. We will continue to provide a sense of normality for the pupils in our care and, of course, a full education in these very strange times. We have also been making continued improvements to our remote learning package for all pupils who need to self-isolate. Thank you so much for your continued support over the last few weeks, and thank you in advance for continuing to organise tests for any pupils with Covid-19 symptoms, so that we can respond quickly to any confirmed cases in the School.

In terms of our own risk assessment, there are very few major changes going into this new half term – the zoning and bubble systems are working very well. I would like to take this opportunity, however, to remind you of some aspects of our current processes that we all need to tighten up on over the coming weeks:

- It is essential that **your child is only dropped at school at the allocated time**. In the couple of weeks before half term we saw a worrying increase in Primary pupils being dropped before 8.15am, meaning they were left unattended and in mixed bubbles. Please support us in following the drop off times. Thank you so much to those that are doing this every day.
- Please **limit the number of people coming to main reception**, and remember that only one family group is permitted at any time.
- Since September we have been **limiting the number of external visitors on site**, meaning a lot of parent meetings have been conducted remotely. Going forward, we will limit this even more, so we ask for your understanding if the meeting has to be conducted via video call or telephone. We know this isn't ideal – everyone would prefer to meet in person – but these are exceptional times.
- A reminder that **social distancing is essential at the school gates between adults**. This includes the Year R and 1 parents coming in to collect their children. Please adhere to the markings on the floor before you enter the site, and the member of SLT on the gate will be proactively staggering you to maintain distance as you walk through the outdoor play area. Thank you for your understanding and support of these requests.

Masks

Going forward, however, we are making one key change – and that is in relation to our approach to mask wearing. Our current stance is that we encourage masks to be worn by staff and Secondary pupils when moving round the inside of the building. We have been concerned by how few pupils have adopted this approach when simply being encouraged to do so. Feedback from yourselves as parents, pupils through Class Council and staff feedback, show that this worry is felt

throughout many stakeholders. Pupils are honest and say that many want to wear masks and wish more were, but feel strange doing so because so few of their peers are. And I know that many of you are concerned. Masks are compulsory in schools in some areas of the country with the localised approach to restrictions, and locally many schools are also now adopting this approach. Based on feedback, and of course the changing national picture meaning that the local restrictions are likely to increase this week, we have therefore decided that **masks will now be mandatory as outlined below:**

Who will have to wear a mask?

- All staff
- All Secondary pupils and Sixth Form students, not Primary pupils
- Parents at the school gate and when collecting Year R and Year 1 pupils
- All visitors on site, for essential face to face meetings

When and where will they need to be worn?

- Indoors when moving around the school building
- In classrooms if a pupil or teacher needs to move around the room
- Lining up for the canteen, even for those who queue up outside
- In the indoor break spaces, except when eating
- Coming in and out of the school site at the start and end of the day, through the gate and until pupils have got to their zoned areas
- Throughout assemblies

When are masks exempt (although still allowed if desired)?

- Outside at break times when pupils are in their zoned area
- When eating in the indoor break spaces
- For pupils - when sat at a set seat in a classroom. For teachers - when they are teaching at the front, 2 metres away from all pupils
- For anyone with medical exemption; we will require evidence in order to give pupils and staff a pass so that they are not challenged for a lack of face coverings. Whilst masks are the desired covering, if a medical condition means that a face visor can be worn instead, we do of course support this.
- For Primary pupils - only allowed with prior permission

What will happen if my child does not wear a mask?

Masks will be treated in the same way as any other part of the school uniform, like ties or blazers. If these are not worn at all, or not worn correctly, then this is challenged. If this is not rectified immediately then a sanction is issued. We will apply the same approach with masks, with persistent lack of compliance resulting in contact home and further, more serious, sanctions. This is, of course, except for those who are medically exempt.

We do understand that this is new and very strange for pupils. Our approach will therefore be very supportive, with active reminders. I have found in a lot of cases that pupils simply have forgotten and a reminder results in them putting them on. We will all work together to get used to this temporary normal and avoid conflict as much as possible. However, we have seen last half term that unless we enforce this more strictly, not many pupils will feel confident in wearing them and it is important that we get to a position where they are worn consistently.

When will this start?

We would like this approach to begin tomorrow Tuesday 3rd November, but I appreciate this is very short notice. Over the next couple of days we will be proactively introducing this new policy – as I know that many people will already have masks for use in shops and on public transport - but sanctions will not be issued until Thursday 5th November.

What does my child need?

As before, we are not stating a particular colour of mask. I would prefer everyone to be able to choose a mask they feel comfortable in and are therefore more likely to wear, so different colours or patterns are permitted. However, pupil masks should not have any words on it unless it is a brand name e.g. Adidas or personal name (some of our teachers have named masks!) and offensive words and images are of course completely banned. Disposable masks are allowed, although we will be monitoring litter very strictly.

Pupils should bring in a plastic bag or sandwich bag to place their mask in when they are not wearing it. We are increasing the access and use of hand sanitisers in classrooms, so pupils can clean their hands after removing masks.

What about Primary pupils?

Our approach has not changed here – masks are not mandatory or encouraged for Primary pupils. That said, as previously, if you wish for your child to wear a mask in school – who hasn't already been doing so – then please contact the Primary Office.

How will you enforce this at the school gate with parents?

Obviously, I can't issue parents with a sanction if these are not worn. But I am asking for your support whilst you are on the School site. The member of SLT on the gate at both ends of the day will be prompting and reminding parents to wear masks. If you are unable to wear one for medical reasons, please just politely tell us that and will of course respect this.

What if I really don't agree with this approach?

These are extremely difficult times and I am acutely aware that no approach will be welcomed by everyone. We have considered this decision very carefully, liaising with external bodies, other Headteachers and considering the guidance and changing national picture. We have also listened to the concerns raised by every Class Council conducted before half term. We feel very strongly that this is the right decision for now, but we will of course continue to review things as hopefully the situation improves nationally. Every decision we make is always for the safety and welfare of pupils and staff and never to cause annoyance or conflict. Whilst this isn't going to be a welcomed decision by all, I believe it is the right one for the safety and well-being of all. Thank you in advance for your support and understanding.

We do of course await to see if there are any further changes to the national guidance for schools, in light of the national lockdown. If there is we will of course respond accordingly and will be in touch with any further changes we are making in school.

With very best wishes,

Mrs Louise New
Principal