

12 October 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Thank you for your supportive messages and understanding words following our letters and phone calls last week about the student who had tested positive and the need for some children to isolate at home for 14 days. We appreciate that this will make life complicated for some families and has caused worry to many of you.

As a school we continue to follow the guidance from the government. In a number of places it allows headteachers and school leaders to make decisions about what is best for their setting. One area about which schools have some flexibility is mask wearing. Most of you have been supportive and agreed with our school's decision to not have widespread mask wearing in school so far. Students and staff who wish to wear masks or visors do so. At the moment this is quite limited and almost entirely in social spaces - more on this later on in this letter.

When we planned our return to school our focus was on a timetable structure which minimised the potential risks to all adults and children in school. We have about 900 adults and children in school each day and if attendance is high it is as many as 1000 people. Clearly keeping everyone safe is a challenge and a priority. For that reason, we have set the school up in zones with each Year Group spending most of their time in just one part of the buildings. In Years 7, 8 and 9 most lessons are in just one room. Each year group has their own entrance to the school building and one stairway if upstairs. Years 10 and 11 do move rooms for option subjects but not for English, maths and science. This is all quite different to how school and lessons were last year. It is the main way we can minimise the risk of spreading the virus while still being open to all students. Other schools have chosen different approaches. I know some local schools have stuck with a traditional timetable which means children move between every lesson and do so in corridors around the school perhaps following a one-way system. They then require masks in corridors because they are shared by all children at the same time. We do not have that risk because of our zones. Where our children from different years do pass each other, it is outside where there is more space and moving air. The other key way to stay safe is hand washing or sanitising. Children now have access to over 40 additional sanitising points as well as toilet areas with soap and sinks.

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When a school is notified of a positive Covid test result for a member of the school community there is a strict process to follow set out by the Department for Education (DfE), Public Health England (PHE) and the local authority which is Hampshire County Council (HCC). Last Thursday was the first case of a person at our school gaining a positive test. 35 children were asked to isolate, no staff came in to the close contact category this time. This is less than 25% of the year group, some schools have sent whole year groups home. This showed that our measures at this time have worked well.

However, it is important we now learn any lessons we can from this and try to further reduce risks not only of spreading of the virus but also regarding those required to isolate. One way will be for teachers to ensure that, so far as possible, children in the same classroom always have the same seat. Your child's seat in class may change as a result. We will continue to expect children to stay in their room and Year Zone except at the social times and for practical subjects. If children leave their area without permission, you will be asked to come to school for a brief meeting to discuss the dangers your child poses to others. Thank you if you have been to such a meeting and helped us explain that risk to your child so that they can continue to be in school. Children who have been unable to follow the rules have had detentions which are undertaken after school in a suitably spaced setting. Repeated rule breaking or a no-show at a detention continues to result in an exclusion. These have been less frequently used as a sanction than last year, which shows how well the children have coped with the new systems. When you have been to school and spoken to your child with staff that has normally had the desired effect. Together we have been able to continue to educate our children despite the obvious challenges of so many people in one place at this time.

It is important to us as a school that we not only educate children well but that we do so in ways to help at home too. That is why school food is such a focus for us along with Munch our foodbank. Many schools have stopped serving hot food and, in some cases, have even closed their canteens. We do not want to be in that position. For break and lunch times children are in their Year Groups and so only mixing with children they also have lessons with. We continue to encourage social distancing between children when they are together. We now have three breaks, instead of just one before Covid, and three lunch slots when we had two before Covid.

This means there is more space for children as well as no mixing across Years. Following suggestions from you we staggered our end of day from the middle of last month and now allow older children to leave slightly earlier. Some schools have more of a stagger than we do, however, their experience

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suggests that often that means students arriving early or waiting after the school day just outside the school gates which causes its own health concerns. A longer stagger at the end will mean that some children have to wait for siblings or may then be unable to collect younger brothers and sisters in other schools.

It is important that when children arrive at school they do so as near to 8.25am as possible to minimise contact with others before the start of the day. They should go straight to their Year Zone area. Some parents need to know children are safe at school earlier in the morning because of their own work commitments, so we continue to allow children to be on site to help with this. If your child needs to have breakfast at school, which for healthy items this remains free, that too remains a priority for us. Some schools have stopped serving breakfast altogether we do not want to do that. To help us keep serving breakfast safely it is important they sit in the part of restaurant for their Year Group, this is identified by the year group flags.

There will be further occasions this school year when members of our school community contract Covid because of the increasing prevalence of the virus in the community. Havant remains a place with relatively few positive tests but numbers are increasing. It is very important that as a school we minimise the number of children sent home to isolate. So, we will continue to review our assessment of the risk and measures we can take to stay open while limiting disruption to children's learning.

An area which is contentious is face coverings. The number of children sent home last week was not affected by our approach to face coverings. The identification of individuals asked to isolate by PHE relates to proximity and duration. The DfE advice is clear about mask wearing in lessons, it does not advise it. For a few children it may be important while around others because the risk to that person is greater. Staff who need additional protection wear masks or visors. Current DfE guidance states:

On the basis of current evidence, in light of the mitigating measures education settings are taking, and the negative impact on communication, face coverings will not generally be necessary in the classroom even where social distancing is not possible. There is greater use of the system of controls for minimising risk, including through keeping in small and consistent groups or bubbles, and greater scope for physical distancing by staff within classrooms. Face coverings can have a negative impact on learning and teaching and so their use in the classroom should be avoided.

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The advice for school outside of the classroom says:

Nationwide, the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary in education settings generally because a system of controls, applicable to all education environments, provides additional mitigating measures. Schools and colleges will have the discretion to require face coverings in indoor communal areas where social distancing cannot be safely managed, if they believe that it is right in their particular circumstances.

Our mitigating measures include zones for lessons and areas at lunchtime and movement through outside spaces. The DfE guidance also reminds us that:

Safe wearing of face coverings requires cleaning of hands before and after touching – including to remove or put them on – and the safe storage of them in individual, sealable plastic bags between use. Where a face covering becomes damp, it should not be worn and the face covering should be replaced carefully.

So, while mask wearing is simple, making it a safe activity for an extended period is more difficult. Policing it is a further challenge. It is something we will continue to review for the social times and movement around the school. In order to help us in that review we will invite you to take part in a questionnaire before half term to support a decision to increase mask wearing or stay with our current arrangements which allow for face coverings but do not require them. Our focus continues to be to educate children safely and we are mindful of the often repeated government phrase:

The Chief Medical Officers have made it clear that the overall risks to children from coronavirus (COVID-19) in relation to education settings is low and that the risks associated with not being in school certainly outweigh those of being in school.

Please remain assured that your child's health as well as a broad education is our focus. As a parent community you have given us fantastic support this term, going out of your way to help us retrack children who are struggling and remaining calm when worries and other pressures coincide with requests for help from school.

Yours sincerely

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Headteacher

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Head of School