

16 April 2021

Dear Parents/ Carers,

I hope that you have been able to enjoy something of a break over Easter and feel a rising sense of positivity as we see the rates of Covid infection declining locally and nationally, the relative success of the vaccination programme, and some good weather! My household has certainly felt different with a few trips out and seeing some extended family again.

Safety

Please can I ask you to continue to use the lateral flow tests and report these results to the NHS. In particular, please can you ensure your child/children take a test this Sunday evening before returning to school. Tests should continue to be available so the plan is to keep using these each Sunday and Wednesday evening if you can.

The general government guidance regarding control measures including mask wearing hasn't changed. This means that our risk assessment hasn't changed and we cannot yet relax any measures. Mask wearing will continue inside school and classrooms as before for the majority. We have generally had a very good response from students on this and I continue to be impressed by our young people's general adaptability and resilience. Please do pass this message on.

On a different safety issue, please consider enabling your child/children to walk or cycle to school and avoid dropping them off if you can. If you do need to, please be mindful of other road users and pedestrians and don't park on the zig-zag lines. Staff at the front gate and local passers-by have witnessed some dangerous driving and I have received a number of complaints from members of the public.

Our Values

Our return to actual school in the last four weeks of the Spring term well went very well in lots of ways. The majority of pupils have re-acclimatised to school and settled back into routines and learning very successfully. However, this is not to under-estimate the impact of the two school 'closures' in the last twelve months. We have seen substantial rises in anxiety and mental health issues; we have also seen a spike in social problems and behaviours.

Friendships are more challenging for some and we have seen an alarming rise in the use of inappropriate, prejudiced and even hate-filled language. Perhaps in some ways fuelled by recent news stories and events, a minority of pupils are using some really offensive terms, often

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without fully realising the effects of their language on others. We will be targeting our PSHE education in lessons and tutor time on a number of these issues, but please could you speak to your child/children about the unacceptability of racist, homophobic or sexist language in particular. We will be adopting a very strict approach to sanctioning the use of any of these terms which can cause so much pain and undermine our community.

High Expectations

On a similar theme, as the normality of school re-emerges, we are looking to return to and improve on our high standards and expectations. Uniform was more difficult for many in drafty classrooms and with some items outgrown last term. However, it is now warmer and there is no need for hoodies or non-school jumpers to be worn on top of school uniform. If it does get cold again, coats can be permitted over blazers or school jumpers, but we want to return to good, basic uniform expectations. On PE days, students will have to continue to come into school in their PE kit, but we continue to hope that we will be able to change this soon.

Similarly, some skirts have been getting increasingly short and the jewellery and make-up has become excessive in some cases. Please can you check and remind your child/children of our basic expectation so that we don't have to pull them out of class to address this. I know this can be an on-going battle, so thank you in advance!

Exams

We will write again separately to the parents/carers of pupils taking national qualifications this summer in more detail. In summary, in lieu of the normal exam season these pupils are taking smaller, spaced-out assessments which they will often get some support to prepare for fairly. These will run over the next six-week half term and enable us (teaching staff) to mark, moderate and grade all of these pupils. We have been busy on these plans and are confident that we can do this objectively, comprehensively and supportively. Where there are significant challenges, we are able to consider a broader range of evidence (if necessary) so that no child is disadvantaged.

We are very aware that other year groups (years 7-10) have not had the opportunity to be comprehensively assessed for some time. We have been concentrating on patching missed learning and getting students back into the right habits and routines. This will continue, with a return to regular homework (which will be set on Class Charts). We will then run an exam week for each year group after the May half term which will enable us to fully ascertain how pupils are doing and anything else we need to concentrate on or adjust as we look to the following year. More details on these exam weeks will follow.

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Key Dates

The following gives an outline of key dates coming up this term. All of these could of course change in response to events.

26 April-28 May	Staggered assessments for Years 11-13
26 May	Parent Forum (potentially online)
28 May	Last day of assessments and 'normal' school for Y11 and 13
31 May-4 June	Half term
7-18 June	Taster days for Year 11 in the Sixth Form (tbc)
14 June-2 July	Years 7-10 exam weeks (more precise dates will be confirmed)
29 June	Year 8 Parents' Evening
1 July	Sports Day
2 July	Year 11 Prom (tbc)
14 July	Enrichment Day
19-23 July	Year 6 to 7 transition week
23 July	Last day of term: school will end at 1.00pm

Finally, I do hope that you share my rising sense of optimism and will be able to enjoy this summer and greater normality as our school begins to again look ahead in earnest.

Best wishes



James O'Connell
Principal