

**July 14<sup>th</sup> 2020**

Dear Parents and Carers,

As you know, just over a week ago, the government published its plans for a full return for all students to school in September. Since then I have been carefully working through the guidance and discussing with colleagues, with governors and with fellow Headteachers the best way to implement the government guidance in the specific context of the Academy. The end product of these discussions will be a revised risk assessment setting out the ways we are going to work and the control measures that we will have in place to minimise the risks to students and to staff. We will finalise this at the end of August in the light of the guidance and conditions at the time and upload it to the website at the start of the new term. In the meantime I will set out some of our current thinking in this email.

The first thing to say is that it is really important that we do get our students back into school. Even though many of them have been working very hard on their remote learning, it is clear from the conversations we have had that (almost without exception!) they miss being in class with their teachers and their friends. Although they have often done more than they think and remembered more than they realise, they need to be back in lessons and back learning in school. For some this is not just a matter of their education but also of their mental health and wellbeing. It is also important for the economy. I have never understood why some people belittle the “child minding” part of a school’s role. As we have learned over the last few months, the country desperately needs its children to be in school in order for everything else to happen. Millions of parents have learned just how hard managing the learning of a very small number of children can be. I am proud to be part of a profession that does this for millions of children on a daily basis and proud of what this adds to the economy and to the country as a whole. To enable everybody else to do the important things that they do, we need to return to making this vital contribution as quickly as we safely can.

Safety is, of course, all important. It is important to realise just how much the context has changed. The Office for National Statistics carries out regular random testing to find out the infection rate across the community in the country as a whole. When we were planning for our partial re-opening in June, the figure was one infected person in every 400. The figure is now one in 3900. This means it is reasonable to do more now than it was a couple of months ago. However, that fact that we are now almost ten times safer does not mean we are (or ever can be) completely safe, which is why we still need to take sensible precautions. It is also true that this figure can go up as well as down and we will need to monitor it carefully over the summer before finalising our plans for September. There will be a special meeting of our Health and Safety Committee in mid-August to assess the position at that point.

That committee met yesterday and made a number of provisional decisions which will shape the development of our Risk Assessment over the next few days. They are provisional because we know that circumstances beyond the Academy can change and we will need to keep all of our plans constantly under review. However I wanted to make sure that you know all of our thinking as it currently stands:

1. ***We will stagger the start of term.*** Year 7 will start on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September. This will give our new students the chance to meet staff, to get used to the building and to understand all the control measures that we have in place. Students in Years 10-11 will return on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> September. Students in Years 8-9 will return on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> September. This will mean we can work with each Year group in turn to make sure that they understand all of the safety arrangements for their “bubbles”.
2. ***We will stagger the start of the day.*** The day for Years 7-9 will start as usual with form time at 8.40. For students in Years 10-11 it will begin with the start of lesson 1 at 9.00. Their form time will be at the end of the day. Depending on the guidance on funding for catch up provision, their day may also be extended further. I will let you have more details on this point as soon as we have them.
3. ***Students will begin their day on the South Yard.*** Unless they are travelling on the Sutton/Langley bus, students should arrive no more than 10 minutes before their designated start time. They will line up in forms as they would for a fire drill and be taken into the Academy a form at a time for handwashing at the start of the day.
4. ***Students will be managed in Year Group “bubbles”.*** Years 7, 8 and 9 will all be in separate “bubbles” and kept apart from one another while they are in school. Following discussions with Cheshire East Council who are happy for us to proceed in this way, Years 10-11 will be treated as a

single “bubble”. This is to enable mixed age teaching of pathway subjects. It is worth noting that, at 240 students, this combined “bubble” is no larger than a single Year group in many schools.

5. **Breaks and lunchtimes will be staggered.** To keep the bubbles separate, the dining room safe and to avoid congestion when students are washing their hands before break and lunch, each bubble will have a different break time within lesson 1 (ie 0900-1100) and a different lunchtime within lesson 2 (ie 1100-1320). We are finalising the details of this at the moment and I will let you have details of timings before the start of term.
6. **The Dining Room will be used by one “bubble” at a time.** This will enable alternating bubbles to be seated at the counters on stools and on the chairs and tables (facing the same way. This will mean that the stools and counters can be cleaned while the chairs and tables are in use and vice versa.
7. **We will maintain the circulation system introduced for the “rainbow school”.** This is almost (but not quite) a one-way system. It is designed to reduce congestion on the corridors and to minimise the time students are face to face. It does make some journeys around the Academy a little longer and does mean there are times when students need to leave the building.
8. **We will amend the rooming timetable to reduce movement.** There are limits to how far we can do this while still giving students access to the full curriculum in specialist rooms. However, where it is possible, we will plan for them to stay in the same rooms.
9. **Students with SEND who need support from a TA will be withdrawn from lessons for targeted interventions.** To avoid TAs working too close to students, support will take place in separate rooms (such as work rooms or the conference room). This support will be under the direction of the class teacher. The length of these interventions will vary with the needs of each child.
10. **Students will need to bring their own equipment into school.** It will be important that students do not share equipment or borrow items from one another. They should all have:
  - ✓ 2 pencils
  - ✓ 2 pens
  - ✓ A ruler
  - ✓ A rubber
  - ✓ A pencil sharpener
11. **Students will sit together at double desks facing the front.** The guidance is clear that, with larger groups working together in class, they will all need to face the front. This will mean that some teaching activities etc will need to be changed. Others may take place outside rather than in the classroom.
12. **Students will clean their desk at the end of each lesson.** We believe it is important that students take responsibility for their own hygiene and the safety of others so we will ask them to clean the surfaces they have been working on at the end of each lesson.
13. **Subjects will carry out subject specific Risk Assessments.** There need to be some adjustments to the curriculum and to the activities students undertake. There is national guidance in many subjects and we will apply

this to our particular circumstances. One example of this is that we will not use the PE changing rooms. On days when students have PE, they should wear their PE kit all day. This will, in turn, affect the PE activities we undertake.

**14. We will only allow essential visitors into school.** These will, include, for example, visitors who are attending statutory social care or SEND meetings. Where possible, meetings with parents should take place over the phone or using a video conferencing platform. Where face to face meetings with parents are essential they will take place **by appointment only** in the waiting room. I know parents will understand the reasons for these precautions and I hope it will not be too long before we can welcome more parents into the Academy.

I feel I should add a note on face coverings. At the moment the guidance from both the Department for Education and the Health and Safety Executive continues to recommend that they are not worn in schools. This is partly because of the risks associated with their being put on and taken off. As I write, we are expecting a change to the guidance for shops in England but there is no sign of the position changing for schools. I know that some schools (particularly where they have narrow corridors or particular difficulties in staggering the day) have decided to move away from this position and we will monitor the situation carefully over the summer. At this stage, however, we have no plans to move away from the national guidance.

I fully understand that, while the great majority of parents welcome the return to the Academy operating in something more recognisably like its normal way, for some this will be a source of anxiety. I have already suggested that, once we know the final details of the guidance and our working arrangements (which will probably be mid August), some parents may want to discuss individual risk assessments and additional control measures that we could put in place to reflect individual medical conditions or membership of venerable ethnic groups. I will repeat this invitation when I send out further details of our opening plans towards the end of August. In the meantime, however, do get in touch with your child's tutor, if there is anything more general you would like to discuss.

Finally, at one point during the lockdown period, I quoted the words of another Headteacher who said:

***I have started a list of things I am looking forward to doing when we get out of lockdown: marking work with a pen, having a child greet me with a smile as I pass them in the corridor, leafing through exercise books to watch a year of student progress unfold, wandering around the playground and hearing the happy laughter of students, a child proudly coming into my office on their birthday, students telling me about sporting successes.***

***Though it has been hard, we have got to a point where we can keep going. Hopefully, it won't be long before we can see our colleagues, the parents and, most of all, the reason we do this job – our students.***

It has been a long time coming but it feels as though these words are finally coming to fruition. I can't wait to see our students back in school and, although it will still look and feel rather different from what we were used to, I really hope that our plans for September will make everybody as excited as I am about the return to school.

I will write once more before the end of term. In the meantime, please continue taking care and staying safe.

With every best wish

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a final upward stroke.

**Richard Hedge**

**Headteacher**

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