

**September 30<sup>th</sup> 2020**

Dear Parents and Carers

In the midst of such difficult times it is important that we are continuing to focus on the really important business of educating our students. Today is National Poetry Day and all around the Academy, in lessons and out, staff are sharing poems with students to mark this important event and I will include my own contribution at the end of this email.

First though, an update on the challenging business of running the school safely in these anxious times. While we are still in the fortunate (and increasingly unusual) position of having no positive diagnoses of Covid-19 among either our staff or our students, we have been reviewing the steps we are taking to keep everyone safe and the ways in which parents can support this.

Since we re-opened in September we have based our safety plans on the “hierarchy of measures” set out in the guidance from the government:

- a requirement that people who are ill stay at home
- robust hand and respiratory hygiene
- enhanced cleaning arrangements
- active engagement with NHS Test and Trace
- formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise distancing between those in school wherever possible and minimise the potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable

| <i>Safety Measure</i>                              | <i>What we are doing</i>  | <i>What parents can do to help</i>  |
|--|---|---|
| A requirement that people who are ill stay at home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making sure students, parents and staff understand the possible symptoms of covid-19</li><li>• Asking all students about symptoms at the start of every day</li><li>• Isolating and checking any students with possible symptoms and sending them home if necessary</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make sure that students are doing everything they can to stay well by following all the government advice on grouping and social distancing</li><li>• Make sure that you know the possible symptoms of Covid-19 (see the letter from NHS Test and Trace below)</li><li>• Make sure that your child is kept at home if they have possible symptoms and that you get a test</li></ul> |

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|--|---|--|
| Robust hand and respiratory hygiene                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insisting that all students wash their hands at least five times a day</li> <li>• Promoting “catch it-bin it-kill it” throughout the Academy</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that all students have tissues with them in school.</li> <li>• Make sure that students have hand sanitiser in school especially if they are wearing face coverings.</li> </ul>  |
| Enhanced cleaning arrangements   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buying additional hours from our cleaning company throughout the school day</li> <li>• Cleaning desks with anti-bacterial wipes at the start of every lesson.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure students have ant-bacterial wipes with them in school.</li> <li>• If you are in a position to do so, donate some packs of wipes to our reserves to support families who are unable to provide them (see below).</li> </ul>  |
| Active engagement with NHS Test and Trace                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deploying a duty SLT leader each lesson of the day to liaise with Test and Trace if necessary (so far it has not been)</li> <li>• Using our dedicated “Covid line” (07340 665057) for parents to report positive test results <b>by text only</b> out of school hours</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure you let us know immediately if your child has a positive test result, phoning the Academy in office hours and using our dedicated “Covid line” (07340 665057) <b>by text only</b> out of school hours.</li> <li>• Make sure you check and implement the requirements of the test and trace system (see <a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works</a> ) if anyone in your household has a positive test result.</li> </ul> |
| Formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise distancing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staggering the start of our school day so that students in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 arrive separately</li> <li>• Staggering breaks and lunchtimes for each of our four “bubbles”</li> <li>• Operating a “one way system” around the Academy</li> <li>• Not changing for PE</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wherever possible, ensure that students arrive at their allocated time (0830-0835 for Key Stage 3 and 0850-0855 for Key Stage 4) (we realise a small number of students need to arrive earlier than these times because of buses etc and have made arrangements for these)</li> <li>• Make sure students are in PE kit on “PE days” and full school uniform on other days (see below).</li> </ul>   |

I fully understand that the decision about whether or not to keep a child at home is a very tricky one and I do not envy the position that some of our parents have found themselves in. This is a problem which is being faced by parents all over the country and the NHS Test and Trace team has sent schools the following letter for parents:

***One important part of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of pupils, parents and our communities is testing for coronavirus. We all have a duty to make sure that the right people have access to get tested at the right time. Every time a test is used inappropriately, a person with Covid-19 symptoms may miss out on getting tested.***

***Therefore, we ask that you only book a test if your child has any of these three coronavirus symptoms:***

***1. a high temperature: any new high temperature where your child feels hot to touch on their chest or back (you do not need to measure the temperature)***

***2. a new continuous cough: coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours***

***3. a loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste: a noticeable loss of smell or taste or things smell and taste different to normal***

***Your child does not need a test if they have a runny nose, are sneezing or feeling unwell but do not have a temperature, cough or loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste. Runny noses and sneezes are not normally symptoms of coronavirus.***

***If you are unsure about whether to get a test, please check the official list of symptoms on the NHS website, which is reviewed regularly: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/)***

***Only the person with symptoms should get a test. You do not need to get a test for anyone else in the household unless they also have any of the three symptoms listed above. All members of the household need to self-isolate whilst waiting for the test result.***

***If the person with symptoms' test comes back positive, other members of their household should continue self-isolating for 14 days and only get a test if they develop coronavirus symptoms.***

***If a pupil in a class or bubble tests positive for coronavirus, anyone who is advised to self-isolate does not require a test unless they subsequently develop symptoms.***

***No one else in the same class or bubble as the symptomatic person needs to take any action unless advised by the school. Schools have detailed guidance and access to a Department for Education and Public Health England helpline for advice and support.***

***Contacts of a person who has tested positive must follow the guidance carefully and in full, which means they must stay at home for 14 days. This is because it can take several days following contact with an infected person before an individual develops symptoms or the virus can be detected. Students should only book a test if they get symptoms.***

***The NHS has produced some guidance to help parents understand when their child can and cannot attend school which you may find useful: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthybody/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/>***

***It is vital for children's learning and future opportunities that they are able to return to school and college. It is therefore vitally important that all we work together and do our bit to make this possible.***

This letter is helpful in re-stating the symptoms of Covid and clarifying the circumstances in which a child should be tested. It is important to remember, though, that a child may be genuinely unwell, even if they do not have the Covid symptoms. There were days when students were too poorly for school before Covid and there will be similar days this term. If you feel your child is too ill for school, please keep them at home but only book a coronavirus test if they are showing one or more of the three symptoms above.

If you are in any doubt, full details of our school uniform and PE kit can be found on the Academy website. In particular:

- We will continue to ventilate classrooms as well as we can; students may wish to wear a uniform jumper (feedback on the new black jumpers has, incidentally, been very positive).
- Girls must wear knee length skirts (or trousers) and tights without holes in. It is maybe no surprise that many of those who have complained most about cold classrooms have been those in the shortest skirts!
- On "PE days" students should wear their PE kit. We recognise that it is now getting colder so they may also wear track suit bottoms and/or an Academy PE hoody and/or an Academy blazer.
- As each day begins (except in the foulest weather) out on the South Yard, we would advise all our students to wear a coat through the autumn and winter months.

I want to thank our whole Academy community: students, parents and staff for the part they have played in getting the term off to such a positive start. The attendance of our students has been excellent and *almost* without exception their behaviour has been exemplary. Our Year 7s have settled remarkably well to Academy life and the challenges of work in a secondary school. Our Year 11s have regained momentum really quickly and over 120 of them have participated in our first after school classes this week. Years 8-10 are pretty good too! We are proud of them all. None of this would be possible without the constant support of so many of you, many of whom I know from individual conversations with you are juggling many different work and family commitments as well as dealing with the challenging times we are all living through. I know it is not easy and I am very grateful to you all. I know that, in turn, you would want me to thank all of our staff. These are difficult and worrying times in which to work in a school and I am sure you will agree with me that my colleagues have risen magnificently to the challenge.

The challenge for us all now is to sustain the start we have made through the winter months that lie ahead. It is almost certain that infection rates will continue to rise both nationally and locally and we will need to maintain and review all of our safety measures as well as keeping an unrelenting focus on the education and educational wellbeing of our students. It will not be easy but I take great hope from the enterprise and endeavour that our students and staff have already shown.

And that brings me back to where I started and my poem for World Poetry Day. I have written before about my belief that one of our most important human characteristics is our ability to hope: our capacity to imagine a better time and a better world than the one we are living in right now and our determination to make that imagining a reality. That is why, in these especially difficult times, I have chosen the following poem:

### **“Hope” is the thing with feathers**

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -

That perches in the soul -

And sings the tune without the words -

And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -

And sore must be the storm -

That could abash the little Bird

That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land -

And on the strangest Sea -

Yet - never - in Extremity,

It asked a crumb - of me.

**Emily Dickinson**

With every best wish

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Hedge', with a horizontal line extending to the right and a small dash at the end.

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