

4TH November 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

This is the first letter I have written since the announcement at the weekend that the country will enter into a second national lockdown tomorrow. These are anxious times for us all and particularly for the families and teachers of young people in the 11-16 age group where, nationally, coronavirus infections have risen significantly since the start of October. The situation is complicated by the fact that most of the increase in infections took place during the week beginning 19th October when many of the schools in the country were on half term. It is, therefore, not possible to tell at this stage whether the transmission to teenagers is taking place primarily in schools or in the wider community.

What we do know is that the infection rate in our Academy community remains significantly below that in many other schools both locally and nationally. Throughout the pandemic, however, I have tried to be as transparent as possible with parents, and I do need to tell you that two further members of our academy family have tested positive for coronavirus over half term. One is a Year 7 student who had been in self isolation (along with the rest of the year group) before half term and had had no contact with staff or students since 12th October. The other is a member of staff who tested positive at the end of the half term week and had had no contact with anyone in the Academy community since 23rd October. We are confident, therefore, that neither of them could have transmitted the virus to any other staff or students. Our thoughts are with them both as they self isolate.

As you will know, the government have decided that schools will remain open during the current lockdown and the legal obligation on parents to ensure that their children are attending school wherever possible remains in place. I fully understand the anxiety that this creates for some parents but would, on this occasion, reiterate the government view that, in almost every case, the disadvantages to students of being out of school far outweigh the risks of attendance. If you do have any concerns around this issue, please contact the pastoral co-coordinator for your son or daughter's year group.

The changing national situation does mean that we need to redouble our own efforts within the Academy to keep our students and our staff as safe as we can. To this end we will:

1. Apply the revised guidance on ventilation in classrooms. This means we will ensure a through draft in lessons and a "purge" of the air by opening windows fully at break and lunch times. This does have implications for warmth and comfort and we will need to allow students to wear some suitable indoor clothing in addition to their uniform (see below).
2. Limit still further the visitors coming into school. Please do not come into the Academy building without an appointment. Wherever possible, meetings will take place by phone or online. If it is essential to hold a face to face meeting in school, these will be held in the waiting room and kept as brief as possible. I am sorry this means that we cannot be as welcoming to parents as we would normally be but I am grateful for your support in lamenting these restrictions.
3. Cancel our normal review day and hold parents evenings virtually. There will be online parents evenings (with time limited conversations determined by the scheduling software) this half term for students in Years 9, 10 and 11. Mr Reed has begun the process of contacting parents in these year groups to explain this new process.

4. Remind all parents of the importance of students having the following items in school:
 - i) A face covering
 - ii) A sealable plastic bag
 - iii) Hand sanitiser
 - iv) Anti-bacterial wipes

5. Continue to take disciplinary action against students who do not comply with all the safety measures we have put in place. Overwhelmingly, our students have done remarkably well with all the additional requirements that have been placed upon them but, sadly, we have had to impose a number of exclusions in cases where individuals have failed to work with us to keep the Academy safe. While this will always be a last resort, please rest assured that we will continue to take all necessary steps to keep the Academy safe.

The government guidance on ventilation now includes the flexibility for schools to allow students to wear suitable indoor clothing **in addition to** their school uniform. With this in mind, we have taken the decision to allow students to wear plain black, blue or grey jumpers or hoodies in class in addition to their shirts, ties and blazers. The purpose of this is to ensure that students are warm and comfortable enough to learn while maintaining a reasonable standard of formal uniform. Multi-coloured or heavily branded items are not suitable in this context. An alternative for students who do not have access to a suitable jumper or hoodie would be to wear a white t-shirt or vest underneath their school shirt. Similarly, girls who have complained about their feet being cold may want to wear black socks underneath their tights. On days when they have PE, students may wear plain blue, black or grey tracksuit bottoms over their PE shorts. Students should not wear coats or hoodies with the hoods up inside school. If you have any questions about these arrangements, please contact the pastoral co-coordinator for your son or daughter's year group.

On a different note can I thank you all for your contributions to our food bank appeal which was linked to the non uniform day for Years 8-11 on the Friday before half term. Between us we raised over £600 on the Gateway and a minibus full of food contributions. The foodbank does a fantastically important job, especially at the moment, and I am really grateful that your generosity has enabled us to support them in this way. Thank you, too, to Miss Halsall and to Tony Togneri who have helped us to develop such a strong link with this important charity over the last few years. Year 7 missed out on the non-uniform day because they were self-isolating. They will have their own non uniform day on Friday 6th November. They should wear suitable indoor clothing (which should also be suitable for PE if they have a PE lesson) and, if possible bring an item of food for the food bank or make a donation on the Gateway.

These are serious times and November looks like being at least as challenging for us as any of the months that have gone before. In any other year this is months when the nights draw in and when the cold and the dark start to sap our energy levels. In every school I have worked in, November has almost always been the hardest month of the year- covid or no covid.

That is why I am especially grateful to Miss Jerome who is leading our forms in a November challenge to try something new every day (details are attached). Students are encouraged to upload pictures of themselves taking part in the different challenges and there will be a form prize for the best participation. This is a great way of putting our Academy value of "celebrating the power of positive thought" into action and I hope it will help our whole school community maintain a positive outlook through the coming month. My personal favourite is 30th November: look for reasons to be hopeful, even in difficult times. That will be my personal target for every day of the weeks ahead. I am optimistic enough to believe that, by the end of the month, the "reasons to be hopeful" might include good news in relation to improved testing or the arrival of a vaccine. We shall see.

In the meantime, take care and stay safe.

With every best wish

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

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