

Reminder: Our Covid-19 emergency number is 07340 665057. Please this number for texting details of positive test results. For all other messages please ring or email the Academy as normal.

November 12th 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

As we approach the end of another week, I am pleased to be able to report that we have had no further positive tests for COVID-19 from any Academy staff or students. For the sake of full transparency I should say that one contractor working for another firm within the Academy has tested positive, but, in conjunction with public health colleagues in Cheshire East Council, we have undertaken the full test and trace procedure and we are confident that the contractor concerned had had no close contact with anybody within the Academy community. We are, unfortunately, being increasingly affected by cases where the children of our staff have been told to self-isolate from their own school or childcare setting because someone within the setting has themselves tested positive. This has had a significant effect on our staffing levels over the last couple of weeks and this is only likely to increase as the winter goes on. I remain hugely grateful to all of our staff team who are stepping up with undiminished commitment to fill some of the gaps left by absent colleagues.

There are a few points that I would like to raise this week in relation to the implementation of our risk assessment and the safety measures that we have in place:

1. We have as you know relaxed some of our normal uniform requirements to ensure that students are warm enough even when our classrooms are very well ventilated to prevent the spread of the virus. It is important to stress that these relaxations allow students to wear plain coloured clothing in addition to their normal school uniform but are not a substitute for it. It is important therefore that all of our students wear their full school uniform as normal even if they are supplementing it with additional items.
2. Some students particularly those who have brothers or sisters in other years are finding it hard to understand why they cannot mix with their siblings around the Academy. It is important that they all understand and accept that the maintenance of our bubbles during the school day is an important part of the safety measures that we have in place and that any mixing of these bubbles is likely to involve students from beyond their own household and therefore adds to the risk that everybody faces. If you have more than one child in the Academy, I would be very grateful if you could reinforce this point with them.
3. There are some signs that some of our students have become a bit less vigilant where some of the fundamental control measures such as hand washing and wiping down desks at the start of lessons are concerned. We will be taking steps to remind them of these important points but I would be very grateful if parents could reinforce these as well. To support this message, please ensure that your child has anti-bacterial wipes and hand sanitiser with them in school.

On a different note, I am pleased to confirm that our first online parents evening will take place next Wednesday for students in year 10. Parents are already actively engaging with

the online software for booking appointments and details of similar events for families in Year 11 will follow shortly. For families in Year 9, the information will come out early in the new year. This is a new venture for the Academy and our staff as well as for parents. Doubtless there will be the occasional technical glitch but I am confident that it will offer a workable alternative to the traditional face to face parents evenings which, as I am sure you will understand, are not events that we can run at the moment. Our Year 11 students are very talented, but even they cannot be in two places at once. The Year 11 English lesson scheduled for next Wednesday at 3.00pm, will therefore, have to be cancelled.

This week, I would also like to focus on two issues which arise from the wider national context. First, as we are all only too well aware, we are currently subject to additional restrictions as part of a national lockdown. This means that after school, a secondary age student should only meet outside with one single student from another household. I am sorry to say that we have had some reports of larger groups of students in the park and around town. It would be really disappointing if all of the hard work that we are doing here in the Academy and that many, many families are supporting outside of school came to nothing because a minority of students who are not complying with the national lockdown. Please make sure that you remind your own children that the additional restrictions that are in place apply to them and that for everybody's safety it is important that they follow them.

Secondly this week has seen further developments in some of the UK jurisdictions over the question of arrangements for the 2021 summer exams. In Scotland it is already been announced that exams will not run as normal and this week it was confirmed that an announcement will be made in the new year about the detail of the alternative plans in Wales. It was announced this week that the normal exam series will not take place but will be replaced by a system of school based assessments complemented by some external testing in the spring in England. On the other hand, the current plan, for reasons which I completely understand, and in many ways support, is to run the examination series as normal. This does however have two drawbacks firstly contingency plans will be needed in case there is a significant upturn in infection rates over the examination period which has now been put back until July. Secondly there is a risk of social and geographical inequality if students in different parts of the country have missed differing amounts of teaching owing to illness or self-isolation. Some of our parents have raised concerns over this very point. Ofqual the exams regulator has said that ***"We will need contingency plans. We are discussing with government, exam boards and the sector, the detail of that – taking into account the risk of disruption at an individual, local and regional level"***. While there is no formal consultation over this, parents who wish to make their views known might want to make two particularly important points. First, it is very important that the contingency plans are clarified and published as soon as possible so that schools can make any necessary preparations. Second, Ofqual should require the exam boards to apply the arrangements that already exist for giving special consideration to candidates disadvantaged by a variety of personal circumstances to ensure that the marks of students who have been affected by the Covid-19 crisis are adjusted to reflect this. Parents can contact Ofqual via their website at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual .

Finally, in any school, in any year , November is always a tough old month. This year has inevitably brought additional challenges and difficulties. Nonetheless I am really pleased with the way students and staff across the Academy are continuing to maintain their focus

on the really important business of teaching and learning. Recent announcements about both testing and vaccines give us cause to hope that there may be some light at the end of the tunnel. I very much hope this is the case. It is important for all of us to remember that the very difficult times we have all lived through for the last year will not last forever and that even as winter approaches so too does the day when we can start to return to something more like normality. Until that happens, please rest assured that all of us here at the Academy will continue to do everything we can to educate and support your children safely and effectively.

With every best wish

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a final upward stroke, representing the name Richard Hedge.

Richard Hedge
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