

Monday 12 October 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I write to inform you that from Thursday 15 October 2020, all students and staff at the College must wear face coverings in corridors and indoor communal areas, unless they are exempt from doing so. At a time of increasing rates of transmission of the coronavirus, this change in policy is a matter of group responsibility made from our respect for others to help keep our community safe. Wearing a face covering is an expression of the care we collectively have for our community, and of our solidarity with others. I outline below the reasons for this change to our policy:

On the week beginning 7 September, when schools reopened, there were 2,948 lab-confirmed confirmed cases of coronavirus nationally. As of 9 October, the 7-day average was 14,391 — with hospitalisations and deaths also rising. And whereas locally (West Devon and Torridge) and regionally (the South West) the number of lab-confirmed cases of coronavirus remains low relative to other localities and regions, the fact remains that using latest available data, in the South West every 10 people infected infect between 13 and 16 other people, with a growth rate of up to 8% per day, comparable with all other regions in the UK.

To illustrate the rate at which coronavirus transmission is increasing locally, as of 9 October, in West Devon there have been 40 lab-confirmed confirmed cases of coronavirus in the 33 days since schools reopened, compared with 40 in the preceding 140 days dating back to 17 April. In Torridge there have been 36 lab-confirmed cases of coronavirus in the 33 days since schools reopened, compared with 36 in the preceding 137 days dating back to 20 April. It is also important to acknowledge that in Exeter, where many staff live and where many of our students' parents and carers work, there have been 891 lab-confirmed confirmed cases of coronavirus in the 33 days since schools reopened, more than treble the total number in the preceding days since the pandemic began.

The relatively low number of confirmed cases locally, alongside the significant and carefully planned measures and controls we have vigilantly implemented in the College to mitigate the risk of transmission and spread, has meant that so far there has been no confirmed case of COVID-19 amongst our students or staff. As such, we have not been required to close either fully or partially (e.g. year group bubbles), as — according to latest available national data — around 1 in 5 secondary schools nationally have.

We have had 192 students and 17 members of staff who have needed to isolate since our return in September, and I would again like to reiterate our gratitude for the support of families who have followed guidance to not send their children into school, to isolate at home and arrange tests. But given that coronavirus transmission is rising and is significantly higher now than it was when we returned in September, both locally and nationally, it is vital that to continue to mitigate the risk of transmission and thus the potential for class or year group isolation, we do not just maintain the efficacy of our existing measures, but strengthen them.

Whereas current guidance states that ‘face coverings will not be necessary in the classroom even where social distancing is not possible’ (DfE 2020d), HM Government have given schools the discretion to ‘require face coverings for pupils, staff and visitors in areas outside the classroom where social distancing cannot easily be maintained, such as corridors and communal areas’. In other words, schools may require the wearing of face coverings ‘where the layout of the school or college estate makes it particularly difficult to maintain social distancing when staff and pupils are moving around the premises’ and ‘where on top of hygiene measures and the system of controls [implemented], permitting the use of face coverings for staff, pupils or other visitors would provide additional confidence to parents’ (DfE 2020e).

Given that a significant number of parents and carers have raised the issue with us as a concern, including through our most recent ‘Keeping in Touch’ survey; given that all Student Councils have voted unanimously for us to require the use of face coverings in communal areas such as corridors; and given, of course, the rising rate of transmission and spread locally, I reiterate that all students and staff — unless exempt — are now required to wear face coverings in corridors and communal areas.

Thus, from Thursday 15 October 2020, unless exempt, all students and staff must wear face coverings:

- If travel to and/or from College is by public bus, coach, or taxi.
  - Note that from 2 November, the requirement to wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated school transport will become a condition of travel for all students aged 11 and over, unless exempt. If a student is found not wearing a face covering by the school or transport operator on two occasions, and there is no record of them being exempt, they will be refused travel for a period of time.
- If travel to and/or from College is in a vehicle shared with people outside of their household.
- If a student is unwell with coronavirus symptoms in College and is isolated awaiting collection.
- During movement in corridors between lessons and to and from break and lunch.
- In corridors when leaving classrooms at the end of the day.
- In communal dining areas (canteen, Café 11, Café 6) until seated to eat or drink.

Students do not need to wear a face covering during lessons, including Physical Education, or outdoors. We are also mindful of the fact that some people are less able to wear face coverings, and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others. As such, the following are exempt from wearing face coverings:

- Students who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability.
- Where putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause a student severe distress.

If your child is exempt from wearing a face covering, please complete the survey (link provided below, and in the email accompanying this letter) by 22:00 Wednesday 14 October 2020. We will provide all students exempt from wearing a face covering with an exemption badge and exemption card. We will not routinely require any written evidence of the exemption, and you do not need to seek advice or request a letter from a medical professional about your child’s reason for not wearing a face covering. If you do not complete the survey, we will deem this to indicate that your child is not exempt from wearing face coverings.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=kG0HO7J4vUqeBclPJiicRjnWSebDr4NDqtvBush-3nFUNzZaU1ISNVU1S1VQMjc2TzlaVIMzNjVMWi4u>

It is important that face coverings are worn safely — are put on, removed, stored, and disposed of (if disposable) ‘to avoid inadvertently increasing the risks of transmission’ (Cabinet Office and DHSC 2020). Advice on how to make a cloth face covering is provided by [PHE \(2020\)](#) and advice about how to wear a face covering is provided by [DHSC \(Cabinet Office and DHSC 2020\)](#). Staff and students should bring their own face coverings to College, which should be plain, but we will maintain a small contingency supply of disposable face coverings where needed.

Our approach to the wearing of face coverings will of course be subject to continual review in response to the ongoing situation regarding coronavirus transmission, and national guidance.

To reiterate the detail outlined in section 7 of our ‘Return to School’ plan, it is also important that students adhere our expectations of behaviour, including our strict, unambiguously defined hygiene protocols, both respiratory and tactile. Unhygienic behaviour is a significant issue in the current climate and deliberate acts of transmission, e.g. spitting, will result in severe sanctions, including fixed term exclusions. Heightened respiratory and tactile hygiene, increased ventilation, increased cleaning, and the use of face coverings all work together in prevention and are particularly important in schools to compensate for the practical impossibility of maintaining consistent 2m physical distancing.

In short, but not exclusively, students must:

- Adhere to expectations regarding travel to and from College.
- Wear face coverings as required.
- Enter the building by the appropriate entrance.
- Upon exiting the building go directly home, with no congregating outside the College.
- Sanitize hands as expected, on entry to and from all rooms, and if directed to do so.
- Report directly to classrooms without delay or detour.
- Remain seated in classrooms, unless granted permission otherwise.
- Not undertake any deliberate acts of transmission.
- Follow the ‘Catch it, bin it, kill it’ code.
- Always make every attempt made to respect social distancing when possible.

Any failure to adhere to these expectations will be a disciplinary matter.

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I thank you again very much for your continued support. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any concerns or require further information. And as ever, keep looking after yourselves, and each other.

Yours sincerely,



Derrick Brett (Principal).

## Links to Guidance

(A selection of links to advice and guidance.)

Cabinet Office. (2020a, September 22). *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Meeting with others safely (social distancing)*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>

Cabinet Office. (2020b, September 22). *Coronavirus (COVID-19): What has changed – 22 September*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-what-has-changed-22-september>

Cabinet Office. (2020c, September 22). *Staying alert and safe*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>

Cabinet Office, Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC). (2020, September 24). *Face coverings: when to wear one, exemptions, and how to make your own*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (DMAT). (2020, September 2). *COVID-19 2020. College full return September 2020 Risk Assessment*. <https://www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk>. [https://www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/uploads/6/1/4/4/61443371/covid-19riskassessmentoc\\_1.1.pdf](https://www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/uploads/6/1/4/4/61443371/covid-19riskassessmentoc_1.1.pdf)

Department for Education (DfE). (2020a, June 15). *Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

Department for Education. (2020b, July 1). *What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges in the autumn term*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-in-the-autumn-term>

Department for Education. (2020c, July 2). *Guidance for schools: coronavirus (COVID-19)*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-schools-coronavirus-covid-19>

Department for Education. (2020d, July 3). *Guidance for full opening: schools*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

Department for Education. (2020e, September 4). *Face coverings in education*. GOV.UK.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education/face-coverings-in-education>

Department of Health and Social Care. (2020a, August 28). *COVID-19 contain framework: a guide for local decision-makers*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/containing-and-managing-local-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreaks/covid-19-contain-framework-a-guide-for-local-decision-makers>

Department of Health and Social Care. (2020b, September 21). *Update from the UK Chief Medical Officers on the COVID-19 alert level*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/update-from-the-uk-chief-medical-officers-on-the-covid-19-alert-level>

NHS. (2020a, September 18). *Check if you or your child has coronavirus symptoms*. nhs.uk.  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

NHS. (2020b, September 18). *Coronavirus in children*. nhs.uk.  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/coronavirus-in-children/>

NHS. (2020c, September 18). *When to self-isolate and what to do*. nhs.uk.  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/when-to-self-isolate-and-what-to-do/>

Public Health England. (2020, July 15). *How to make a cloth face covering*. GOV.UK.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>