

Wednesday 23 September 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I would like to begin by thanking all those parents and carers who were able to find the time to complete our 'keeping in touch' survey last week. As always, we greatly welcome and genuinely value your feedback and have read and considered each response. In summary, 95% of parents and carers indicated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the arrangements we have put in place (as outlined in our Return to School plan and Risk Assessment, linked at the end of this letter), with one in three parents and carers stating that they were very satisfied.

The two most common themes that emerged from parents' and carers' comments centred around increasing the use of face coverings in corridors and communal areas and possibly making such a mandatory expectation (unless exempt), and about the length of breaktimes and lunchtimes. It is also evident from numerous comments offered through the survey, but also from many conversations had, that there exists a degree of uncertainty from parents and carers about what constitutes coronavirus symptoms and what doesn't, and what they should do should their children become unwell.

We use your feedback alongside our own monitoring, review and evaluation — including feedback from staff and students — and that of our partners. A thorough inspection of our system of controls and measures to mitigate and manage the risk of coronavirus transmission and spread was undertaken last week, for example, by Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust's Health & Safety Manager and Director of Premises and Facilities. I outline in the detail that follows some of the actions we have taken and adaptations we have made in response to all the feedback we have gathered in the first two weeks of our return to school, and provide some clarifications and additional information that may be of some help.

Changes to break and lunch times

Whilst year groups still have breaks and lunches at different times and/or venues, we have been able to extend the lengths of break times and lunch times by ten minutes and have slightly adapted the staggered starts of breaks and lunches. This was implemented from Wednesday last week and our monitoring so far, including informal feedback from staff, students, and parents and cares suggests it is working effectively.

Minimising contact during movement around the school

Our existing measures are significant in negating opportunities for contact across year groups during the College day, including during unavoidable movement through corridors. Nevertheless, we have introduced a 'two-bell' system for lesson changeovers to strengthen these measures and help ensure consistently controlled movement that — alongside the one-way system in operation — will further minimise the potential for inadvertent year group 'bubble' mixing in corridors. We continue to monitor these procedures and will continue to adapt, as necessary.

Improving access to toilets

Whereas increasing the length of break and lunchtimes has undoubtedly helped here, we are working on further adaptations to improve access to toilets without compromising our system of safety controls. We will resolve the issues as soon as possible and will communicate any change in protocols to our students, and their families.

Curriculum adaptations

We have finalised a curriculum-specific risk assessment for Technology, that has been checked and ratified, and we are now able — with the implementation of additional controls, including the purchase of more equipment — to provide practical lessons in technology subjects (including Engineering) in years 10 to 13.

Attendance

Firstly, may I refer you again to section 11 of our 'Return to school' plan, which sets out all the detail you may require. Please remember, the normal expectations and guidelines for attendance have resumed, i.e. it is the parents' / carers' duty to ensure that their child(ren) attend regularly, and it is the College's responsibility to record attendance and follow up absence. And whilst the ability to issue sanctions — including fixed penalty notices — in line with Devon County Council's code of conduct also returns, as the DfE have explicitly stated, 'no parent will be penalised for following official public health advice for their child not to attend a given session' (DfE 2020e) and where a child is not attending school in circumstances related to coronavirus (COVID-19), this 'will not count as an absence', either authorised or unauthorised.

We want all of our students to have high attendance, because we all know the impact that absence has the potential to have on the progress students make in school — and we are working tirelessly to ensure that our system of safety controls are robust enough to minimise any disruption to attendance in the event of any confirmed case of coronavirus in the future. Government statistics indicate that on the latest snapshot day of 17 September, '87% of pupils on roll in state-funded schools were in attendance... [including] pupils absent for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 related reasons' (DfE 2020g). Attendance at the College is significantly better than this, and on this day alone, including students absent for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 related reasons, 94% of our students attended.

Whilst we are of course pleased that our students' attendance in such volatile and uncertain times is so positive relative to the national picture, we want to make sure that it remains high and, indeed, gets better. Not counting absences related to coronavirus, which to reiterate 'will not count as an absence', we expect students to aim high for at least 97% attendance (or no more than five days absent in the academic year).

Attendance (coronavirus symptoms)

Several families have wrestled with decisions in the two weeks since we have returned about whether to send their children into College or not, given the symptoms they have displayed. We have endeavoured to support all families as best we can, ensuring they are fully informed and, hopefully, reassured, and in this spirit I clarify overleaf current government guidance (NHS 2020a-c). I also attach as an appendix to this letter a communication received this afternoon from Professor Viv Bennett CBE of Public Health England and Dr Susan Hopkins of NHS Test and Trace to further help parents and carers and prevent children being taken out of school unnecessarily:

A child who develops one or more of the following symptoms should be considered as a potential coronavirus case:

- A high temperature. The child will feel hot to touch on the chest or back, and whilst you do not need to measure the temperature, if you do and are confident in the reliability of the thermometer, a temperature of 37.8°C or higher would be considered high.
- A new, continuous cough — coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if the child usually has a cough, it may be worse than usual).
- A loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste — This means the child has noticed they cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Students with any of the above symptoms must not to come into school (or if they are already in school they will be isolated and must be collected as soon as possible) and parents/carers should arrange for a coronavirus test for them (go to [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus) or dial 119). They must isolate and only return to school if the test is negative, or after ten days isolation, whichever is the sooner. (In such circumstances, parents and carers will be ‘following official public health advice for their child not to attend a given session’ (DfE 2020e) and such will therefore not count as an absence, either authorised or unauthorised.) All members of the student’s household must isolate for fourteen days, or until the return of a negative test result, whichever is sooner. If your child’s symptoms subside before the outcome of the test or the end of the ten days of isolation, they must remain in isolation at home, along with all members of your household (a person with coronavirus can still be contagious for approximately ten days after symptom onset).

If someone in your household has symptoms, do not send your child into school. They must isolate along with the rest of the household until the return of a negative test result, or fourteen days have passed, whichever is sooner. If your child develops symptoms, they should arrange a test and begin isolating for ten days from the day the symptoms started.

Attendance (other symptoms)

Current Government guidance indicates that if your child is unwell and unable to attend school for reasons other than the three coronavirus symptoms — and may be reporting other symptoms such as a headache, sore throat, runny or sniffly nose, sneezing, earache, itchy eyes, lethargy or tiredness **without** a fever — they should **not** be treated as potential coronavirus cases and do not need to book a test. Parents and carers are advised to seek advice from your GP, a pharmacy or visit 111.nhs.uk. I attach as an appendix to this letter a leaflet produced by the NHS summarising the above information.

Face coverings

To reiterate our current policy as outlined in section 13 of our ‘Return to School’ plan, unless exempt (see our ‘Return to School’ plan and DfE 2020f), all students **must** wear face coverings:

- If travel to and/or from College is by public bus, coach, or taxi.
- If travel to and/or from College is in a vehicle shared with people outside of their household.
- If a student becomes unwell with coronavirus symptoms in College and is isolated awaiting collection.

Unless exempt, we **strongly encourage** all students to wear face coverings:

- During movement in communal areas such as corridors between lessons and to and from break and lunch. (Staff will encourage students to put their face coverings on as part of our standard routines for exiting classrooms when they move to break, lunch or — where applicable — another lesson.)

All visitors, including parents, will be required to wear a face covering whilst on site until they are located within a room or setting, such as a meeting room or office, where they can maintain social distance. At this point the face coverings can be removed. (Disposable masks will be available at reception.)

We unashamedly want our staff and students to wear face coverings (unless exempt) in communal areas such as corridors out of respect for others and to help keep our community safe. It is a matter of group responsibility and is even more paramount in a time of rising infection rates and confirmed case numbers. Please also note that should any local restrictions be implemented — i.e. should our locality be defined as an 'area of national government intervention' (DfE 2020f, see paragraph 14.2) — we must and will make the wearing of face coverings by adults and students mandatory (unless exempt) 'in areas outside classrooms when moving around communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain such as corridors' (DfE 2020d, see DHSC 2020a).

We are monitoring the local situation closely, including the views of parents and carers, and this policy is subject to change. (We will, of course, communicate any change to families.) We will shortly be surveying all families to gather information on those students who are exempt and will be providing such students with a badge to permit unobtrusive visual confirmation of their exemption and/or exemption card.

We have had 122 possible cases of coronavirus in the ten days since we have returned, either of students, staff or household members displaying symptoms, and I would like to reiterate here 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. As you know, regrettably one parent has tested positive and the family are isolating (both tests of the two children have returned negative). We again send the parent our warmest wishes for a speedy recovery and thank the parent most sincerely again for their responsible and swift response in following the Government guidance we have shared.

Since March, there have been over 400,000 people in the UK with a lab-confirmed positive coronavirus test result, and there have been almost 19,000,000 tests processed. We are committed to supporting anyone in our community who tests positive for coronavirus as much as — and in whatever way — we can, and we would expect the other members of the community we proudly serve to do so as well. We have been disappointed to learn that the parent who has tested positive for coronavirus has received several 'unsupportive' communications that have exacerbated the family's anxieties at an already stressful time for them. Please be reassured that should there be a confirmed case of coronavirus amongst our students or staff, we will take swift action and inform families as soon as possible after liaison with the Department for Education and Public Health England. I would respectfully ask here, again, that if anyone has any concerns, to contact the College directly.

Given the UK COVID-19 alert level moving from level 3 to level 4 this week (DHSC 2020b), with the number of coronavirus cases 'now rising rapidly', I respectfully urge all members of our community to stay alert and safe (Cabinet Office 2020c), and follow the three simple actions we must all follow to keep protecting each other, in the name of community, namely: washing our hands regularly, wearing face coverings as required, and making space for each other by staying at least 2 metres apart (or 1 metre with a face covering or other precaution). I also urge everyone to follow the new restrictions as outlined by the Prime Minister yesterday (PM Office 2020, Cabinet Office 2020b), and I would be grateful if parents and carers could revisit these requirements with their children and impress on them the importance to adhere to these key behaviours and routines.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Brett', written in a cursive style.

Derrick Brett (Principal).

Links to Guidance

(A selection of links to advice and guidance with specific reference to information included in this letter.)

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>

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

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 2). *Addendum: recording attendance in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19) during the 2020 to 2021 academic year*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance/addendum-recording-attendance-in-relation-to-coronavirus-covid-19-during-the-2020-to-2021-academic-year>

- Department for Education. (2020f, September 4). *Face coverings in education*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education/face-coverings-in-education>
- Department for Education. (2020g, September 22). *Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, Week 38 2020*. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-38>
- Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC), Public Health England (PHE). (2020, September 3). *Letter from PHE and NHS Test and Trace to school and college leaders*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-phe-and-nhs-test-and-trace-to-school-and-college-leaders/letter-from-phe-and-nhs-test-and-trace-to-school-and-college-leaders>
- 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/>
- Okehampton College. (2020, September 2). *Coronavirus Response and Planning: Returning to school September 2020*. <https://www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/>. https://www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/uploads/6/1/4/4/61443371/oc_coronavirus_full_return_planning_v7_02092020.pdf
- Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street. (2020, September 22). *PM Commons statement on coronavirus: 22 September 2020*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-commons-statement-on-coronavirus-22-september-2020>

Important

Advice for schools

CORONAVIRUS SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

A CHILD WHO DEVELOPS ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A POTENTIAL CORONAVIRUS CASE:



NEW CONTINUOUS COUGH

This means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if the child usually has a cough, it may be worse than usual)



FEVER (TEMPERATURE OF 37.8°C OR HIGHER)

The child will also feel hot to touch on their chest or back



A LOSS OR CHANGE TO SENSE OF SMELL OR TASTE

this means the child has noticed they cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

MOST CHILDREN WITH CORONAVIRUS HAVE AT LEAST ONE OF THESE SYMPTOMS.



If a child is unwell with one or more of these specific symptoms they should be told not to come into school or sent home as soon as possible and advised to get a coronavirus test. **ONLY** those children with one or more of these symptoms or those advised by their clinician or Local Authority should get a test.



Children reporting other symptoms such as a headache, sore throat, runny or sniffly nose, earache, itchy eyes, lethargy or tiredness **WITHOUT** a fever should **NOT** be treated as potential coronavirus cases or advised to take a test.

If the national guidance on symptoms of coronavirus in children changes, updated information will be provided at a local level as soon as possible. This information about coronavirus symptoms in children can be shared with all school teaching and administration staff as well as parents and carers where necessary.

For further guidance on coronavirus testing for schools, please read the letter from PHE and NHS Test and Trace to school and college leaders at: bit.ly/phe-schools





Test and Trace

23 September 2020

Dear parents and guardians,

This is an important letter to share some information on how we can work together to make sure we can continue to give children and young people the best education in the safest way possible.

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, I ask that you all follow these principles:

- You should 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 because these 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/
- 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/healthy-body/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.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Viv Bennett CBE

Chief Nurse and Director Maternity and Early Years | Public Health England

Head of World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Public Health Nursing and Midwifery

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