

14 September 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I would like to start by simply reiterating my brief Facebook message on Wednesday, namely that it was wonderful to welcome our students back to College last week. It is good to have them all back. It was also a joy to welcome our new Y7 students into our community, and we look forward to watching and helping them grow into happy and successful young adults. As we embark on the year and work ahead of us, it was extremely encouraging to see over 98% of our students in attendance last week, a high standard which it has never been more important that we work together to sustain, and which bodes well for the future as we all adjust and adapt to new ways of working.

I would like to reassure you that the system of controls and measures we have implemented to mitigate and manage the risk of coronavirus transmission — as outlined in our 'Returning to School' plan and accompanying Risk Assessment that you can find on our website — are under constant review. Throughout the last week, we have checked, checked, and checked again the effectiveness of the various mitigating actions we have implemented, through observation and feedback from staff, from our students and from parents and carers. As a result, we have already made some small adaptations and are currently finalising planning for some additional changes that we believe will further embed our safety controls, at the same time as ensuring we are able to provide the best learning opportunities for our students.

As you know, the protective measures we have implemented, as required by HM Government guidance, aim for our students and staff to minimize contact, maintain distancing, and thus effectively mitigate the risk of coronavirus transmission. Zoning and year group 'bubbles' are working well, with all year groups having break and lunch at different times, whilst timetable stretching and subsequent extension of lesson lengths has meant that whole school corridor movement has been markedly reduced to just three in a day, with the potential for year groups to mix during these two transitions reduced further by our new one way system. We have, nevertheless, observed some congestion at one point in our corridors during one of these transitions and we will be implementing additional controls this coming week to address this — amending our standard operating procedures for dismissal from classrooms to include a 'bell' system, and strategic placement of staff at key points of student 'flow' to monitor, manage and intervene if necessary.

Our cleaning, site and catering teams have worked incredibly hard in establishing and maintaining high standards of hygiene, with a significantly increased cleaning regimen in place. Dining areas are cleaned before and after year group use, surfaces in classrooms are sanitised before and after lessons, and students and staff sanitise their hands before entering and leaving any area.

Our students have been mature and responsible, cooperating fully with the new requirements regarding, for example, hand sanitising and adherence to the one way system. On the very few occasions where students have erred, they have worked with us and new habits are clearly forming.

It is important to note that where distancing is possible beyond the measures we have implemented and described above; we further enforce it. However, whilst we expect all members of our community to make every attempt to respect social distancing, it is simply not possible to always maintain such between students in schools, for example in corridors, communal areas, or other shared enclosed spaces. This is the reason underpinning the significant extent of the rest of the measures we have implemented — i.e. to minimize contact, increase cleaning, and enhance hygiene habits. In addition, we have strongly encouraged staff and students to wear face coverings in corridors and communal areas, and all staff are expected to wear a face covering wherever a physical distance of 2m cannot be maintained.

We have had a small number of students displaying coronavirus symptoms, and we are grateful for the support of families who have followed guidance to not send their children into school, to isolate at home and arrange tests. A small number of staff have either displayed symptoms or have had family members who have displayed symptoms and again, they too have followed guidance to not come into school, to isolate at home and arrange tests. There also have been a small number of students displaying symptoms in school and we have responded as per the procedures we outlined in our 'Returning to School' plan and accompanying Risk Assessment: These students have been isolated immediately, collected by family, taken home to isolate and have had tests arranged. All tests have returned negative. We have adhered to guidance from Public Health England, and our response to infection procedures have worked effectively.

Whilst the number of confirmed cases of coronavirus infections is growing nationally and in the south west*, the number of confirmed cases locally remain relatively low. Since Monday 7 September, for example, there have been no confirmed cases in West Devon, and in our neighbouring districts of Torridge and North Devon there have been 1 and 4 confirmed cases, respectively. The rate of confirmed cases since the pandemic began per 100,000 population in the south west is now 278, the lowest of all UK regions, whereas the rate is 180 in Devon, 140 in West Devon, 94 in Torridge, and 147 in north Devon. For comparison, 555 people in every 100,000 in England have tested positive for coronavirus, and the rates in those areas nationally that are subject to local restrictions and 'lockdowns' range from 1060 to 1706.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that relative to the majority of the rest of the country, the risk of coronavirus transmission in the localities we serve is low, given the national and regional increases in the growth rate in confirmed coronavirus cases, alongside the recent actions taken by Government such as the 'rule of 6', we of course want to do everything we can to continue to mitigate the risk of transmission — and thus minimise the risk that the College will be required to close again, either partially or otherwise, in the future. We are therefore considering making the wearing of face coverings in corridors and communal areas, to all but those who are exempt, mandatory. We will update you with more information in this regard soon, but until then I would ask you to share with your children this 'hands face space' film from HM Government, illustrating the importance of the use of face coverings: <https://vimeo.com/455704121/01b3eea402>. Furthermore, I would like to reiterate our current position, namely that staff and students are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings in all communal and circulation spaces where social distancing is difficult, such as corridors, entrances, and other shared enclosed spaces. (Paragraph 13.6 of our 'Returning to School' plan outlines the conditions where students must currently wear face masks.)

* R rate of 1.0-1.2 nationally, and 0.9-1.2 for the south west. See <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

In further support of our collective efforts to keep our procedures under effective, regular review, we would very much welcome your feedback. To this end, I would be grateful if you could take a few moments to complete this brief 'keeping in touch' survey, which will close at 23:59 on Tuesday 15 September.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=kG0HO7J4vUqeBclPJicRjnwSebDr4NDqtvBush-3nFUNzBEWjdGQVdPQkZRRVRCsk03RTA0VTBPOC4u>

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

Yours sincerely



Derrick Brett
Principal

Links to Guidance

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

- Department for Education. (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). *Guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak*. GOV.UK.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>
- Department for Education. (2020c, 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. (2020d, 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. (2020e, 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>