

**HIGH STANDARDS, HIGH ASPIRATIONS, HIGH EXPECTATIONS**27<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

I know that currently you are receiving a flurry of letters from me as I try and keep the community up to date with the rapidly evolving landscape around us currently. We have been continuing to refine our process for notifying families about new cases of corona virus to reduce the number of letters you will receive and to reduce any potential for confusion, particularly where families have students in different year groups. I hope that what you have received has been useful and we continue to take any feedback on board.

As you will no doubt be aware, the national lockdown ends at 00:01hrs on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December. At that time each county in England enters one of the 3 new “Local Tiers”. You will also likely be aware that Bristol is starting out in ‘Tier 3 – Very High Alert’. The same is also true for the surrounding areas of South Gloucestershire and North Somerset. In all tiers Schools are remaining operational in the current way which means continuing to deliver on site, in person education for any student who is well enough to attend and not required to actively self-isolate. This includes students who are themselves clinically vulnerable/extremely clinically vulnerable and those students who live with others who are clinically vulnerable or extremely clinically vulnerable. Our default position is therefore that we welcome all students who are well enough and not actively isolating (either due to their own symptoms whilst awaiting a test result, family symptoms awaiting test result, positive result in the household, close contact as communicated by NHS Test & Trace or close contact as communicated by Bristol Metropolitan Academy) on to site every day. I know that disruption caused over the recent weeks as we saw a rise in cases in the South West may make it feel like missing a day or two from the Academy would be less important than usual but the staff in the Academy are working tirelessly to try and maintain as much continuity and normality as possible and we would really appreciate your continued support in sending children to school when there is no other reason for them to remain at home.

Tier 3 also brings some specific local conditions with it. The full breakdown [can be found here](#) but a brief summary of how it may affect your child’s education is:

- Face coverings remain as mandatory in communal/social spaces (and is the case in Tier 2 areas as well so it is likely they will stay a feature in the Academy for a while yet).
- Households may not mix at all indoors. That is also the case in many outdoors places. In some outdoor public spaces (parks for example) the ‘Rule of 6’ comes back into being.

In relation to the two points above:

Face Coverings – as communicated previously, I am really appreciative of the mature approach and attitude shown by our students in wearing their coverings as they move around the building. However, a sizeable number of students each day are still turning up without one, either because they have forgotten it or they have lost it the previous day and not organised an alternative. We have given out hundreds of reuseables and thousands of disposables. Financially, and environmentally, this isn’t sustainable. Therefore from Monday we will no longer be issuing disposable masks (I don’t like the environmental impact) and we will only be able to **sell** reuseable coverings for £1 (which is just less than cost price). Alternatively students will have to return home to collect a forgotten covering which will obviously impact on their day. I am sorry to have to take this approach but hope that you will understand the need to ensure the best use of our finances in a particularly challenging environment. If we can work together to ensure that all students have at least one covering in their blazer and one in their school bag (minimum) then I am hoping this change will not affect any students at all.

Mixing of Households – I appreciate this one continues to be confusing for students (and all of us at times) but I appreciate your support in continuing to speak to students about mixing when out of the Academy, particularly when the school day ends. We are doing everything we can to reduce mixing inside the Academy (whilst accepting that it is physically impossible to socially distance all students at all times hence the need for isolation of close contacts when we do have a positive case).

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However, a recent positive case required isolation of students outside of classroom groups due to students socialising across year groups, after school, in a local park. This was during a period of national lockdown. This means a number of additional students now having to remain home for the 14 day isolation period which could have been avoided. Although the lockdown is ending, Tier 3 restrictions are similar in regards social mixing so I appreciate the continued support in reinforcing that message to students. In essence, when the school day ends, students should be heading immediately home, in the smallest group necessary (ie, siblings or other household members) and not hanging around in large groups or in social spaces. I know this is hard for all of us and, in particular, students given the conflicting layout of their day as in school they still get to be in groups during the day. By working together we hope to be able to continue to lower the transmission potential in the local area, protecting the NHS, each other and our most vulnerable. Lowering the transmission potential will also allow rapid movement to Tier 2 and ultimately Tier 1 where social interactions would then be possible something I am sure we all desire.

As you know, Bristol and the wider South West saw a sharp rise in cases last month which has then been followed by our first cases in the Academy. We have learnt from each case. Our systems of close contact identification continue to evolve and we have also tried to moderate our communications and now aim to communicate only to those families most needing to know. The aim of that is to ensure families are not inundated with communications which are not likely to be relevant to them. I am saying this here in the spirit of transparency in case you hear of cases in the Academy which aren't directly communicated to you. There is no attempt to not be open and I promise you, that we will continue to communicate directly to families in any case where we identify a likely close contact or where we think families are likely to hear about a case and we want to confirm that your child is not identified as a close contact. Communications are likely therefore to be restricted to the affected year group in most situations due to the 'bubbles' we are operating. The, hopefully, encouraging news is that local transmission rates are declining meaning that the efforts of our local community are having an impact.

Following on from our confirmed cases in the community this has created our first bubbles needing to isolate. We currently have small bubbles of students across multiple year groups along with all of one half of Year 8. Currently we are open fully to 80% of students and by early next week this should be back to 90% until the final half of Year 8 return the following Monday. Although our number of cases in both students and staff is below that of many of our surrounding secondary schools, the identification of close contacts both in and out of the Academy has catapulted our online learning plan into reality. With the first small bubble of Year 9 students going out two weeks ago we moved to try and start delivering some "blended" lessons (where the teacher continues to deliver their lesson to the class but any students having to stay home can remote in, through MS Teams Classroom, to the lesson as it happens). When we had to close half of Year 8 we moved immediately to deliver lessons online for the whole class according to their normal timetable. These live sessions are in addition, or complementary, to us continuing to ensure work is set in Show My Homework for each lesson. If your child is required to self-isolate then please do ensure they check SMHW and their Email (and MS Teams Classroom which you can get as a free app on smart phones and tablets as well as desktop/laptop). If your child is off isolating at our direction and genuinely has no meaningful access to a device and/or internet please do contact their House Team who will endeavor to get a loan machine to you for the duration of the isolation. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we continue to develop this very new (and slightly surreal) way of working.

Finally, we are now 3 weeks away from the festive Christmas break. Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December is an INSET day so students will finish **at their normal time** on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December. We will be having our annual 'Festive Jumper Day' on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> December to raise money for 'Save The Children' who do some amazing work. We will also be collecting long life food and other essential items for local food banks so please watch out for future communication about these.

Until next time I hope that you and your family remain well and that everyone has a pleasant weekend,



Mr C Shaw  
Principal