

## COVID Update - 20th November 2020

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Dear Students, Parents and Carers

My apologies for a lengthy email this week but there are a number of important items and some potentially positive developments that I want to share with you.

Whilst I am sure that we still have some way to go I hope that you share my optimism regarding this week's news of three vaccines reporting good preliminary data from testing. Let's hope they successfully complete the trial process and a vaccination programme can be rolled out in the near future paving the way for a return to normality. There may be more good news in that the infection rate in Worcestershire dropped a little this week, perhaps suggesting that the national lockdown is starting to have some impact.

### **College Cases**

There have been three confirmed COVID cases this week affecting our students, which means that our total number of cases since September is 17 students and 1 member of staff. In relation to two of this week's cases, the students had already been isolating so no one at College had been in contact with them during the time that they were contagious. In response to the third case, we identified 18 students as proximity contacts and they were instructed to isolate. To date none of the reported cases have been identified as internally transmitted.

Please can I reinforce the message that if a member of the household has requested a COVID test or is awaiting the results, students must not come to College. The reason we didn't have to isolate more students this week is because families have been careful to follow the rules and so reduced the risk of spreading the virus.

### **Mock Exams - COVID safety measures**

Second year students and those first year students who will sit external exams in the summer will sit mock exams next week. To ensure that the experience is as realistic as possible, the Hall, Gym and Dance Studio will be used as venues for the exams.

We have identified measures which will ensure that students continue to remain as safe as possible. These include the following:

1. When in exam venues, students will be seated in class bubbles. Physical distancing measures will keep different class bubbles at least 2 metres apart;
2. Different entrances to exam venues have been identified to ensure that the foyer and corridors are not crowded;
3. Students have been advised that they must maintain physical distancing when they are waiting to enter the exam room.

The full instructions that have been issued to those students who have exams can be read here.

[Mock Exam Instructions for Students](#)

### **COVID safety video**

We are continuing to look for ways to reinforce the messages regarding safe behaviour with our students. Below is a video that teachers were asked to share with students this morning as well as distributing masks and sanitiser to each student. I am grateful to the students who contributed to this for volunteering to talk openly about the safety measures that they are taking to protect themselves and others. Research suggests that young people are more likely to listen to their peers in relation to following COVID safety measures so I hope that this can play a small part in raising awareness and changing behaviour in a positive way. I was also interested to hear their thoughts on the measures implemented at College. Whilst I appreciate that not all students welcome every change, and I am sure that we have not got everything right I do think that there is a general consensus that students feel safer at College and that they understand that we see everyone's safety as a priority. Please can parents and

carers reinforce the message that students need to follow COVID safety guidelines outside College as well as inside so that we protect each other, our families and our community.



### **Buses**

I previously reported that I had written to the County Council to request that they consider providing additional capacity on public services. The Council have responded positively by agreeing to reschedule services to better match the changes in our timetable and hopefully to increase capacity at key times. They are looking into an additional bus shelter to cater for students using different services and so promote better distancing, as well as looking at other measures to promote this. I am very grateful for their support. I have also visited the bus shelter to remind students of the need to maintain physical distance wherever possible.

### **SAGE Research**

This week the DfE published a SAGE paper on the benefits of remaining in education. The paper says, what we all know to be the case, namely that if students don't have face to face lessons their education suffers. And it isn't just their education that suffers, their mental and physical well-being also suffers and the impact of these negative effects is greatest for vulnerable learners.

SAGE go on to say that remote learning may work for short periods of time but it doesn't work effectively over the medium and long term.

SAGE and the government are clear in their conclusion that the increased risks presented by COVID-19 when young people attend school and College are limited and they are far outweighed by the benefits. However, there are 2 significant issues that the SAGE paper and the DfE neglects to comment, namely the impact on those who work in education. It is a great shame that they have failed to take the opportunity to provide some clarification and reassurance on these issues, and that once again they have missed an opportunity to recognise the contribution of school and college staff.

I believe that it takes commitment and courage to work in a school or college during the pandemic and I have thanked my colleagues accordingly. They do their job in these circumstances because they care passionately about the education and well-being of our young people, they want to support their colleagues and the College more generally, and they want to play their part as key workers in responding to the virus.

### **Feedback from Parents and Carers**

I am grateful to the many Parents and Carers who have contacted us with feedback on our COVID safety measures. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, which is very encouraging, but we do reflect on all the comments and they do help us to improve what we do. I think that our dialogue with the Council regarding the bus services and facilities and our efforts to promote students' awareness of the importance of safe behaviour outside College are examples of progress that we have made as a direct result of parental feedback.

Kind regards

Ed Senior  
Principal