



'We value the power of education to change lives.'

28th August 2020

Re: Use of Face Masks at Highcliffe School

Dear Parents/Carers and Students,

As you may be aware the government recently altered its guidance regarding the use of face masks by students and staff in secondary schools. Whilst the scientific debate about face masks continues to rage, with no side appearing to possess the definitive answer, the government has empowered schools to make individual decisions about their use informed by each school's different circumstances.

One of those circumstances is the local Covid-19 infection rate and local 'lockdown' status. Hence, schools in parts of England back in a local lockdown are presently expected to require students to wear a face mask at all times. Schools in other parts of England have the freedom to make their own decisions about face masks as one of their strategies for minimising the risk of Covid transmission in the school. The original government advice to schools in July was very clear that: *"the way different schools implement some of the requirements will differ based on their individual circumstances."*

The physical layout of Highcliffe School means that separating year groups from each other all day into zones where they never really come into contact, and educating them as separate units whilst "still ensuring all pupils receive a high-quality education [AND] all pupils continue to be taught a wide range of subjects, maintaining their choices for further study and employment" is not achievable at this school.

Only the students lucky enough to be zoned into Science rooms could have specialist Science lessons; only the students lucky enough to be zoned into Da Vinci could have Art, Design and Technology lessons— and so on. Their permanent occupation of these rooms would prevent other students using them. As priority zoning to the specialist rooms would *have* to be given to GCSE and A Level students, students in Key Stage 3 would simply not be able to study Music, Drama, Art, Computing, specialist Science etc in the rooms equipped to teach those subjects – in reality, nor would most GCSE students as the Sixth Form would take priority.

Therefore, to ensure "all pupils continue to be taught a wide range of subjects, maintaining their choices for further study and employment" *they must be able to move around the school to where the best facilities for them are.* At these times, student from different year groups will encounter each other.

This is why the school will operate a one-way system to manage student circulation around school, and operate staggered break and lunch times for different year groups which reduce the number of students in circulation at social times, and outdoor spaces will be zoned into year groups.

It is also the reason why we will implement the control measure of students and staff using face masks at certain times or in certain situations. As you would expect this decision will be reviewed regularly.

Our assessment is that the local BCP Covid infection rate at present is sufficiently low that face masks do not need to be worn *all* the time and we hope this never becomes necessary. A middle-ground approach of face masks in some situations but not others seems to be consistent with the routines expected of us all in different situations out in the 'real world' at the moment i.e. wear a face mask where you can't be sure of keeping a safe distance from other people indoors. At Highcliffe situations where face masks will need to be worn are:

- Moving around to lessons
- Queueing at break and lunch
- On school transport
- To facilitate support from a member of staff in lessons (so a TA can move inside the social distance limit to assist a students, so a teacher can do the same)
- In other situations where a member of staff needs to ask 'let's just pop our facemasks on and . . . 'in order to help a student inside the social distancing zone
- If needed, in Internal Isolation
- In socially distant detentions because we may not be able to staff year-bubble detentions although we are still looking at socially distant year-group detentions carefully as the preferred option
- We ask parents of students with minor coughs/sniffles/colds [but NOT Covid-19 symptoms] to help us ensure their child wears a face mask *all* the time until they recover, so that they don't feel like they have to avoid school or to minimise possible anxiety about their illness among other students

Any students in the official 'Exempt' categories will of course not need to wear a face mask at all (please contact us to double check we know who you are) and any parents of students with a SEND need which may make the periodic use of a face mask problematic should contact Miss Warburton, the Learning Support Manager, at school. Support towards the cost of face masks is available to families receiving Free School Meals.

Ever since this Covid crisis first led the school to partially close on 23rd March parents have told us how much you value the school communicating clearly with you about what it is doing *and why*. You tell us that because we share with you the thinking behind the decisions we make or the strategies we adopt, you support the school irrespective of our of your own personal views, because the transparency of approach has built trust in the school and loyalty to it. We value our relationship with you highly too and trust you to work with us as a *community* to achieve success. It is in this spirit of transparency that I've shared with you in detail the reasoning behind our decision to include the limited use of face masks as one of the control measures at Highcliffe School.

My letter to you in July and last week's 'Refresher' update have both drawn your attention to all the main aspects of our Covid control measures supporting re-opening and I encourage to re-read those communications from your email or in the Whole School Letter section of the website. The final detailed information briefing about how each of those aspects will function will be published during Wednesday 2nd September and will subsequently be accompanied by a series of audio-visual briefings about some of the key elements. The induction process on each year group's first day will continue focusing on developing their understanding of the Covid control measures and their responsibilities within them. The **Key Points for Students** document below will be uploaded to students' MyHighcliffe shortly. Please discuss it and this letter with your son or daughter - thank you.

Yours faithfully,



Patrick Earnshaw
Headteacher

Key Points for Students Year 7 to 13

The focus is on **your** safety and **your** education

We understand that some of you may be feeling anxious about returning to school after such a long time away and we will support you. In most respects, school will be just like it's always been

You will be in full school uniform

Bring the full set of equipment from the Equipment List every day because you will not be able to borrow off another student

If you travel on school transport sit in your zone and wear a face mask and sanitise your hands when you get on and off

If you travel on public transport wear a face mask

You will have different entrances/exits to school depending on your year group. We'll show you these before your first day back at school

Wear your face mask indoors moving around school at Tutor and Lesson changeovers and indoors during break and lunchtime

Wear your face mask in a lunch queue

Put your face mask on at other times a staff member asks you to

You do not need to wear your face mask outdoors or in the lessons (unless asked to by a staff member for a specific reason)

Follow the clearly signposted One-Way system which starts at 8:45am and ends at 3:15pm. We'll explain this system clearly to you on your first day in school

Wash your hands properly and as often as possible

Use the stations to sanitise your hands as you enter and leave every lesson/Tutor Time (you can bring your own sanitiser if you prefer to)

Sneeze and cough into your elbow not your hands

Stick strictly to the seating plan in each lesson, for Track and Trace purposes

The Pod, The Hatch and The Kitchen will not be open at break time, so you need to bring enough food with you to last all morning

Year 7 to 11 will be given a personal QR code to use to buy food instead of using the PIN pads

The water fountains are shut off so you will need to bring enough water to last all day

Break time and lunch time are at different times depending on your year groups (we'll explain this to you clearly on your first day in school)

Sixth Formers, unless you have a lesson period 5 or need to see a staff member, or must work in the Study Centre, or a transport issue, you are strongly urged to go home after period 4

Outdoor spaces are zoned to keep Year Group bubbles away from each other. Go to your outdoor year group zone straightaway at break and lunch (unless you are first queuing to get food at lunchtime). We'll explain these zones to you on your first day in school

Do not panic if you feel unwell, just follow the normal procedure for going to MI for a check-up