

13 May 2021

Our Ref: SW/KS

Dear Parent / Carer

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support since all students returned to the Academy in March. In particular I am grateful to you for the initial uptake of in-school Covid testing amongst students, and the subsequent home testing that so many of you have fully supported. I am sure you all heard the positive news from the Prime Minister on Monday evening that the next stage of the 'Roadmap' will come into place from Monday 17 May, and some more of the Covid restrictions can be relaxed around the country. I thought this would be a good opportunity to share an update in relation to this.

Clearly our top priority is the safety of students, staff and the local community, and whilst infection rates are low nationally, South West Durham is still an area where there are a number of positive cases in schools. Reports today suggest that the latest B.1.617.2 variant (also known as the Indian variant) appears to be spreading quickly in some areas of the country and so we need to be cautious in order to maintain safety. We have a significant number of teaching and support staff in the Academy who have not yet received their first Covid vaccination, and I am aware that this is also the case for many parents as well. As a result of this information I do not consider it appropriate or safe to allow the relaxation of our rules on face coverings at this time, therefore students and staff will continue to wear their masks in classrooms and Academy buildings until we break up for half term on Friday 28 May. This additional precaution is in line with recommendations from scientists in the government advisory group SAGE who suggested last week that regular testing and wearing masks in schools has reduced transmission by up to 30%. I will review the situation again over half term and update parents prior to students returning in June.

I hope that you can understand my reasoning for these continuing precautions, and that you will continue to support our efforts to reduce the spread of Covid-19. Please be aware that all of our Year 11 and 13 students, as well as some students in Year 12 are currently undertaking a range of assessments to enable them to secure good grades in their GCSE's, and by all students and staff continuing to wear face coverings we hope to minimise the risk of these students having to self-isolate prior to half term when they will complete their courses.

Thank you once again for your support. I hope to be in a position to relax these restrictions as suggested on 28 May and hopefully we can move back to some level of normality in school.

Yours faithfully

Simon Whitehead
Acting Headteacher



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