

1<sup>st</sup> November 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

### **Coronavirus Update 23**

The second half of the autumn term begins tomorrow. Before our students return I thought I should set the scene at the High School so far as COVID-19 is concerned.

Over the next couple of days we shall be welcoming back the students who stayed away from school during the latter part of the week before the half term break. Their co-operation has helped to keep themselves, their families and their colleagues safe.

The virus has not let up during the past week. I have had new notifications on five of the days during half term, a total of six new cases among our students and two among the staff. After each notification Public Health England was informed, the contacts were identified and instructions to self-isolate were passed on individually.

We have also continued the practice of asking the remainder of some teaching groups to stay at home even though they were outside the official definition of close contacts. When we did this before half term it was a step beyond the requirements of Public Health England. I am pleased to report they have, at least locally, shifted their position. They now accept that this can indeed be a sensible step in some circumstances. From our point of view this practice achieves more than a lower risk of infection in classrooms where some congestion is unavoidable. When whole classes are at home we can, the health of staff permitting, provide teaching online. If a class is divided, with a proportion of the students remaining on site, it becomes impractical to teach both groups simultaneously.

It seems very likely that we shall continue to have new cases among our students or our staff. You may find it helpful to know how we respond to a new notification. I should stress that the school's starting point has to be information received from a parent. We do not hear directly from the testing centre.

We have to identify everyone, be they student, teacher or support worker, who has, in the previous two days been within two metres of the infected person for at least fifteen minutes or one metre for at least one minute.

This is how we go about it:

1. We inform Public Health England and agree broadly how we are going to respond.
2. We hold seating plans and measured spacings for every class and every classroom. These give us an initial list of probable contacts.
3. We check that list to eliminate any known absentees, whether through illness or self-isolation.
4. We consult the teachers concerned - ten of them in all - unless the notification is on a Tuesday when it is five. This is to confirm that the seating plan was applied and that the spacings were not

altered. We also need to know of any movement during that lesson which could have altered the list of those at risk.

5. We ask the student who has tested positive about how he/she spent break and lunchtime and with whom.
6. We check how the student travelled to and from school on the days concerned. If this involves school transport we have to do our best to reconstruct the seating plan on the bus for the journeys involved.
7. All of this creates our list of those required to self-isolate. The students' parents then have to be notified individually.
8. Finally, we set the latest positive result in the context of previous COVID-19 cases. We are looking for particular classes or social groups or rooms which seem currently to be especially vulnerable. These would be the situations where we drew up an additional list of those we were asking to stay off school.

Before closing, I must share with you my worry about the level of absence among the teaching staff. In addition to our five positive cases, we have others who are self-isolating, sometimes for reasons to do with their home lives. Our teaching resources are being stretched very thinly; each day I am anxious about our ability to provide a full timetable for every year.

I hope that this letter, along with its predecessors, helps you to understand how we are adjusting to these challenging times.

I shall continue to keep you in the picture.

Yours sincerely,



Natalie Waters