

HOLYWELL SCHOOL

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*A Church of England School
providing a Values Based Education*

Update Letter 24-09-2020

Dear students, parents and carers

It's hard to believe that this is nearly the end of our third week back at school! It seems such a long time since the students arrived back to Holywell and we did our induction sessions for them all. As a community, we have adjusted, adapted and started to accept the 'new normal' – using the one-way system to manage the flow of student traffic around the site, coping with segregated lunchtimes and dealing with distancing and hand-sanitising. Classrooms look and feel very different – I have to say it has been the strangest teaching experience I have ever had! It is alien, weird and most disconcerting to teach from the front of the classroom with a 2-metre 'no man's land' in between myself and the students, not being able to go and support them where they sit and having to set up new routines involving drop-zones, side-by-side discussions and lots of mini whiteboard-based activities!

At the start of the year, I introduced our motto for the year: 'Dig deep to build high'. Students and staff have absolutely taken this to heart, digging deep every day to make the best of these extreme circumstances. We have had to make a few changes and adjustments 'en route' but, in the main, our plans from the start of term have been both effective and thorough. Thank you for your supportive feedback and for your understanding when we have had to make amendments and adjustments. ... just a reminder to make sure students have a water bottle, a reading book and all of their equipment with them (including the mini-whiteboards and whiteboard pens we have provided for all students).

We continue to have challenges - some affecting more families than others. The organisation and logistics of whole school transport remain difficult and we have worked closely with both CBC and BBC to resolve issues. We have had to be realistic about some of our ambitions – especially in terms of keeping year groups totally separate on buses. We have designated areas on the buses but, in the morning, we rely on students to get to those areas (and stay in them! ... to their credit, they have certainly been in year groups when we have disembarked them on arrival in school). On some of the vehicles, seating configurations make this 'zoning' into year groups impossible; however, as the DfE guidance states: "Both the approaches of separating groups and maintaining distance are not 'all-or-nothing' options and will still bring benefits even if implemented partially." Most KS3 students are wearing face coverings on the buses and this is something we would recommend for all students travelling on school transport (even in KS2).

You have rightly challenged us about the suspension of setting for the foreseeable future – especially as students mix more freely in year groups at break and lunchtime, however, during recreation time, they are outside and English and Maths lessons take up a considerable percentage of the teaching week – hence the need to keep the students in these more consistent groups. We will continue to differentiate and support all of the students in these groupings. Our commitment to providing all students access to the whole curriculum has also necessitated some slightly different groupings (particularly in KS3) where we need smaller groups for some practical subjects. We will keep this under review, however, in the light of heightened levels of infections and new cases, this arrangement will need to stay in place for the moment.



Headteacher: Mr MG Simpson MA, NPQH

Deputy Headteacher: Mr S Van Der Merwe – Acting Deputy Headteacher: Mrs H Donnellan

Acting Assistant Headteacher / DSL: Mrs J Davies

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Now that attendance at school is compulsory for all students again, most students have welcomed the opportunity to be back at school. Students have found the return a relief and have been happy to be back with their friends. There have been inevitable absences due to Covid-19 symptoms (especially new persistent coughs) and we have had lots of questions about whether students can come to school. We have put together a handy guide detailing when students should stay at home – a copy has been sent out with this letter ... please always check the version on the website as the guidance is constantly changing (especially where testing is concerned). There is also a letter from the DfE which also has some guidance and helpful links. Please keep us up-to-date and give us a call with any questions you may have.

We are working on our remote-learning/contingency planning and we hope to share this with you soon – in the meantime, if students are self-isolating and are well enough to do some work, please contact us and we will provide some work.

Looking ahead, we have several school events which we will have to do differently this year – from tutor-based parents' evenings to Year 6 SATs information evenings; from Open Evening for prospective students to Music concerts and sponsored events. Most of these will be done online – either via Zoom or as recorded video presentations. We have started to use these platforms and technologies for staff meetings, in-school assemblies and parental meetings. Further details will follow!

Some of our usual sanctions and consequences have also had to change and we rely on students to behave well and responsibly. Serious breaches of Covid-19 safety measures will result in stark and harsh consequences as we can no longer offer the range of support measures in school to manage students who do not comply with expectations. This does not mean that we will abandon our values or our care for students – on the contrary, the students' wellbeing and learning remain at the heart of everything we do and our need for kindness, care and responsible behaviour is an even greater imperative.

How can you help? As cases of coronavirus continue to rise again, it is vital that you reinforce key messages and practices at home and that you take every precaution to control the virus in everything you do as a family. Please continue to keep us updated with any relevant information. We have just had our first member of staff test positive for the virus since our return in September. We reacted swiftly and consulted with Public Health England. As the member of staff is a part-time member of staff and as they were not in school 48 hours before being symptomatic, there was no need for any further action (apart from the member of staff needing to self-isolate for 10 days). We hope that the member of staff has a speedy recovery. At some stage, I'm sure we will have a wider outbreak at school (I'm hopeful that we will stay virus-free ... but there is an inevitability about this at the moment!) and we will need to move quickly to address issues. We will take advice from Public Health England and we may be required to restrict numbers of students and/or staff in school. Your understanding and cooperation will be needed and we will give as much notice of actions as we can. Please ensure that we have your current contact details and we hope and pray that as a community, we remain largely untouched by this deadly virus.

Meanwhile, students continue to flourish and learn at Holywell. Our assembly this week focuses on 'filling our classrooms with learning and love' and I am delighted to say that we have had lots of learning already this term.

Take care and stay safe.

With all best wishes

Mr MG Simpson
Headteacher