

28 September 2021

Dear Parents & Carers

I am writing to you to thank you for your support with regard to face coverings and to outline the further steps we will take if numbers of confirmed cases do not reduce within the school community. Firstly, primarily for the benefit of some new parents, I would like to explain again how face coverings work and why we run the system as we do. I do realise that many of you have read this a number of times, but given a small number of the conversations we have had this week, particularly with new families, I think it is important to reassure all of our families again.

We ask students to wear face coverings as a result of advice from public health. All schools on Wirral have been asked to review the data on cases as and when they have confirmed COVID infections and I am responsible for taking steps to manage case numbers if we see a cluster developing within the school. We take these steps to try to prevent an outbreak, because once we get to that level it is very difficult to impact upon case numbers. We take these steps, because evidence suggests that these steps help to stop people in the wider community becoming unwell and worse, and not because we want to. At the start of last week, there appeared to be two very clear clusters developing, with students who shared teaching groups receiving positive tests in quick succession. These clusters were apparent in two different year groups.

Wearing a face covering is optional, with exemptions for those with medical conditions. However, it is also an expectation and a norm within this school to wear a face covering unless you are medically exempt. Currently 97% of the school community wear face coverings and they are not all part of some grand conspiracy, they are part of all of us working together as a community to try to create the safest possible conditions for all within the school community. I will of course respect the right of anyone to refuse to wear a face covering, but given that this is an expectation within the school community (we ask that everyone who can wears a face covering and overwhelmingly they do), with those who choose not to wear a face covering they will continue to receive their educational entitlement, however, they will be placed into a bubble of their own. To be clear the decision on the arrangement of teaching and groups is the school's alone, not parents. If we are then told that it is not choice, but a medical requirement, we do need to see information regarding this medical requirement and that is not about COVID. If you are telling us as a school that your child is medically unfit to operate within the confines of a normal school day, then I am duty bound to understand what the medical issue is, conduct a risk assessment if necessary and then write an individual health care plan if required. If your child is unwell and cannot work within the confines of the school without medical support, we cannot then allow them to just wander around the school without this care and thought being given over to their safety, it is basic safeguarding and an issue I take very seriously.

**Next steps if required (numbers one and two are already in place):**

1. Back into face coverings everywhere
2. Reduction in visitors to only essential + masked
3. Stop assemblies and large groups whenever possible
4. Stop using PE changing rooms, plan for trainers only: table tennis, volleyball etc.
5. All desks and teaching forward facing

6. Lunch service back in year group bubbles
7. Break service limited to a year group service area
8. Year group bubbles back into play to minimise mixing at break, lunch, library etc.
9. Students in SSC and inclusion to be separated into year groups, 2 metre distance between groups
10. After school fixtures cancelled
11. Trips/visits cancelled
12. Extra-curricular and wider curriculum moved back into year group bubbles
13. Extra-curricular activities cancelled, one-to-one teaching of music etc. cancelled.

In an ideal world, none of these would be required, but unfortunately we are not in that world. We want to keep the curriculum as broad and as open as possible, extra-curricular, friendship groups and interaction outside of learning are every bit as important to a child as their learning, we will work to keep these wider opportunities open.

We will only operate any of these controls when we have a need. Let me be clear, I do not want to wear a face covering, I don't, but I do, because that is what helps to stop the spread and we need to do something. In the whole of the last academic year we had 31 confirmed cases and four by this point of the year, in less than four weeks this year we have 28 cases and whilst year group bubbles have been removed, the main control to go is face coverings. If it was year group bubbles that were the main control, we would have seen the spread within year groups last year. As soon as we are clear of the clusters we will cease wearing face coverings and we will only introduce further measures if numbers continue to rise. Future use of face coverings will only be in response to a future rise in case numbers and where we start to see clusters of cases.

Once again, I would like to thank all of the parents who support the school. It has not been an easy few years for anyone and I realise that we are asking you to trust us to keep your children safe. I promise you that we will do everything we can to do just that.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Flanagan', written in a cursive style.

Mr K Flanagan  
Headteacher