3rd September 2021

Dear Parent / Carer,

I hope that your family have enjoyed the summer break and that you were able to experience some of the nicer weather with your family. If you did have the opportunity to get away, I hope you had a restful time whilst enjoying a change of scene.

There is no doubt that the last school year was extremely challenging at times for families, students and staff. None of us could have accurately predicted the disruption to learning or the impact on people’s lives that the Covid pandemic caused. Indeed, we are not out of the woods yet, as cases continue to be high especially in our local area.

Therefore, I have made the very difficult decision to keep a number of restrictions in place when your child returns to St Mary’s College next week. I fully recognise that this is not the start that any of us would have wished for, but I have to take into account the most recent local data alongside the ongoing anxieties of families, students and staff. By beginning the school year in a cautious and controlled manner, it allows us to lift restrictions as soon as possible - as opposed to reintroducing them a few weeks into the term (which would be a real possibility when taking into account current statistics) which I feel would cause unnecessary disruption and further worry.

We will review the mitigations we will have in place on a weekly basis, thus allowing us to constantly re-evaluate and make clear decisions which we will communicate to all families. Hopefully the points below will help to clarify my decision and next steps. If you do have any questions, please contact your child’s Head of Year in the first instance.

When we return next week, we will:

- Remain in bubbles across the school
- Request that students continue to wear masks – especially in internal spaces where social distancing cannot be achieved - as they have previously, this will also be the same for all staff. A blue medical mask or an SMC mask is permitted
- Expect all visitors to the site to wear a mask inside buildings
- Remain in bubbles on the school buses – please ensure your child has a mask to wear on the bus next week
- Continue to ensure that windows in classrooms are open to enable ventilation and to maximise ventilation in other indoor spaces etc
- Continue to spend break and lunchtime in the previous designated areas
- Eat in the same areas as last year depending on which year group students are in
Why are we doing this?

- Covid rates in Hull remain stubbornly high
- We are double the national average for new infections
- The situation in Scotland is a good marker of how we can expect cases to spike upon students’ return to school
- I want to ensure that we are being pragmatic and taking a cautious view
- Due to the numbers at St Mary’s College (one of the biggest secondary schools in the country) this would be the sensible approach.

Regarding Testing and close contact tracing:

- Lateral Flow Testing for students will start, as planned, when your child returns to school next week if they have parental permission for a LFT (unless they are over 16 as these young adults can give their own consent)
- Once the initial 2 tests have been taken by students in school the usual 2 tests per week, undertaken at home by students, will resume. We would ask that you log these results as you did previously, this is really important as it is the cornerstone of the National Strategy
- Staff at St Mary’s College will resume their testing regime next week too
- If a student tests positive for Covid they will have to self-isolate for 10 days. As previously, they will be able to access their lessons online if feeling well enough
- Students and staff will still be identified as “close contacts” of any student or staff member who tests positive as we did previously. However, double vaccinated adults and children aged under 18 do NOT have to self-isolate now. Instead, we will request that they take a PCR and notify us of the result. So long as they have no symptoms, both students and staff should continue to attend and work at school. Whilst waiting for the PCR result, staff and students should continue to be at school.

Furthermore, we want all of our students to be able to take part in trips, events and as much extra-curricular as possible this year. All of these activities will be fully risk assessed on an individual basis and we will work hard to ensure that as many go ahead as possible—assuming it is safe.

I thank you in advance for your support and understanding during what continues to be a challenging and unprecedented time. As always, everyone’s safety and well-being is paramount and by working together we can hopefully look forward to a more “normal” future as the school year progresses.

I look forward to seeing your child next week upon their return to school.

God Bless,

Mrs M Stead