

17 July 2020

Dear Parents

I intend this to be the last communication of this academic year. I would like to start by thanking all parents for the support they have provided to students and the academy during the lockdown period. I am sure more announcements will be made by the government during the summer but, as history has demonstrated, advice during this pandemic has often been superseded almost immediately. I shall send a letter out shortly before the September start with the latest guidance and its impact on our opening.

Exam results

I have sent a separate letter to all Year 11 and 13 students regarding the collection of exam results. On the basis of mock examinations, I believe that these would have been record years for achievement at Knole Academy and I hope the hard work of students will be rewarded through the examination results attained. While we will be celebrating the individual achievement of students, we shall not be publishing the overall results for the academy. This is a decision taken in collaboration with other West Kent Headteachers as we feel that, in line with the government decision not to publish National league tables this year, it would be inappropriate to compare this year's outcomes with previous or future years.

Dinner service

Due to the need to keep year groups separate we are moving to a staggered dining service and using all of our food outlets to serve specific year groups only. There will be no sit-down dining facility available and all food will be served in a takeaway fashion. Due to the limited timescale available and the need to maintain year group bubbles, we will not be offering a breakfast or break service in the main dining room, but we will continue to offer a breakfast club from the food technology rooms.

Mobile phones

We are making a temporary adjustment to the academy mobile phone policy. We have identified that there may well be issues in the practice of lending dictionaries, calculators and the shared use of laptops. Therefore, students who have data enabled mobile phones will be allowed to use them in lessons, under the direction of the classroom teacher. Phones may be kept in student blazers but must be turned off unless directed by a classroom teacher. Unsupervised use around the school site is still prohibited.

Shared equipment, teaching and learning

We have had to make some amendments to the way we would normally teach lessons, wherever possible classes have been configured with desks facing forward and there will be a reduction in group work. Some practical activities will have to be suspended. In some GCSE classes, such as art and food technology, we shall be sending out equipment lists. This is a result of the inability to lend shared equipment, we shall always try to minimise cost and the academy will endeavour to offer financial help where required. At the end of each lesson, students will take all exercise books with them as we want to keep classrooms clear to aid cleaning. I encourage all students to bring an adequately sized bag to carry their books and all of their equipment.

Transport

I have attached an update on transport arrangements that we have received from Kent. Mr Phil Lightowler, KCC Head of Public Transport, in a briefing to West Kent Headteachers (17 July 2020), stated that the intention would be that dedicated school buses will run with face masks, hand sanitisers, forward facing seats only and with no standing, in line with the restrictions placed on public buses. KCC are awaiting guidance from government as this is obviously a national issue. I appreciate many parents may choose to take responsibility for transport arrangements. If you intend to drop off or collect your child from the academy, please arrange a location at an appropriate distance from the site. The immediate area around Knole Academy is already heavily congested at peak times and does not have the capacity to cope with an increase in traffic.

Face masks

There has been considerable coverage given to the usage of face masks, below is the latest guidance from the Department for Education:

The department has confirmed (15 July 2020) that it does not intend to change the guidance for education settings and has provided the following statement:

“Public Health England does not (based on current evidence) recommend the use of face coverings in schools. This evidence will be kept under review. They are not required in schools as pupils and staff are mixing in consistent groups, and because misuse may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission. There may also be negative effects on communication and thus education.

“Face coverings may be beneficial for short periods indoors where there is a risk of close social contact with people you do not usually meet and where social distancing and other measures cannot be maintained, for example on public transport or in shops.”

Zoning

In order to maintain year group bubbles, we have added zoning to the school site where year groups should stay outside of lesson time. At the beginning of the school day students should head to these areas. This information will be shared with students upon arrival on their first day. We shall try and maintain as many of the extra-curricular activities as possible within the limitations of year group bubbles, a list of extra-curricular clubs will be published at the start of the academic year.

Behavioural expectations and attendance

We have obviously had to make some amendments to our school behaviour policies in light of Covid-19, such as the mobile phone rule listed above. However, the behaviour policy stands with the addition of a requirement to adhere to protective measures. We appreciate that students have been absent for an extended period and while we will show the same consideration as we would normally, it is important for the smooth and successful running of the academy that normal expectations are in place from the first day back. We shall be reinforcing this with students on their return. The DfE guidance is clear that attendance is mandatory, if clinical advice is not to attend school, please supply a copy of the relevant correspondence and we shall signpost online learning support. If students are displaying symptoms, please ensure they are self-isolated immediately and inform the school so that we are able to consult with Public Health England regarding the action we should take. If your child is experiencing anxiety about the return to school, please contact the relevant Head of Year.

IT/School Phones

Over the summer holiday we shall be upgrading the IT network the wireless network and changing our phone system. We have delayed all these works while we were supporting remote learning during the last four months. This will lead to periods where the academy will not be able to receive or respond to calls or emails. We hope to minimise the disruption, but I apologise in advance for any break in service.

Risk Assessments

We shall be placing two risk assessments for reopening in the autumn term on the school website. One risk assessment is more formal to meet government expectations and the other is more practical to explain day to day processes.

Calendar

We have made some amendments to the school calendar such as moving parents' evenings scheduled for the autumn term to the New Year. We always endeavour to minimise changes and we shall keep the website up to date.

I hope the return in September will be a smooth one, I know all staff are looking forward to a relative return to normality. I wish everyone the very best over the summer.

Best wishes



David Collins
Headteacher