

Dear Parents / Carers

Face Coverings in School

As you will no doubt have seen, very late on Monday evening the government updated its advice on face coverings in secondary schools.

In simple terms the new guidance states the following:

- From 1 September 2020, new advice will apply to the use of face coverings by staff and pupils in some schools, and learners in further education
- In areas of "national government intervention" {e.g. Leicester in recent weeks}, the government will require adults and pupils to wear face coverings when moving around their school, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain
- Nationwide, the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary in education settings generally
- However, secondary schools and colleges will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas where they can't safely manage social distancing (if they believe that it is right in their particular circumstances)

The guidance also includes important information about the safe and effective use of face coverings in schools.

I have to say that I consider it neither helpful nor fair for the government to ask school leaders to make individual decisions on face coverings in schools. These decisions should rest with public health bodies who have access to the full range of scientific evidence.

Nevertheless, I have consulted with my fellow Headteachers in Stafford and Stone and with my Governing Body and Trust Board. We have decided to:

- require students and staff to wear a face covering when moving between lessons in our corridors and when they are gathered in communal areas inside [e.g. when the weather is too bad for them to be outside or when they are walking through communal areas to or from the toilet]

We believe that this closely mirrors experience in the outside world whereby children of secondary school age and adults are required to wear face coverings briefly whilst shopping, for example.

We believe that our students will be used to this experience and will be sensible enough to co-operate with this requirement.

We note that the other Stafford schools are adopting a very similar approach.

We also note that this very quickly became mandatory in Scotland after schools started back and we would not be surprised if the government had to change its stance in short order.

We also believe that whilst face coverings are not perfect, there is evidence that they help to reduce the "viral load" of Covid-19 in cases where it does spread.

There will be no requirement for students to wear masks in classrooms. We believe, as does Public Health England, that the system of controls [hand washing / sanitizing; enhanced cleaning; catch it, kill it, bin it approach] will be more than adequate. However, we have no objection whatsoever if students and / or staff would prefer to wear a face covering in class.

We also understand that there will need to be exemptions for certain pupils [e.g. pupils with certain medical conditions]. That is absolutely fine - please simply write us a note (preferably in the student planner once they are issued, or on paper beforehand] to let us know. Please reassure your children that no-one will get into trouble for being exempt from wearing a face covering.

The government is of the opinion that face coverings are cheaply and readily available and that, therefore, it is reasonable for us to ask you to provide your child with a face covering and a small plastic bag to store it in when not in use. However, we will have a small supply of spares available should students forget / lose / damage theirs during the day.

I would urge you to spend some time discussing the safe use of face coverings with your son / daughter before their return to school. Please see the attached email from the DfE for guidance.

I apologise that this letter has been sent out so late in the holidays but we felt it was important to react to the new guidance.

Staff will be in school from Tuesday 1 September and we will try to respond to any individual queries from then but I hope I can count on your support for this measure which is designed to enhance the safety of your children and their families as they return to school.

Yours sincerely

Neil Finlay
Headteacher