

Hele's School

A great place to learn. A great place to grow.



Friday, 5 March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

In the space of a school week, we have upscaled our Lateral Flow Testing provision and staffed it entirely from our wonderful Hele's Support Staff (having already tested 2 whole year groups), enlisted and trained a small army of Parent and Carer Volunteers to support with LFT, interviewed and appointed new staff for September, engaged in a very successful SEND external review with strong, positive feedback, delivered high-quality, live remote lessons to 1300 young people, as well as bespoke pastoral care (on-site and remotely), run a growing and meaningful Supervised Remote Learning provision on-site with over 90 key worker, vulnerable and SEND children, hosted a virtual Quality Assurance Review with an external team to scrutinise the quality of our remote provision, alongside planning for a full reopening from Monday 8th - what a week! That said, it's an uplifting thought knowing that this is the last Friday communication of Lockdown and by this time next week we will have welcomed all 1300 children and 167 staff back on site and be back in the rhythm of a 'normal' school day - we can't wait!

Lateral Flow Testing: in readiness for the return to school, this week has seen the Sports Hall become a mass testing centre for asymptomatic testing of all consenting students. By the end of Monday next week, all participating students from all year groups will have had their first test and some their second of three before the shift over to home testing. Despite having no experience of running such a system until about 8 weeks ago, and having had to upscale our testing facility significantly in the last week, the process has run incredibly smoothly thanks to a phenomenal team effort. From support and patience around initial teething problems with booking systems etc., through to our magnificent support staff on the ground and senior leaders coordinating, it has all gone very well. To bolster the staffing to allow for extended shifts, we were delighted to have rallied a small army of parent and carer volunteers who have enhanced the service significantly - a huge thank you to all involved for being so giving of their time. An indirect advantage of the testing programme was the personal welcome we have been able to give to every child returning to the school site and to chat informally with parents and carers as so many attended with children. We hope you found the interaction with someone outside of your family as enjoyable as we did! It has really set the tone for the students' return next week.

Face masks: you will have received my Parent/Carer Guide to the school reopening earlier in the week and I just wanted to clarify the message about face masks within. Firstly, I must stress that wearing of face masks for staff and students is voluntary and will not be a sanctionable offence if someone who is not exempt from wearing one chooses not to wear a covering. However, we are following the government guidance and the World Health Organisation advice about children from Year 7 and above being **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** to wear face coverings. We'd really appreciate your support in encouraging your child to wear a face covering as an extra control measure to keeping our community as safe as possible. This will cover all indoor areas where it is difficult to socially distance, including classrooms, as well as outdoor areas around the site when travelling from one part of school to another.

This control measure will be in place until Easter in first instance, when the government has committed to reviewing guidance. There are some exceptions to this, such as when eating or drinking or taking part in a strenuous activity such as a PE lesson or physical play at break time. It is acceptable that staff and students remove masks temporarily for some respite throughout the day ***so long as social distancing of 2 metres can be adhered to.***

To give further detail on the rationale for this control measure, I have attached a document from the Westcountry Schools Trust outlining the reasons why we strongly support this measure, so please do take the time to have a read of this. As mentioned, this will be reviewed at Easter and any amendments made based on the government guidance at that time.

Egress points trial: also in the Parent/Carer Guide was information pertaining to entrance and exit points for each year group. You will likely have noticed that we have opted to relax the rules around exit points from Monday 8th March in order to avoid students having to cross areas to exit through a fixed point; instead they are expected to leave by the exit nearest to their Period 5 lesson. This is a trial for us and one we will also review at Easter with a view to either extending the relaxation to school arrival as well as exit or reverting back to a stricter dismissal routine, depending on the success of the trial and the government guidance update due in April. I do recognise that for families who drop multiple children off in the morning, having allocated gates may be inconvenient but your support and patience in ensuring your child uses the entrance assigned to them is greatly appreciated - we are hopeful it won't need to be for too much longer.

Mobile Phones: in order to support a period of reconnection for students when they return to school next week, we have decided to relax the rules on mobile phone usage during social time. In the first instance, this will be in place until Easter, with the Junior Leadership Team working up a new Code of Conduct with students to trial in Term 5 and Mr Fonseca, Assistant Principal, leading a piece to explore the relative merits of a 'Bring Your Own Devices to School' policy and set of protocols. Having experienced the benefit of devices such as phones over the past year in supporting communication, learning and independence, we are hopeful that this relaxation will aid student transition back into school and support staff in focusing on rebuilding relationships with students without avoidable confrontation around phone use, as well as supporting learning. As I said, this is a trial only in the coming weeks. Students will be informed through tutors on the morning of their first day as part of their return to school, with the expectations around usage shared at this point.

Return of any loan laptops: could we please request that where families were in receipt of a loan laptop during Lockdown that these be returned to Reception where no longer needed. This will help us rotate our on-site stock of devices to support teaching and learning upon full return to school and ensure they are deployed effectively in lessons.

Uniform support: families in Plymouth who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic or have taken a pay cut due to being furloughed will be concerned about purchasing new school uniform ahead of March 8th when schools fully reopen to all students. Please contact School if you are struggling to source any item of uniform and please remember that if we receive the Pupil Premium for your child, you have access to the £150 personal allowance which can be spent on uniform; again, please contact Reception to discuss.

Families may also be pleased to know that The Uniform Store in Plymouth is planning to restart a click and collect service in the next few weeks and will open again at its New George Street store for the summer holidays. They have a free service providing families with kit before returning to school.

External reviews: we are delighted to have hosted two virtual external reviews of our learning and support provision over the past 10 days – one around our Special Needs provision and a Quality Assurance Review around remote learning. Thank you to all parents and carers, students, staff and Governors who took an active part in either review. There was much to celebrate within the written feedback report we received for each area, with many positive soundbites, including:

- The Principal and her senior team demonstrate high levels of commitment, collaboration and strategic vision in developing a cohesive and effective remote learning provision.
- Determined and committed leadership at all levels, and an openness to learning from previous experiences, have secured a strong curriculum offer for students' learning, particularly in the period from January 2021. The curriculum is well sequenced and adjusted appropriately and offers a structure for students through following the timetable with live lessons. A culture of self-improvement amongst teachers has fostered an excitement about debating teaching and learning and implementing shared strategies. Leaders have identified much that will be taken into the face-to-face phase. Parents and students speak highly of the daily offer and the enrichment encourages a sense of belonging.
- Hele's School is led by a team committed to school improvement. It is outward looking. There is clear intent to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND and thus improve their life chances.
- There are high levels of collaboration and a strong culture of wanting the best for students. 'A great place to learn. A great place to grow'.

- Provision at Hele's is child centred. The students with SEND spoke highly of the support they received and described their school as 'very kind', and 'a nice place', 'I get help to understand' and 'it's better than other schools'.

There are no significant improvement points raised from either review, just recommendations for incremental gains to make our practice, and hence the provision for all our young people, even better - and as you can imagine, we've started planning to act on these areas imminently in our quest to get the best ever provision and experience for every child at Hele's School!

Good news: we were thrilled this week to see that the hard work, dedication and determination – not to mention the sheer talent – of Year 11 student, Joe O'Connor, has really paid off, as he continues to excel in his apprenticeship with Exeter City Football Club. Balancing the demands of elite sport with learning and ensuring neither slips is no mean feat, but Joe has continued to excel in both fields over the years - testimony to the fact that hard work pays off. We are all so proud of you, Joe, and wish you the best of luck for a long and successful career in the beautiful game!

The countdown to kicking off the new season at school has started and the excitement is rising to fever pitch! Just a couple of days now until we start to welcome our young people back to the hallowed turf, and to continue the football analogy with a well-coined phrase, 'we are over the moon' – go, Team Hele's!

Have a lovely weekend.

Kindest regards,



Justine Mason

Principal

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