

Hele's School

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



Friday, 18 March 2022

Dear Parent/Carer,

You may be aware that Covid rates are once more rising across the South West in general, and Plymouth in particular. Whilst infection rates remain lower than we saw last term at Hele's, we have experienced some disruption to our teaching and support provision over the past week, with some staff either becoming infected themselves and being off work for anything from 7 to 10 days, or because their child/ren are at home with Covid and they need to take parental leave for the duration.

This disruption is set to continue into next week. Whilst we are currently able to manage this situation and keep everyone on site and learning, it is very tight, and it is becoming incredibly difficult to secure Supply Teachers as many schools in Plymouth find themselves in a similar position in needing cover.

I raise this now as it is a strong possibility that we will find ourselves at stage 5 of our contingency plan between now and Easter in having to direct year groups to work from home to access online learning on a rota basis. Of course, if we are in this position then we will give families as much notice as possible. In the meantime, we continue to do all we can to keep all students on site and engaged in their learning.

Uniform themes from the feedback survey: Thank you for your constructive feedback around uniform recently. We have spent a long time analysing the data and digging into your comments to help shape our policy and practice moving forwards. This is very much work in practice, but I wanted to keep you updated with developments. The table below captures the key themes emerging and our planned next steps:

Feedback	School response/next steps
Frustration with the lack of consistency in dealing with uniform infringements against policy – skirt length and shoes are the biggest area.	We share your frustration! This is why we have introduced 'spotlight weeks', where senior staff are actively dropping into Tutor time each morning and checking uniform, piercings, shoes, etc. Follow up with infringements is through communication home, with a timescale agreed for making changes. Year 10 spotlight was last week, and Year 11 is this week. We will continue with Key Stage 4 into next week, and then turn our attention to Key Stage 3. Tutors will continue their regular monitoring of standards of uniform and contact home to work with parents/carers where necessary. An important element of the spotlight is to celebrate where uniform is being worn well, of course! The other is getting the support from parents to address any issues with your child's uniform. Thank you in advance for your ongoing support in this area to make it fair and consistent for all.
Frustration with the mixed requirements across year groups of the school skirt, and whilst most agreed the regulation school skirt was a welcome addition and would improve consistency, some didn't think there was a need for a standard school skirt.	As has been communicated previously, the pleated regulation school skirt will be the only skirt permitted to be worn from September 2022. This is currently the case for Year 7 and Year 8. The roll out to all year groups was originally planned for the current year (from September 2021) but we stalled by 12 months given the context of the pandemic and furlough, agreeing it was fairer to give families a longer lead-in to purchase the new skirt and requesting that when skirts are changed for Y9 students and above then the new regulation skirt is purchased in readiness for September 2022. Remember, trousers remain an option for all – there is no expectation to wear a skirt at all. School trousers follow the acceptable style laid out on the website - no jeans, jeggings, or ¾ length trousers.
Clarity requested on acceptable school shoe	Polishable plain black shoes with a sturdy sole and no obvious logos are expected – not trainers or canvas shoes. This year, we flexed our policy to allow 'hybrid' shoes as part of our policy. Hybrids are not trainers, although some sports companies have started to

Feedback	School response/next steps
	<p>produce a hybrid shoe as more and more schools accept them as part of their uniform (e.g. Nike Airforce 1 is one example from many). This style of sturdy hybrid shoe has become popular because they are robust and hard-wearing. Hybrid shoes are allowed as part of the uniform at Hele's (as long as they are plain black all over, leather and polishable, of course!) If you are unsure as to whether a pair of shoes is acceptable for school then please do not hesitate to get in touch to check before spending your hard-earned cash – we are aware that many retailers market their products as 'back to school', which can be very misleading for parents since it doesn't always match a school's own uniform expectations. If in doubt, please do ask.</p>
<p>Discontent from a small number with the cost of some branded items which get rarely worn e.g. PE hoody/long-sleeved games shirt.</p>	<p>A number of items such as the PE hoody remain optional, although these are very popular with many of our students as they provide extra warmth and also look smart. Due to the nature of contact sports, such as rugby, a hoody cannot be worn as it poses a health and safety risk - a durable and long-sleeved top is required though, hence the mandatory nature of the long-sleeved games shirt to ensure all students can partake in all aspects of their curriculum. Many students choose wear a games shirt instead of a sweatshirt.</p>
<p>Concern over wearing blazers in the summer.</p>	<p>School blazers should be worn to school throughout the year as a core item of uniform. However, students may take them off for comfort when working in lessons, and in hot weather this is actively encouraged by staff. In extreme temperatures, students are given permission not to wear blazers or a tie.</p>
<p>Desire from some to allow PE kit to be worn on PE days in place of uniform.</p>	<p>This was allowed as a short-term temporary measure when changing rooms were closed. Consideration was given to whether it would be beneficial to continue with this when changing rooms reopened and lessons and schooling returned to normal. Whilst there are undoubtedly some benefits to wearing PE kit on PE days, we do have an obligation to teach children about hygiene around exercising so changing into/out of kit as part of routines for a healthy lifestyle will continue as now.</p>
<p>Lack of opportunity afforded for personal expression (hair, make up, jewellery) and misalignment with the workplace.</p>	<p>Whilst we recognise that different workplaces set their own dress codes and expectations, it is imperative in the world of work that whatever that dress code is, is adhered to. At Hele's School, we wholly welcome students expressing themselves in a variety of different ways and facilitate a wide range of opportunities to support this. Our dress code is very clear and whilst at school, these standards and expectations should be adhered to. However, we will give further consideration to some points raised in the survey around allowing light make-up to be worn by younger year groups, hair style/colour restrictions and clear retainers for nose piercings - there will be more to report on this at a later date.</p>
<p>Lack of choice of supplier.</p>	<p>Adelie is our key supplier for the limited branded items we have as part of our uniform and PE kit. This is a link we have had for several years, and feedback has always been around good quality and good value items, with appropriate supply and effective customer service. This was echoed within the feedback to the latest survey. We meet with the owner of the company annually to ensure our uniform remains competitive, and in recent years we have reduced branded items (e.g. Hele's football socks and Hele's leggings are no longer compulsory). However, most items can be bought from any supplier, and many items from supermarkets e.g. black cotton school trousers, school shirts, a plain black blazer, (with just the badge to buy from Adelie if this is your preferred option), a plain black V-neck school jumper (which is optional), to name a few.</p>

We will, of course, keep you informed of developments as we continue to refine our uniform policy and we will republish it in the summer term in readiness for September. In the meantime, your support with ensuring standards around uniform and expectations are adhered to is very much appreciated. Where a student repeatedly does not comply with the requests to improve uniform and parents have been contacted, this becomes an issue of defiance and one we will then need to look to sanction in school. However, it is our firm belief that a situation need never reach this stage so your support in avoiding this is much appreciated. If there are financial constraints around replacing uniform, please do not hesitate to contact school and discuss this further.


Looking ahead:

- Monday 21st March to the end of term – 1-to-1 interviews with Year 11 and a member of the Senior Leadership Team about Post-16 options (individual appointments shared with Year 11).
- Tuesday 22nd March - National Theatre production (free showing) at Hele's School in the Main Hall, 4.30pm
- Weds 24th March – Y8 Subject Teacher evening, 4 - 7pm on MS Teams.
- Friday 8th April is the last day of term. School will end at the usual time of 3pm. We will be holding a 'mufti day' on this day in exchange for a donation of £1, with all funds raised going to the [Disasters Emergency Committee \(DEC\)](#) appeal to support humanitarian aid in Ukraine. Our Student Council is also planning other fundraising ideas to take place on this day.

Good news: Several sporting achievements to celebrate this week, both on an individual level and a team level. Molly Stroud (Year 7) has been selected for the England Football Talent Pathway, J'adore Lawson (Year 10) played for Plymouth Argyle Under 18s at the weekend, Maddison Curno (year 11) is being monitored by the England FA coaching team following an England Talent ID match, Ruby Watson (Year 8) has been successful in her trial for Devon Tennis, and secured a place in the Country Under 18's B Squad, and our Year 10/11 Netball squad came top in their group in the Plymouth School's tournament this week, and runners-up in the Plymouth league overall. Congratulations to all our students on some superb success!

Staffing news: On Wednesday, we bid a fond farewell to Paul Carter, Caretaker, as he retires after 19 years' service at Hele's. What Paul doesn't know about the buildings, pipes, electrics, boilers and the likes probably isn't worth knowing, and we shall all miss his expertise as much as his warmth and friendship! We wish Paul the very best of love and luck as he prepares to take things a little easier in his retirement, and much happiness in whatever lies ahead for him and his family.

Kindest regards,



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Principal

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