

Hele's School

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



Friday, 11 September 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

Well this has certainly been a memorable start to the new academic year! Whilst so much has changed about how the way school operates, the familiarity and joy of having Team Hele's back together in the building remains a constant and we are genuinely thrilled to welcome back our young people and full staff after so long apart! I appreciate that for so many, this will have been their first time of accessing the site since mid-March, and for our Year 7s – all 240 of them – this was their first time since attending Open Evening this time last year! Undoubtedly, there was some nervous anxiety that may have built up over the summer for several reasons, but the overriding feeling has been one of excitement and relief to get back to school with their friends and some into sort of routine. Our children have quite simply been amazing in understanding and embracing the new routines in place and have quickly adapted to being in a year group zone.

Of course, for our current Year 11s and Year 13s, or those who attended EduCare provision since March, the school feels and is very different again to their experience. We have moved from classes of 9, with strict social distancing and no more than 25% of a single year group on site on any day throughout the summer term, adhering to the government guidance for partial reopening at that time, to full opening this week with over 1300 young people and 150 staff where government guidance for a return to fulltime education for all children now emphasises that 'control measures' - robust handwashing, sanitisation and respiratory hygiene, enhanced cleaning, active engagement with the NHS Test and Trace - are the key means of mitigating risk. In summary, the guidance now clearly states that social distancing is not feasible in schools with a full return and the emphasis should be on reducing contacts wherever possible through keeping each year group in a 'bubble' to learn and socialise together in an allocated zone of the school, and implementing the control measures above. A reminder that the government guidance for full opening of schools is very different to that published in May for partial reopening, and can be found [here](#).

Of course, as an extra preventative safeguard, we have introduced the expectation that staff and students wear face masks in corridor areas where adults (who are working across year group bubbles) and children (in a common year group bubble) may mix, and I have been overwhelmed with the positive and proactive response to this. Thank you to all parents/carers for reinforcing this expectation with your children. I would be grateful if you would reinforce the importance of wearing masks in local shops and on public transport, as well as the continued need for social distancing outside of school in all settings outside the home. As ever, please contact us if you have any concerns or queries – it is important you feel informed and confident that we continue to operate completely within government guidelines, particularly as the guidance for schools is so very different than for some other educational and work settings.

Access to the building: thank you for supporting the strict arrival times and egress point for your child. I appreciate this may cause inconvenience for some, but it is necessary to ensure children from different bubbles do not mix. This not only reduces risk of infection, but it will allow us to keep the majority of school attending in the event of a confirmed positive COVID-19 case in one year group bubble as only children in that bubble would be sent home to self-isolate for 14 days (see the COVID-19 Symptoms and Testing FAQs attached with this letter, also found on the school website).

Principal: Justine Mason

Seymour Road, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon PL7 4LT

Telephone: 01752 337193 Fax: 01752 331460

email: heles.school@plymouth.gov.uk website: www.heles.plymouth.sch.uk

Hele's School is part of Westcountry Schools Trust. Registered address: Harford Road, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 0AJ

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WESTCOUNTRY
SCHOOLS TRUST

Please continue to ensure your child arrives as close to allocated time as possible (8.30am arrival for 8.40am start, or 8.50am arrival for 9am start) and at the allocated gate. We are allowing children on site if they are a little earlier and directing them to their allocated bubble social area. It is important, then, to bring a waterproof coat for inclement weather whilst they may be in the open air awaiting the start of school.

Planning for a partial COVID closure: I hesitate to bring you the possibility of a future local lockdown when we have not yet been in school for a full week, but in these unusual, rapidly changing times we must plan for all eventualities. We hope, of course, that your child's education will be uninterrupted and delivered by our specialist subject teachers here on site, but as you may have seen in recent news reports, it is possible that we may have a situation where year group bubbles of students would need to be told to stay at home and self-isolate for 14 days, should a student or staff member who may have been in close contact test positive for COVID-19. We are currently working with colleagues from WeST to finalise our procedures around this and can reassure you that we have plans in place to ensure that remote learning will continue for students who are self-isolating at home.

For parents and carers, I understand this may cause some concern but I hope you agree that having at least some forewarning that this may be necessary gives you some time to consider how you as a household will be able to respond to such a situation. We will therefore send you an InTouch message later this afternoon with a link asking you to complete an online form to help us plan and respond to any fast-moving situations quickly and efficiently. We will require one response per child please. It is vital that this is completed please.

Pastoral support: perhaps how children are feeling this week is of greatest importance, and a great deal of time is invested in getting young people feeling confident, safe and ready for learning. Pastoral support is a strength of the school, and I am pleased to say that we have invested in further support over the summer to build even more capacity. Each child has a team around them, comprising their Tutor, Head of Year, Pastoral Support Manager, Senior Leadership Link, and Safeguarding Lead. They also have access to online support and counselling through Kooth.com, access to face-to-face counselling where signposted (socially distanced) or to a Behaviour Mentor (again, where signposted). A video message will be sent to you over the next couple of weeks to introduce you your child's pastoral team to allow you to put names to faces and to ensure you are confident in knowing how to access the team for support.

Examination success: we could have all done without the debacle around the A Level and GCSE results this summer, but I am delighted that our students have done incredibly well and many are now on their way to Universities, Apprenticeships, Colleges or Post-16 provision to further their education. Both year groups were set to achieve the best results in recent history should had they taken exams. They and their families are commended, and we offer them and all those involved in their education our warmest congratulations and best wishes for their next steps.

New challenges await those starting their exam year of course, bringing our support for Year 11 and Year 13 into sharper focus, but I am confident that staff will work tirelessly to ensure our young people are in no way disadvantaged and achieve well.

Welcome to new staff: With several retirements in the summer term, the restructuring of our pastoral system and the second year of expansion for Hele's School due to strong parental choice, we are in the pleasing position of having been able to not just replace but increase our staffing both in and out of the classroom, and I'm delighted that we are fully staffed having added to the team over the summer term. We welcome the following colleagues and I hope it isn't too long before you meet them personally:

Teaching Staff

Charlene Redfern, Head of History
Charlie Wakeham, Art – Curriculum Lead
Simon Swales, Maths
Kate Baker, Maths
Bryony Radford, English
Michael Chiswell, English
Helen Newton, Music

Support Staff

Gill Parker, Pastoral Support Manager
Hannah Adamson, Pastoral Support Manager
Johanne Watts, Pastoral Support Manager
Roger Hutchinson, Behaviour Mentor
Heather Palmer, Learning Support Assistant
Karen Blakemore, Learning Support Assistant
Pete Cory, Caretaker
Kirsty Putt, Finance Officer
Karen Lamerton, SEN Admin/Learning Support Assistant

Summer works: Our Premises and Cleaning teams have been working flat out during the summer to support our scheduled programme of works. Of course, it may be some time until you can see this for yourself, but works include the refurbishment of 2 Food Technology and Catering labs to industry standard in partnership with The Savoy Trust, Student Services redesign (Phase 2 of this to start in October half term), the resurfacing of the East Quad area, giving a safe social space for children, the recovering of the Dome for sports (ends mid-October), on top of the deep clean and getting the building COVID-ready.

Uniform and equipment: The first few days have proven to be a great success with new staff blending into new routines seamlessly. As ever, I am incredibly grateful to all families for the investment you have made in purchasing uniform and PE kit at a time that will be a particularly difficult time for many, and for ensuring children attend school with their Super 6 (blue or black pen, pencil, ruler, green pen, mini whiteboard, marker and rubber, and knowledge organiser). A reminder that uniform or equipment can be purchased from school. We are allowing children a brief period of settling back in before we address any uniform infringements and following collective messages this week and next, we will follow up with individual students and parents from Monday 21st September where issues with uniform remain. Uniform expectations (including piercings) can be found on the website and I would particularly ask that you look at the suitability of your child's skirt (where appropriate) and shoes, as well as ensuring any nose piercings are removed or covered for school. Your support in working with us to maintain high standards is appreciated.

PE lessons: To reduce risk, students will not be able to use the changing rooms to get changed for PE. Therefore, we request that on the day students have PE they travel to and from school in their PE kit and will remain wearing that during the school day. Further guidance and instruction has been/will be given to students in their first PE lesson. In wet weather, students will carry out PE activities indoors to prevent the requirement for further changing following their PE lesson. Only the listed Hele's PE kit will be allowed, no additional items will be accepted. This will help to maintain our high standards of presentation by our students. On all other days we expect Hele's School uniform to be worn smartly at all times.

Visitors: In order to ensure the safety of staff and students we are unable to receive any unplanned visitors to our Reception. Despite the best efforts of families, we appreciate that children will sometimes forget equipment or their packed lunch or water bottle. If this happens, please telephone the school and we will arrange for this to be provided, but please avoid dropping it into school. If you have uniform to collect, we will arrange for it to be taken to your child during the day to avoid parents/carers needing to access the site to collect it. Parents with pre-arranged appointments with a member of staff should report to Reception in the normal way. Thank you for your support with this.

Catering: We really appreciate your support in sending your child back to school with a packed lunch and drinks and snacks to eat at Break 1 and/or Break 2, wherever possible. In addition to this, we do have a food cart in each allocated zone which is open daily during Break 1 from 11-11.30am, where all students can access a limited range of hot and cold food should they wish. As we find the rhythm of the new day, it may be that your child would prefer to use the food cart instead of bringing a packed lunch, and that is perfectly fine to do so from as of next week. It may be worth gauging demand initially by making use of the trolley to supplement packed lunch, so that students can see what is on offer and get used to new routines for queuing.

It cannot currently be permitted for any student to leave the school site during the school day to buy food or return home for food, but we are confident that with home packed lunches, plus the food cart, we cater sufficiently for all students.

Constructive feedback: We really appreciate the supportive messages and thanks that have been sent to school, recognising that we continue to work incredibly hard within the confines of government guidance and health and safety to ensure all our students can return safely and remain in school. Please keep talking to us directly about the daily experience of our young people 'on the ground' as we go through the coming weeks. We are in this together, and if things could be improved further then please share that with us. An example of this is significant investment in sourcing 240 stools with backs and footrests for our Science labs to make learning safer and more comfortable for our Year 8 students whose learning zone is the Science block and all lessons take place in labs. The lead in time for delivery we have been informed is likely to be a few weeks, but be assured they are on order, and we appreciate your patience in the interim. Without sharing this feedback directly with us, it may have taken longer to recognise and respond to the need to change the seating, so please do keep communication with us open and timely.

Thank you for your continuing support and I look forward to working in partnership with students, families, staff and governors to ensure Hele's School goes from strength to strength, despite the challenges we all face. Here's to a happy, healthy and successful academic year ahead for all.

Kindest regards,



Justine Mason
Principal

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