

Hele's School

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



Friday, 6 November 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope that you were able to enjoy some time off with your families over the half term period and managed to get plenty of rest and recuperation in readiness for a demanding term ahead.

National lockdown: The Westcountry Schools Trust will continue to put the interests of our children, young people, families and staff at the heart of everything we do. Following our return in September, students have quickly settled back into school routines and we have implemented a wide range of protective measures in place keep our school community as safe as possible. We know that the announcement last weekend by the Prime Minister regarding plans for a 4-week national lockdown until 2nd December may have caused some anxiety. As we enter a period of national restrictions then, I wanted to write to you with some key updates and our response to the continually developing situation. Guidance on the new lock down measures to be implemented from 12.01am yesterday, Thursday 5th November, can be found [here](#).

Whilst the view is that we must be (to quote the PM), 'humble in the face of nature', the importance of keeping our children in education settings has determined the central decision to keep schools open. Further guidance for schools was released late afternoon on Wednesday and can be found [here](#). Given school leaders had just 18 hours to read, digest, interpret and implement any measures in readiness for the start of lockdown, the date of implementation of measures for education and childcare settings has been extended by the government to Monday 9th November.

To reassure you, because our robust risk assessment, tight control measures and our bubble model of delivery not only met previous government guidance but exceeded it in many aspects (e.g. all WeST schools introduced the expectation for face mask wearing at the start of term, even though this was beyond expectations at that time), the implications of this updated guidance for our school community are minimal. The two areas requiring some tweaking of our current practice are use of **face masks** and school **attendance for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable** students and staff (see below for changes).

We continue to work hard to mitigate risk and reduce transmission of COVID-19 at Hele's School and within our community. This week, I reiterated our school expectations in terms of the national context with all children through a virtual full school assembly. Once you have read the information below, I'd value your input to reinforcing these messages in discussing the contents with your child to ensure they are fully aware of the new restrictions.

School attendance and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable groups: The guidance states that all children should attend school unless otherwise advised by their GP or clinician:

More evidence has emerged that shows there is a very low risk of children becoming very unwell from coronavirus (COVID-19), even for children with existing health conditions. Most children originally identified as clinically extremely vulnerable no longer need to follow original shielding advice. Parents should be advised to speak to their child's GP or specialist clinician if they have not already done so, to understand whether their child should still be classed as clinically extremely vulnerable.

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
A charitable company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales. Company number: 07398467

Those children whose doctors have confirmed they are still clinically extremely vulnerable are advised not to attend education whilst the national restrictions are in place. Schools will need to make appropriate arrangements to enable them to continue their education at home.

Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves, should still attend education.

Please do contact us directly if you have any concerns and you have not already spoken to a member of the Pastoral or SEND team so that we can ensure the right provision is in place for your child.

Face masks: The guidance for educational settings now sets out specific information on the use of face coverings in schools and makes it mandatory across England for all students from Year 7 and above to wear a face mask when moving around the premises outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and indoor communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained. Students still do not need to wear masks in the classroom (but may choose to) nor in the outside play areas at social times.

Whilst this approach has already been in place across all WeST schools since September, under the new compulsory national guidance, *unless exemption for health or disability reasons applies*, every child must wear a face covering in the appropriate designated areas. **Refusal to do so will result in further disciplinary action for lack of equipment from Monday 9th November.**

Can I remind parents that children should bring a suitable face covering with them each day; it would be useful for children to have a spare face covering in case they lose one during the day or the string breaks. Should any child forget to bring a face mask to school, a disposable face covering will always be provided. Should this become a regular occurrence for your child, you will be contacted by a member of the pastoral team to ask for your support with this matter.

Ventilation and uniform: It is vital that we keep classrooms ventilated even as we enter the colder winter months. It remains important that your child wears suitable layers of clothing (e.g. base layers *under* uniform and/or the addition of a regulation school jumper/cardigan) - we will allow children to wear their coats inside classrooms should this become necessary on very cold days, and this will be at the discretion of the teacher.

Travel to school: We continue to encourage students to walk or cycle to school, wherever possible. If your child does cycle to school, please ensure that they are wearing a helmet and appropriate clothing for their own safety, and that bikes have working lights, given the dark mornings and evenings ahead. It will also be no bad thing to reinforce road safety expectations with your child – whether cycling or walking to school - given the wet or icy road conditions and impaired visibility for drivers during darker travel times at this time of year.

Students who travel on public transport *must* ensure that they are wearing masks whilst they travel to and from school.

If students are being dropped off at school by car, please be respectful of residents. I have received complaints from some of our neighbours around the Plymbridge Road and Trelawney Road gates that cul-de-sacs are routinely being used for turning or waiting, causing disruption and inconvenience for those who live there. Your sensitivity around this matter would be much appreciated.

Wider curricular activities: We had carefully planned and hoped to get students back to COVID-secure extracurricular activities this term. However, the latest guidance is clear that wider curricular activities beyond those that are to support parents/carers with childcare or as part of our educational provision around catch up or revision must cease during the period of national restrictions. Sports clubs, fixtures, subject-specific clubs, CCF and offsite visits will therefore not operate for at least the next 4 weeks. However, our after-school Year 11 Study Café and our Learn and Grow provision in year group bubbles for Years 7 – 10 can and will continue throughout – we've had a strong turnout at most sessions this week, which is pleasing.

We remain committed to resuming our extra-curricular provision as soon as it is safe to do so, as we know how important this is for student health and wellbeing.

Visitors to school site (including parents/carers): We continue to restrict visitors to the school to those that are essential. We will aim to hold all meetings with parents/carers remotely during the period of national restrictions as far as is practicable but recognise there may be times when a socially distanced face-to-face meeting is necessary. Parents/carers can request a face-to-face meeting but during the duration of the national lockdown, permission for this will be at the Principal's discretion.

Our risk assessment procedures/readiness for remote learning: We have responded immediately to any identified positive COVID-19 cases, or any children or staff with symptoms. Detailed procedures are in place to identify contacts and move quickly to ensure that close contacts are sent home to isolate, as discussed with the Department for Education, the Local Health Protection Team and a team of advisers for the Westcountry Schools Trust; this suppresses possible transmission of the virus in our school and will continue to be a key control measure.

We know that informing you of your child/children's need to isolate causes you worry and disruption to your lives and is difficult for our students, and although we sincerely hope this will not be a common occurrence this term, we need to be realistic and pragmatic and accept that given the national and local infection rates and the move towards the winter months, we are likely to see individuals/groups being managed in a far more dynamic way than previously.

We will always continue to prioritise the health and safety of our staff and students; this means that we will take the action that we need to. Please assured that where it is necessary, we will not hesitate to extend to partial or even full closure of our setting if we feel this is necessary to protect our community.

It is possible then that there may be disruption to your child's education over the coming months. We have worked hard to ensure that our remote education offer is robust and accessible and, in spite of receiving some very positive feedback indeed from children and families last term when 7x had an enforced period of home learning, we have finetuned provision to address any glitches experienced.

Please be advised that the latest information about remote learning is available on the school website.

What to do if students develop symptoms of COVID 19: In order to protect your child and the whole of the school community, may I once again take this opportunity to remind all parents and carers that if your child becomes unwell with a new continuous cough, a high temperature, and/or a loss of, or change in their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia) they should stay at home and families should follow government guidance: [COVID-19:guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection guidance](#).

Notification of symptoms and test results: It continues to be of the upmost importance that you remain vigilant to the symptoms of COVID-19 and alert school immediately if your household is self-isolating. If your child receives a positive test, please inform us immediately; your prompt communication with us is essential to our risk assessment.

Non-COVID related news

Curriculum Plans: Our long-term curriculum plans for each year group are now available on our website, and will give you an indication of topics, knowledge and themes being covered at particular times across the year. Please follow this link <https://www.heles.plymouth.sch.uk/curriculum> and then select the relevant Key Stage and year group for your child/children to find the appropriate plans.

Children in Need: Hele's School will be marking the annual Children in Need fundraising event on Friday 13th November by holding a non-uniform day. Students are invited to wear appropriate (and warm!) 'mufti' for the contribution of £1, which will be collected in a safe way during tutor time. Your support in helping us to help young people in need across the country, particularly in these incredibly difficult times, is very much appreciated. Please note that we do appreciate that some of our families may be experiencing financial hardship themselves in the current economic climate, so I stress that this is a *voluntary* contribution of £1. Your child will *not* be questioned or stopped from taking part in this event if you are unable to contribute financially, so please do not worry.

Should your child have PE on this day, they will need to come to school in PE kit as usual (there remains no access to changing facilities) but that this can be 'mufti' sportswear rather than the regulation Hele's PE kit required at all other times.

Rees Centre Wellbeing Hub: Several Wellbeing Hubs have been established across Plymouth to provide support for people in the community. Locally, the Rees Centre Wellbeing Hub can offer information and advice to get you the support you may need. Just a few of the things on offer include, work and benefits advice and applications; accessing mental health support; getting online; being healthier; volunteering; debt support; health; advocacy; befriending; parenting and caring advice. Please contact the Community Advisor confidentially on 01752 340550 or enquiriesrees@gmail.com to access support.

Thank you for taking the time to read this detailed letter. We are all committed to continue to make school as safe, positive and productive as possible for our students. I know that this year continues to be challenging for everyone, but with your ongoing support we will continue to do all we can to keep our young people in school and achieving their very best during these difficult circumstances.

Please be confident that I will continue to communicate with you regularly and openly. Should you have any specific questions that you want me to address, then please do contact me directly. I assure you that we will approach the coming weeks with the school community at the heart of all our decision making. Kindest regards,

Justine Mason

Justine Mason
Principal

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
A charitable company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales. Company number: 07398467

