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Edith Stein Catholic Academy Trust
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7 July 2020

Dear Parents

As I am sure you are aware, the Cabinet Office has announced the intention that all children will return to school in September 2020 following the summer break. This is welcome news for all. The guidance published last Thursday is perhaps the most significant advice for schools since lockdown first began at the end of March.

I am sure many parents and students are uneasy about the return, either because of virus transmission or issues related to anxiety after not being at school for a considerable period of time, particularly students in KS3.

Before I turn to some of the measures the school will take in September, it is worth reflecting on the journey so far. At the point of lockdown in March, infection rates in the community were considerably higher than they are now, social distancing was not in place along with a raft of other control measures we are now familiar with. Like many of you, I have followed the science, listening to experts both in the UK and abroad, who repeatedly state that children are considerably less susceptible to COVID-19 compared to adults. The evidence from many countries around the world is that transmission in schools is very low. Children are more likely to catch COVID-19 from adults in their household¹ with whom they have closer contact.

It is important to remember that we are still two months away from the start of the autumn term, and we have already seen how quickly things can change. In just the last few days, we have seen the imposition of a new localised lockdown in Leicester. This is a sobering reminder that this pandemic is far from over. We may find ourselves in a situation next academic year where the school has to react to a local issue. Part of our planning is to consider this scenario.

The current DfE guidance sets out four conditions that all schools must follow; we will be adhering to these:

- Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring those who have coronavirus symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school.
- Ensure that pupils clean their hands regularly, including when they arrive at school and when they return from breaks. Supervise hand sanitiser use, given the risks around ingestion.
- Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the "catch it, bin it, kill it" approach. Face coverings are not required in schools where pupils and staff are mixing in consistent groups. However, face coverings are required at all times on public transport (for children, over the age of 11).
- Introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach.

I can confirm that these procedures are already part of our daily practice and have been since the beginning of lockdown. They are in place to protect both students and staff.

There are a number of other measures that schools have been asked to consider, for example children not facing each other in the classroom, avoidance of large gatherings, not mixing year groups and removing singing from worship. Measures like this are achievable. Staggered start times, particularly, where a school has a significant number of children traveling by public and dedicated transport is considerably more challenging for students, parents and staff. For the avoidance of doubt, at this juncture we are not proposing a staggered start.

The Government has given schools a mandate to respond in a manner that best serves the Oaklands School community, however the examples I have given you provide a sense of the challenges all schools face.

Currently we continue with our return to school plan for September.

Tuesday 1st September	Staff INSET
Wednesday 2nd September	Year 7 only
Thursday 3rd September	Year 7, Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13
Friday 4th September	Whole School

We had intended to use Friday 2nd October and Friday 27th November as INSET days. Considering the disruption already experienced by students, this time would be better used for students in school, therefore these have been postponed. The INSET time will be used at another point in the year.

The guidance continues to promote the idea of a 'bubble' by placing students in discrete groups, but recognises that these may have to extend to complete year groups. Schools are encouraged to run a full range of curriculum subjects; this is our intention. However, the rhythm of the school day is unlikely to follow the order that students are accustomed to, we are proposing to have staggered break and lunch times. The guidance recognised that the options for school is not an 'all-or-nothing' approach, adopting a raft of measures that are appropriate for our setting and will still bring benefits. Equally, whilst it is possible to implement measures most of the time, for example bubbles, students across groups do mix outside of school, on buses and in families; there are contradictions between the guidance for schools and the guidance for the general public.

The safety and wellbeing of all members of our community remains of paramount importance to us and I hope this letter serves to reassure you of the thoroughness with which we approach our thinking. Before the end of term, I will confirm with you the detail related to the September start.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely



Mr M Quinn
Headteacher