

13<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Please can I pass on my thanks to all parents of Year 10 and Year 12 students that have returned to school in recent weeks. We have been pleased with their attendance and with the learning that has taken place. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the families of children in other year groups that have been supporting at home throughout the summer term. Prior to the summer holidays we ask that all students, with their teachers, plan for any remaining learning that they need to catch-up on. However, it is also essential that our young people get a break over the summer period.

### **Return to School in September 2020**

Just a few days ago the Government produced draft arrangements for the return of all students to schools from September. We have been closely reviewing the detail of these documents and I am writing to you to share our emergent plans for how this will happen.

Before I share the principles of our September return, it is worth adding the caveat that our plans may be tightened or loosened dependent on any announcements over the August period. Therefore, I ask everyone in our community to closely monitor ParentMail, our school website and social media, where we will keep everyone updated.

Our return in September will likely be based on the following rules:

- We will stagger the full return of students over several days so that we can ensure that they receive a full induction on health and safety, changes to school routines and also to allow us to assess any additional pastoral needs that they may have. It will also support Year 7 students having a full induction.
- Year groups will be kept in separate bubbles, where possible, to support social distancing. I should add that if permitted by the Government by September, we would like to treat the entirety of our small sixth form as a year group with its own bubble.
- Staggering the start and finish times to avoid students from different year groups meeting one another.
- Restricting movement of students around the site by teaching each year group in an allocated building.
- There will be no contact sports, no school trips and no events (such as assemblies) that involve more than one year group (or the sixth form) being together at a time.
- Encouraging students to bring a packed-lunch to school where possible, although a food offer will be available.

It is worth adding that the above restrictions do place some serious limitations on the school operating normally and we will seek to keep them under review and lift them as soon as it is deemed safe to do so. Clearly our students' personal development benefits from the broad and engaging curriculum offer that is normally available to them but large elements of this will have to be suspended.

The DfE have suggested that schools can narrow the curriculum to focus on the academic core, such as English and Mathematics. They have even suggested that schools could in some circumstances reduce their GCSE options. However, we have decided not to pursue this idea. We believe that our students deserve a wide curriculum diet and we want them to enjoy learning through the variety of subjects that they study. It

is also not practical to narrow the curriculum since it would mean non-subject experts then being asked to teach the additional lessons.

There are many complexities that need to be worked through by my senior team, including major timetable changes, rules and routines to support the systems working, and planning for necessary movements around our site. You will already be aware that we have removed the morning break and extended lunch time to ensure that we can support the safe transit of students.

I have met with the Catering Manager to discuss a proposal for food being served in the hall in half-hour intervals for Year 10 and then Year 11. This will remove pressure on the canteen area and will allow us to potentially stagger short lunch sittings for Years 7 to 9 in 25-minute blocks. We are looking into alternative approaches to the current fingerprint payment system, although it may be that students will be expected to hand-sanitise immediately after use. There are other challenges around lunch-times including student recreation and making sure that year groups remain separated.

All of us are becoming used to washing our hands regularly, PPE and new norms around social distancing, but these expectations will inevitably change over time as government guidance is periodically updated. We are expecting a more detailed announcement on August 11<sup>th</sup> which will allow for further clarification and modification of return to school plans. Once we have this information and made any changes I intend on writing to parents to give the detail for the return to school.

With regard to public transport, we remain unsure what the offer will look like in September. Understandably, I am concerned that bubbling year groups within the school will be undermined if students are mixing freely on buses or trains. KCC and the transport firms have been relatively mute on how this will be addressed but I would encourage children to make their own way to school wherever possible.

### **Pastoral Care and Guidance**

There has been much discussion in our school about strengthening our support offer further for students to assist their return to school and provide them with the opportunity to have conversations with professionals where needed. During recent weeks we have appointed a team of teachers as 'academic mentors' to have conversations with students in each year group about the learning and progress. Their work will be especially targeted at those students that have fallen behind during lockdown or have greatest opportunity for improvement. These appointments mean that the Heads of Year and the team of full-time pastoral support staff can exclusively focus their work on the welfare and care of students. We expect that some students will be anxious about returning to school and some others will have personal or mental health issues that require the care and support of these key workers. We have the benefit of an excellent school counsellor and highly trained staff for those with additional educational needs. This includes our personal education centre, for students with significant needs that need more intensive one-to-one support away from a mainstream setting.

### **Structure and Routine**

In parallel to the increased focus on care and guidance, we will continue our emphasis on strong school systems and structures alongside clear daily classroom rituals and routines. These high behaviour standards and norms form the basis of our school community and will ensure that the school remains a consistent touchstone in our young people's lives. I am empathetic that many of our students have missed this structure during lockdown and it will take a few weeks to get everyone back into the mindset they were in prior to Covid. That said, our expectations will remain exactly the same as ever, from the first day of school, and in some areas will be increased. This is so that Abbey students get the best education possible and are working to their potential at all times. Our teaching staff tell us unanimously that the firm structure and clear rules mean that they can focus on teaching without disruption and in turn this provides them with the ability to support the class to make better progress.

When students return it will be on the expectation of full school uniform. Our school outfitters are able to take orders online and I understand that they have comprehensive plans in place for hygiene and social distancing to support those students and parents that visit their stores. Please can I remind parents that items such as trousers and shirts can be purchased cheaply from supermarkets or online clothing stores. Should there be any case of severe economic hardship, then please contact me in confidence, ahead of time, so that we can support however possible.

I further need to remind parents of the change I announced much earlier in the year regarding school bags. We are expecting all students to have a rucksack or backpack style school bag capable of bringing books or other learning materials to and from school and storing coats or PE kit. Shoulder bags, hand-bags and other fashion bags will no longer be permitted. To support this change during these difficult economic times we are providing all current Year 7 students (going into Year 8) and new Year 7 students with a free Abbey School backpack which they are expected to use. Students in Years 9 to 11 should obtain any suitable backpack from a retailer and any brand will be acceptable. From Sept 2021 we will move to all KS3 and KS4 students using the Abbey bag available from our outfitters.

Our online curriculum will finish on July 17<sup>th</sup> and we encourage all of the school community to enjoy the summer. Given this, we will not be setting any additional work during the summer other than that shared before the end of term.

At present the first few days in September are likely to look as follows, but look out for any changes closer to the time:

Date	Event
Tuesday 1 <sup>st</sup> September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff Training (no students)</li></ul>
Wednesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff Training (no students)</li></ul>
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New Year 7 transition day</li><li>• Year 12 student admission event</li></ul>
Friday 4 <sup>th</sup> September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Year 7s normal school day</li><li>• Year 10s return and induction</li><li>• Year 11s return and induction</li><li>• Year 12s formal induction event</li><li>• Year 13s return and induction</li></ul>
Monday 7 <sup>th</sup> September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All year groups in school</li><li>• Year 8s and 9s return and induction</li></ul>

Timings for the first few days back and more detail will be published to families closer to the time.

Please take care and I hope to see you all directly after the summer, when hopefully we can gradually return to a new normal.

With best wishes



Dr Rowland Speller  
Headteacher