

Monday 24th August

Dear Parents, Carers and Staff

As you will have picked up from media coverage in the last few weeks, it has been an eventful summer for schools. The Government ultimately climbed down on the standardised exam grades that students were being awarded and instead our exam students have been awarded the best grade from both the Centre Assessed Grades or their Standardised Grade. Thank you to all those parents that wrote to their MP or the Department of Education regarding this, following an earlier letter. I think that this is fair justice for all children and does the best, within reason, to ensure that no child in an exam group is worse-off because of Covid-19.

As has been widely reported, grades nationally are up significantly as a result of a switch to this process. Given the devastating impact of Covid on our students and wider community, I think it would be inopportune to dwell unreasonably on the improvement in outcomes at The Abbey. However, I will say that our Centre Assessed Grades (which were based on assessments prior to Covid) have led to statistical increases that appear to be significantly above the national trend for improvement. Of course, 'one swallow does not make a summer' and we now face the challenge of getting back to school and tackling any learning deficits created by school closure. I know that everybody is up for this challenge and we all want to get the students back to a normal routine.

I wrote to you all some weeks ago to explain that we expect the school to be open fully in September, albeit with some significant changes to routines, to ensure that the school can continue to operate as safely as possible whilst retaining effective teaching. I am now in a position to update you with our current thinking based on the latest national guidance and policy:

Health

Students should not come into school if they need to self-isolate based on government guidance. It is expected that those self-isolating with symptoms must access testing and engage with the NHS Test and Trace process. If a symptomatic student attends school, parents will be contacted and the student will be isolated until they can be picked up. Please discuss recommended hand and respiratory hygiene habits with your child.

Guidance for Students

- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds and dry thoroughly (NHS guidelines), or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser to cover all parts of your hands
- Clean hands on arrival at school, before lunch break, after lunch break, as well as before and after eating, and after sneezing or coughing.
- Do not touch your mouth, eyes and nose.
- Use a tissue or elbow to cough or sneeze, and use bins for tissues. When you enter a specialist teaching room (Music, Computer Studies, Science, DT, Changing Rooms) you must sanitise your hands.

*Our expectation from last year remains regarding bringing in your own personal learning **equipment** i.e. pens, pencils, rulers and calculators and reading book. After the first day you should also be bringing in your knowledge organiser and planner (student diary) daily. All these items are checked by staff first thing in the morning as part of our daily line-up before school starts.*

Attendance

All students are expected to attend school from September. If a student is self-isolating or unwell, parents should please contact the school by 8.30am on every day of absence. Please do not be offended if the office staff ask for details of symptoms and instruct you to access a test for your son or daughter.

Equipment

Equipment should not be shared, so please ensure that your son or daughter brings their own personal stationery, including: pens & pencils (including highlighters), glue stick, eraser, pencil sharpener, ruler, protractor, compasses, calculator and fiction book. As previously stated, student planners and knowledge organisers must also be brought in.

Year Group Bubbles

All lessons will be delivered in year-group bubbles. In practice this means that each year group will have all of their lessons in one part of the school site and will have an allocated time or location to go for lunch, which is different to other students. For the most part, it will be teachers moving around rather than students, although there may need to be some switching of classrooms by students within their designated building.

Given that our sixth form is approximately the size of a small year group and there is a need to preserve curriculum integrity, we will be treating the whole of the sixth form as a 'bubble'.

Movement Around the Site

Routes around the school will be clearly marked to limit congestion in corridors and around the campus more generally. The normal morning line-up procedure will be amended to ensure that students from different year groups remain separated.

To avoid students mixing between Year Groups and congestion in corridors we will operate a strict one-way system in buildings and around the campus between lessons, as well as before and after breaks and at the beginning and end of days. It is likely that arrangements will appear quite regimented with synchronised departures from, and arrivals to, lessons and teachers at doors releasing classes on pips and then receiving them in close cooperation with each other.

Parent cars including taxis will not be permitted to enter the front entrance of the school site but will be allowed to wait in the Sports Centre car-park at the end of the school day. We encourage all children to be picked up off-site where possible and that children from different families and different year groups avoid travelling together.

Buildings and Washing Facilities

We have installed many outdoor hand washing facilities, which are ready for the Autumn Term. At the start of term we will also be issuing students with their own personal bar of soap. This will be in addition to the soap and hand sanitisers around the school site which will be regularly refilled.

Sixth Form Arrangements

Sixth Form students will not be permitted to leave the school site during the school day and will be expected to register for any non-taught study lessons and undertake private study in the Sixth Form Area.

Travel to School and the Start and End of School Days

Many of our students use buses to attend school. Gov.uk guidance outlines several differences between public transport and dedicated school transport. On occasion, students may not know if they are on a public bus or a dedicated school bus. Please look at the appropriate section in the link to the Guidance, which appears at the end of this letter.

Please avoid dropping your child off or picking them up at school if this is at all possible. Neither the school site, nor the surrounding roads can support current traffic levels at drop off and pick up times, so please expect to be delayed and remain patient, both with our site staff and other drivers, as well as pedestrians. On a very small number of occasions our staff and the children have witnessed, or even been subject to, very poor behaviour on the part of adults, who have simply become impatient at the amount of traffic, and this is completely unacceptable.

For obvious reasons parents or other non-staff will not be permitted to enter the inner school site by car or on foot at the start or end of the school day. We ask that you phone the school reception if there is a reason for needing to speak to a staff member. We will be ensuring that Year 7 students are greeted at the school gate and escorted off the school site at the end of the day since I know that there will be some worried parents.

Face Coverings and PPE

Students wearing non-disposable face coverings when arriving to school must bring a plastic bag to keep these in during the school day. Disposable face coverings must be put in a bin. Students must not touch the front of the covering during use or removal. Gov.uk guidance is evolving around the use of face coverings and we continue to monitor this. At present, we are not allowing face coverings at all and they must be removed on entering the site. This is because the Government are strongly advising schools that they should not be worn by staff or students. They can also become a hindrance to both teaching and behaviour management.

We appreciate that this instruction conflicts with PPE use on public transport and shops which has recently toughened and will keep this under review. Whilst we acknowledge that this is a sensitive issue, at this stage there will not be a choice on teachers and students wearing face masks on the school site.

Catering

We are changing the school day to ensure that it remains the same length but so that we can spread out the student use of the canteen. This is intended to provide a more pleasant lunchtime experience and promote social distancing.

We are actively encouraging all children, other than those in Year 7, to bring a packed lunch where possible in September although we will continue to offer catering for those that require this. Our reason for this change is to make the lunchtime manageable given the pressures to ensure that all children are fed and remain separated from other year groups. We hope that this measure can be relaxed in part as the term progresses.

Lunch has been extended by 20 mins to make it a full hour. However, morning break time has been removed. During the hour of lunch each year group will have a designated time to go to the canteen or the school hall to purchase food and dine. We will be doing this in a structured 'family lunch' style arrangement. The rest of the time they will be expected to go to an allocated area of the site for recreation, catch up revision or to be reading with their class. This will inevitably place a great deal more emphasis on

use of staff and teacher duties around the lunch hour but keeping students separated is an important pillar of the safe return to school.

After School Activities and Clubs

We are hoping to run a limited programme of year group-based and possibly remote extra-curricular activities from the end of September. However, this is an aspiration only and when we initially return there will be no contact sports, no fixtures and no extra curricular activities until deemed safe to do so.

Meetings in School and School Events

Prior to the current pandemic we were always pleased to meet with parents by appointment. However, from September meetings will be conducted by telephone or face-to-face via Microsoft Teams video-conferencing.

Open Evening for incoming Year 6 and any awards events for the outgoing Year 11 and Year 13s will likely take place remotely.

Parents' Evenings will not take place in their previous format and we are now considering alternatives.

Pastoral Care and Guidance

Students will be able to have conversations with school professionals when they return. We have Academic Mentors, Heads of Year and a variety of other pastoral support staff including counselling services. Care and support is at the heart of what we do at The Abbey School. We praise students whenever they show progress and want to help them move forward.

Our Personal Education Centre and SEN provision will be available for those with a high level of need. Similarly, we have dedicated staff that can support families working with other agencies such as social services, the police or the NHS.

Structure and Routine

There will continue to be a heavy focus on systems, structure, and routine when we return to school.

- The continuation of a structured school day including line-up, entry and exits to classrooms, STAR behaviours, a corrections system and other rules to promote student self-discipline and order
- Students arriving in full school uniform and with the necessary equipment
- Years 9 to 11 should arrive with a ruck-sack or back-pack style bag (any brand is allowed)
- Years 7 and 8 will be issued with an Abbey School branded back-pack which will be a compulsory part of their uniform from September

From Sept 2021 we will move to all KS3 and KS4 students using the Abbey Bag which will be available from our outfitters.

Behaviour sanctions will continue to include detentions at the end of the same day and time in Reflection. However, students will need to be 2m socially distanced where serving such a sanction with students from other year groups, so the school gym will be used.

Curriculum 2021

Our Heads of Learning and teachers have been working hard to ensure a 'Catch up Plan' is ready for every year group in every subject, so all students are back on track by June of the coming academic year. These will appear in the curriculum section of our website alongside the complete Schemes of Work on our website.

Every year group and every child will be our priority. To reduce the amount of paper-based work collected by teachers, the amount of traditional teacher marking will be limited. Students will receive plenty of whole-class feedback and personalised electronic feedback through Microsoft Teams. Most homework tasks will be set via the Microsoft Teams, although we will also be strongly encouraging students to read daily.

We will not be narrowing the curriculum for any student i.e. students will not be able to 'drop' subjects or spend more time on the core. Our staffing does not permit for this and we believe that our students enjoy the variety of learning experience that they undertake.

PE and Sport

We will maximize use of our beautiful outdoor environment at The Abbey as far as the weather allows. We will minimize contact sports where possible. We will maintain distance between students as far as possible.

Remote Learning Contingency Plan

We have adjusted our Schemes of Work for 2020-21 to allow for continued emphasis on 'blended learning' i.e. use of both online and classroom approaches.

In the event of full or partial school closure we will activate remote learning overnight, set work through Microsoft Teams and move very quickly to 50%+ live face-to-face lessons with teachers via that platform.

Staggered Return of the School

There will be a gradual return of the whole school population over several days to support student safety and training of the school community in all the changes. To support social-distancing, years 10 and 11 will line-up on the 3G; years 7-9 on the playground as usual.

Date	Event	Time of arrival
Tuesday 1 st September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff Training (no students)	
Wednesday 2 nd September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff Training (no students)	
Thursday 3 rd September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Year 7 transition day• Year 12 student admission event	8.45am 9.00am
Friday 4 th September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Year 7s normal school day• Year 10s return and induction• Year 11s return and induction• Year 12s formal induction event• Year 13s return and induction	8.45am 8.45am 9.20am 8.45am 8.45am
Monday 7 th September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All year groups in school• Year 8s return and induction• Year 9s return and induction	8.45am 8.45am 9.20am

Summary of Key Safety measures

A full, updated Risk Assessment will be placed on the school website before the beginning of the Autumn Term.

The protective measures include:

- A staggered return of the school population over several days in September
- Teaching in year group bubbles
- Management of movement via one-way systems and synchronised departure and arrival to lessons.
- Limited staggering of lunches
- Hand sanitizing. Dispensers are spread around the school site.
- Regular reminders to wash hands
- Regular reminders about the importance of physical distancing
- Restrictions on sharing of equipment
- Enhanced cleaning during and at the end of the day

In the remaining few days left before we return, please just focus on ensuring that you have the basics prepared, such as transport and our uniform / equipment expectations. Every year we have several students that arrive without the right uniform or kit. Whilst we deal with these issues as sensitively as we can, participation in the normal school day is dependent on these being right. Common issues include parents purchasing black trainers (sometimes sold as 'school shoes') rather than the smart black leather footwear. Please also remember that students in Years 7 and 8 will be given a black Abbey School Bag (free of charge) on the first day as part of their school-wear. Students in other year groups will be expected to bring their own back-pack or ruck-sack style bag please. This will be treated as any other part of the uniform.

We fully expect that many of the mitigation strategies that we have put in place to support student safety will adapt and change over time. For example rules around 'year group bubbles' are an important safety measure but also significantly compromise teaching and learning. We imagine that if the Covid risk diminishes this will be one of the first measures that schools nationally seek to have removed. At the same time, if there is a second spike we are in a strong position to tighten our measures further and allow many students to continue being educated on site, if permitted.

Please enjoy a rest in the remaining few days of the summer holiday. We very much look forward to welcoming students back to school in September and resuming, hopefully, a more normal role in helping them and you prepare for their future.

Please stay safe.



Dr Rowland Speller
Headteacher

<https://chalkwell.co.uk/were-good-to-go/>

<https://www.stagecoachbus.com/promos-and-offers/south-east/kent-school-buses>