

11 September 2020

Dear Parents, Carers and Staff,

Over recent days it has become clear that the national Covid-19 rate is beginning to slowly increase again. Some of this will be down to increased testing capacity and better identification of those with the virus. However, I am also mindful of the need to protect our community against a second wave.

Given this, we are going to make it optional from Monday 14<sup>th</sup> September for students and staff to use a mask or face-covering whilst in corridors, moving to lessons or waiting to enter classrooms. We would ask that wherever possible, students have masks or face-coverings that are consistent with our uniform, such as black, blue or white. The school will be ordering a supply of face-masks that we can provide to students should parents be unable to source the appropriate mask/covering. Mask use within classrooms or outside will not be supported given the current government guidance on this matter and our desire to maintain a consistent quality of teaching, learning and student discipline. Additionally, mask-wearing is to be limited to school corridors and should not be worn within the school's dining hall or main hall at lunchtimes.

Please note that national data shows that the rate of transmission in Faversham remains extremely low although some Sittingbourne schools have recently asked groups of students to self-isolate.

May I also reiterate that students at The Abbey School have their lessons, lunch and recreation time within year group 'bubbles'. This means that there is minimal opportunity for students from different year groups to come into contact with each other since all of their lessons are contained in the same corridor and they have a separate canteen time. Students also have designated line-up areas at the start of the day, separate toilet facilities and a staggered end to the day to promote separation between year groups.

We are going further than many other schools, since our year-group bubbles should not cross one another in corridors. In some schools, students are still traveling across school sites to subject specialist rooms and teachers are remaining in their base-classroom, often with voluntary mask use in corridors. Instead, at The Abbey our staff are moving around and students are largely remaining in the same room (or rooms). This has benefits in terms of better student separation but also has its own issues including lack of specialist rooms and facilities for some lessons. We will continue to review both models of 'bubbling' to ensure that we continue to get the right balance between risk-mitigation and ensuring high-quality education.

Finally, I would like to remind the whole community of the importance of hand washing, good hygiene and avoiding contact with others. As the term progresses we will continue to keep our risk mitigation strategies and safety measures under close review and should circumstances change we will respond accordingly.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Rowland Speller  
Headteacher