



Bexley Grammar School
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A Specialist Language College
and IB World School
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Dear Parent/Carer,

I write, having completed six weeks full weeks of the autumn term, with a week to the half term break, to update you on our current position as we continue to plan and adapt to the demands of the pandemic.

On a practical level, the timings of the day we set in September are working but after half term we are going to lengthen the short breaks a little and shorten the second lunch. Breaks and lunch are very different experiences in fine and inclement weather (there is a tension to keeping year group bubbles separate while giving sufficient access to the canteen) which makes finding a compromise a challenge. We do not plan to change the start and finish times to our day so from your point of view, there is no change.

I appeal to all parents and students to try to arrange for students not to arrive too early in school in the morning. However, I am keenly aware of the challenges of travel in the mornings, especially on public transport and in poor weather. If students do have to arrive before their staggered start time, they should go straight to their first period classroom and sit quietly until the lesson starts.

May I also take this opportunity to remind cyclists to wear reflective gear and a helmet; the majority do wear helmets but the few who do not are a great worry, especially as the mornings and afternoons get darker. Our cycle shelter is now full on most days and we have a temporary overflow solution which we will improve when time and money allow.

We are very aware of the difficulties that not having access to lockers present to students. As you know, this was a late decision on my part, at the end of the summer, because I had been hoping we would find a way to make locker access possible. We have recently provided lockers for Year 7 students only (as the smallest students with the largest bags) on a trial basis. This appears to be working but only because the number of students is limited and they are spread out across the site. I think it unlikely that I will be able to extend this privilege to the rest of the school for some time yet. Congregating at lockers inevitably creates congestion in corridors where it is important to keep the flow moving in order not to break our bubbles.

Not being able to run many extra-curricular activities is one of our greatest frustrations. By their very nature, most of our clubs would cross year group bubbles and therefore simply cannot start until the national situation changes. Staff are adapting, determined, of course, to get some activities up and running (in PE, for example, 200 students (600 attendees) have participated in extracurricular clubs

in the last 5 weeks) but at present they can be open only to a single year group at any given time. We are also short of bookable large spaces at lunch times because we need to be able to accommodate separate year groups in separate spaces while half of the school is still in lessons.

Clearly we are not going to be able to hold face-to-face parents' evenings in the usual way with subject teachers. Instead, we are planning to enhance our reports in order to provide more feedback from subject teachers as a temporary measure. More on that nearer the time.

Remembering the summer lockdown when we were forced into an exclusively online world, I think work and home life became blurred more than usual. I would ask, therefore, that we reset the work-life balance and remember that school staff have a working day which we define between 8 am and 4 pm. Outside those hours, students and parents, please respect our staff's privacy; if you compose an email outside work hours, please schedule it to send during the day or keep it as a draft until working hours. This would be much appreciated by staff. A positive result on a Covid-19 test is the exception to the rule and should be communicated immediately. Although the message may not be picked up immediately during an evening or at the weekend, it is helpful for us to be able to take action as promptly as we become aware of the message to minimise disruption and keep everyone safe. However, it is worth reiterating that it is unacceptable and dangerous to assume that anyone at the school will be able to respond to a safeguarding emergency out of school hours. We do not have an on-call service for safeguarding. It remains the case, as detailed on our website, that if a child or young person is in immediate risk of harm or there is an imminent threat of harm to self or others, please call 999.

Looking forward now, many of you will be anxious about what will happen should local restrictions be imposed and/or year groups are sent home due to confirmed cases of Covid-19. I can only reassure you that we are developing plans for blended learning, a combination of virtual learning and learning in school (classroom learning). These plans need to evolve as guidance is updated and the possible scenarios become more or less likely. Currently, the most likely scenarios will involve isolation for groups of students, possibly year groups, for two weeks. Blended learning works differently than the previous remote learning of lockdown because of the limited isolation periods which enable the planning of virtual tasks to complement the work that will be done in school - the two will operate alongside each other.

In these uncertain times, parents and carers are having to put more trust in teachers and in the school's leadership than ever before. You are having to trust us to make decisions, often at short notice, in the best interests of students. Two students out of 1435 students have reported testing positive for Covid-19 in six weeks so far this year and no staff out of 170; A total of 64 students were identified as close contacts in the two separate cases and had to self-isolate for 14 days. None of the original 24 developed symptoms/tested positive for Covid-19 and, so far, none of the more recent 40 have done so. I report this to keep our situation in perspective, not out of complacency. There will, inevitably, be more cases to come which will cause further disruption but I hope that our record thus far helps to reassure you all that we are working hard, in challenging circumstances, to keep students and staff safe (and in turn the vulnerable in your households safe) while ensuring that we continue to ensure a broad and rich curriculum that prepares students, at every stage in their school career, for the demands of the year ahead.

Our safety continues to depend on you and on your prompt action in ensuring that no student enters the school with symptoms of Covid-19.

Thank you for your continued support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SE Elphick', written in a cursive style.

Steve Elphick

Quick reference summary:

- Please do not to arrive too early in school in the morning - go straight to p.1 lesson;
- Cyclists - wear a helmet and high-visibility gear;
- Unlikely lockers will be provided for years 8 and above for the foreseeable future;
- Extra-curricular activities limited to single year groups at a time;
- No face-to-face parents' evenings for the foreseeable future;
- Please communicate with school during working hours;
- Positive Covid-19 cases should be reported immediately, regardless of the time;
- Safeguarding emergencies outside school hours must go through 999;
- Blended learning plans are evolving - combining virtual learning with classroom learning;
- A student with symptoms of Covid-19 must not enter the school.