



Newent Community School and Sixth Form Centre

Striving for Excellence

Principal • Mr Alan Johnson

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6th November, 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

It has been another roller coaster week in terms of government announcements. I had hoped that this week all of the drama would be overseas with the Presidential Election but after the announcement of a second lock down last Saturday I know that I should have expected some last minute changes to the guidance for schools. As you know the key messages that came out last night after schools had closed were as follows:

Face coverings

- All secondary school students are now expected to wear masks in communal spaces. We received this update after school on Wednesday from the Department for Education (DfE). DfE guidance states that in schools where students in Year 7 and above are educated, "face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained". The guidance goes on to say "We would expect schools to ensure any changes required in light of national restrictions are in place as soon as practically possible, and by Monday 9 November at the latest." As such please ensure that all students come to school with an appropriate face covering. Further guidance is as follows:

Clinically extremely vulnerable staff and pupils

- Both staff and pupils who have been identified by their doctor as clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), will be advised not to come into school. The government guidance on shielding and CEV people has been updated to reflect this. We will provide remote learning for any pupils in this category.
- Pregnant women are not classified as CEV, and therefore will still be expected to come into work, unless their doctor advises otherwise.
- Pupils and staff who live with people who are CEV, but are not CEV themselves, are still expected to come into school or college.

Curricular and extra-curricular activities

- PE, sport, music, dance and drama lessons can continue in line with the current guidance – during school time.
- Schools must only provide team sports listed on the return to recreational team sport framework.
- Competition between different schools or colleges should not take place.
- Schools are able to work with external coaches, clubs and organisations for curricular activities where they are satisfied that it is safe to do so.
- After-school clubs can only continue if their primary purpose is childcare. So wraparound care in a primary school would be fine, but a Year 8 after-school football club would not.
- The current series of exam resits should continue.

I am sure that these new ways of working will raise many questions and provoke much discussion over the dinner table. Please understand that they are not arbitrary decisions that I have made in isolation but rather a direction of travel mandated by our government that I am duty bound to implement in order to keep our students, staff and community safe.

Ventilation

One other missive from our government that is likely to raise concerns is the thorny issue of ventilation in classrooms. We were advised at the start of the week to keep windows open in classrooms as part of the battle against Covid-19, but with temperatures beginning to fall I can see this becoming more problematic. For example, on my journey to school this week I noticed three children from another school standing forlorn and frozen in their PE shorts whilst waiting for their bus with bare legs far bluer than their uniform. I am also aware that some students at other schools have been told they cannot wear coats in classrooms even if windows are open as it goes against the school uniform policy.

At our school I am taking what I believe to be a "sensible" approach. Effectively ensuring students are warm enough over winter, while also making sure they are well ventilated amid the coronavirus crisis. As such it is my intention to allow students to wear their winter coats in class at the discretion of the class teacher. However, please understand in making what I believe to be a fair decision I am reliant on your full support to make it work. Please do not send your children into school wearing a hoody. Hoodies are not allowed in school and will not be allowed in the classroom in place of a coat, however cold it gets.

Facebook Groups

With hoodies fresh in our minds can I urge everyone to refrain from reaching straight for their keyboard to post anything unhelpful on Facebook. Please remember that our fantastic staff and students are doing their best to operate under the new restrictions and abide by all the new guidelines. Even when these guidelines are given to us at the very last minute or change dramatically without warning as they oh so frequently do. Please understand that the incredible anxiety that we are all living with as a community is only exacerbated by misinformation and half-truths posted on social media. If you have a question, please ask me. If you wish to understand the rationale behind my decision making, ask me. Not Facebook! Unlike many other schools I have written home to our community at the end of every week since schools first closed in March. I fully intend to do so until this is over. This communication is the only source of reliable information about the next steps in our journey through this pandemic.

A Midsummer Night's Dream - SAVE THE DATE - Friday November 20th at 7pm

Our virtual production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' will take place on Friday 20th November. The students involved have never rehearsed in the same room together but instead have worked weekly on ZOOM to create the production for the Coram Shakespeare School's Foundation 'One Night of Shakespeare'. The students have been absolutely dedicated to ensuring that, even in these challenging times, work in the arts continues - they provide an outstanding example of resilience in the face of adversity. To tune in on the night go to YouTube and search for the Newent Community School and Sixth Form Centre's Technician's page. A link will be sent out in my letter prior to this performance.

Children in Need

A reminder that we are holding a non-uniform day on Friday 13th November for Children in Need for a minimum donation of £1 that can be paid via Parentpay. You can also purchase Pudsey ear headbands on Parentpay for £2.50. We have now sold all the squares for the Pudsey Bear raffle and we will announce the winner next Friday.

Remembrance- Wednesday 11th November 2020

Poppies are available from school for a donation on Parentpay and can then be collected from the Finance Office.

Black History Month

Well done to all students that entered the challenges set by the History department for Black History Month. Year 7 student Christopher Hancock won the prize of a book and a bar of chocolate.

'Is Tik Tok safe?'

I'd like to finish my letter this week with a recommendation for a programme to watch with your sons and daughters. It is not a recommendation that will make you popular at home but may help keep them safe on line. This Panorama documentary highlights the potential dangers of the app.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000p3p9/panorama-is-tiktok-safe>

Have a restful weekend.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Alan Johnson', written in a cursive style.

Alan Johnson
Principal