



St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic High School

Prepare the way of the Lord

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2 March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Following my letter last week, I wish to expand on the guidance that secondary schools have been given with regard to the wearing of face coverings in lessons.

At the end of last week there were numerous articles in the national press regarding the guidance for face coverings being 'highly recommended' in classrooms rather than being made 'mandatory', with various quotes being made from anti-mask groups.

The stance of the school is and always has been, that we should minimise the risk of transmission in the school as far as possible whilst maintaining the highest level of educational experience. This view is shared by both Wigan Local Education Authority and the Director of Public Health (please see their letter attached).

We have already successfully implemented the following measures to reduce risk:-

- Social distancing wherever possible
- Hand hygiene
- Regular cleaning of surfaces
- Good ventilation in all classrooms
- The creation of year group bubbles
- Staggered break and lunch times
- Staggered finishing times

The following will be implemented on our return to reduce risk further:-

- Testing of pupils three times on their return to school, with weekly testing of staff.
- Moving to home testing of pupils and staff twice weekly.

I understand that the guidance which schools have been given has changed considerably throughout the year and that it is under constant review. Whilst this has caused much frustration, the overarching principle of minimising the risk of transmission must be the right thing to do. Social distancing in almost all of our classrooms is not possible and **the wearing of face coverings in classrooms is simply another way of doing everything we can to reduce the risk of transmission** in school.

The additional precautionary measure is for a limited time during this early period of 'unlocking' until Easter. It will be kept under review and updated based on Government guidance.

Exemptions will apply for any pupils unable to wear a face covering based on the guidance, such as a physical impairment or disability, illness or mental health difficulties. An exemption card will be issued to pupils that can be worn visibly with a lanyard or kept in their blazer pocket.

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The Government are providing a contingency supply of face coverings that will be made available for pupils who have forgotten to bring their face covering into school, or who are struggling to access a face covering, or their own face covering has become soiled, damp or unsafe to wear.

In response to some queries that we have received I would like to offer some clarity around the expectation for wearing masks within the school site:-

Query 1: Will pupils be wearing a face covering for 6 hours?

Pupils do not need to wear a face covering outside during break or whilst eating their lunch at the dining room tables; PE lessons or any classroom where numbers of pupils or size of classroom allows for 2m social distancing.

Query 2: My child has asthma but can wear a face covering sometimes

If your child is recorded on our management system as having asthma and you wish for your child to have an exemption card you should email pupilservices@arrowsmith.wigan.sch.uk to request one. It is better to wear one some of the time than not at all if possible and the exemption card will validate the periods of time they are unable to wear one.

Pupils who **do not** have medical information recorded on our systems should provide some medical information to support their exemption. This is not necessary for anxiety or other non-visible reasons, but a card should be requested using the pupil services email.

Query 3: I will not send my child to school if they are forced to wear a face covering in the classroom

We are unable to force any pupil to wear a face covering, but we all have a collective responsibility to ensure that our school environment is as safe as it can possibly be. Please remember that the point about wearing a face covering is that it protects everyone else, not just yourself. If everyone wears one, **the risk goes down for all**, no matter how minimally, **the risk goes down**. This is especially important for asymptomatic pupils as they show no symptoms but could still be passing on the virus.

If you refuse to send your child to school this will have an impact on their education and affect their attendance record. Unless your child is absent for a COVID related reason or is shielding and been advised not to return to the school setting, remote learning will not be provided.

Further details of our testing programme will be provided this week by the School's Business Manager, Mrs Chapman. Only pupils who have provided consent will be tested in school and provided with home testing kits. This is due to be extended to family members of secondary aged pupils, but we are awaiting further clarification.

If your child has contracted COVID-19 during the school closure and you have **NOT** informed school, please do so as soon as possible. Pupils **DO NOT** have to participate in our testing programme until 90 days after a positive test. Once this date has passed, they can join the programme providing consent has been given.

Navigating through this pandemic has been extremely difficult for everyone. During the past year, I have consistently asked for and praised your commitment to steering the course through this pandemic in partnership with the school, which you have done magnificently.

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I am now appealing directly to all parents to support us in our efforts to reduce the risk of transmission in school by completing the consent form for testing ([please click here*](#)) – **there is no need if you have already provided consent.* Also, by ensuring that your child knows that you expect them to wear a face covering in classrooms and on corridors until we break for Easter.

As I have stated in my previous correspondence, all the staff are really looking forward to seeing our pupils again and I can assure you that we will do our utmost to maximise the educational experience in the weeks ahead.

With the very best of wishes.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "M. J. Dumin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

M J DUMICAN
Headteacher