



## Wellfield Academy

Executive Headteacher Mrs L Gwinnett  
Head of School Mr J Lewis

Monday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2021

Dear Parents and Students,

### Latest Updates Regarding Covid Measures

On Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November, the Prime Minister announced new temporary measures following the emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in the UK and yesterday the Department for Education (DfE) contacted all schools with further guidance about measures that needed to be revisited.

In this email to Heads, we were told that these measures will be introduced as a precaution to slow down the spread of the variant while the Government gathers more information and that they will continue to keep this under review as the situation develops.

#### Face coverings

Face coverings should be worn in communal areas in all settings by staff, visitors and students in Year 7 and above, unless they are exempt.

Students (in Year 7 or above) should continue to wear face coverings on public and dedicated school transport, unless they are exempt.

#### Testing

All educational and childcare settings should continue to encourage staff and students to test twice weekly using lateral flow device (LFD) tests. Our staff will be testing daily.

#### Contact tracing and isolation

The [current guidance on contact tracing and isolation](#) remains in place. In addition to these, any suspected or confirmed close contacts of the Omicron variant will be asked to isolate for 10 days regardless of vaccination status or age. You will be contacted directly if your son/daughter is identified as a close contact of a person with the Omicron variant and they will need to isolate if this is the case. Work will continue to be set remotely for all Covid related absences.

#### Vaccination

All eligible staff and students aged 12 and over are encouraged to take up the offer of the vaccine, including boosters.

Vaccines are recommended as our best defence against COVID-19. They help protect young people and adults, and benefit those around them. Vaccination makes people less likely to catch the virus and less likely to pass it on.



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To book a vaccination, please visit: [Book or manage a coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination – NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk).

### **Risk of transmission**

Our OVERIDING motivation is to keep our students and staff safe.

Placing large groups into enclosed environments (e.g. classrooms) for sustained periods is clearly risky, despite doors and windows being open to aid ventilation.

Whilst there may be less risk of death in students of school age (although not without risk) we now know that Covid related absence significantly impacts on mental health and progress in learning. In addition, students can spread this virus to our staff and all our families who are more at risk.

### **Masks in lessons in addition to communal areas**

We are aware that Government guidelines have only mandated face coverings in communal areas and do not currently require the use of face coverings in lessons. This is because they are concerned about the impact on learning.

*This issue has been left to the discretion of school leaders.*

In recent times we have operated a policy of masks in lessons and our students have responded positively to this. It makes sense to us to re-introduce this to coincide with the tighter measures being recommended by the DfE.

The following actions and strategies will also take place to encourage safer use of masks:

- Students will wear masks in lessons and will be encouraged not to touch their masks and to have spares if needed. They should wear newly cleaned masks every day.
- Students should also keep their masks on during unstructured times
- Teachers will wear visors so that their face can be seen when teaching
- Students will not be required to wear masks in practical PE lessons as these will usually be outside, although they will keep their masks on in changing rooms
- Any student with a valid exemption will be added to a list to be shared with all teaching staff and will be marked on seating plans. Parents of these students are encouraged to order a lanyard via the following link:  
<https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com/hidden-disabilities-face-covering.html>
- Parents should notify school if they feel they have other good reasons for their son/daughter to be placed on the exemption list

### **Tried and tested**

We have been overwhelmed in the past by the positive support from our families who recognise that staff and students will feel anxious in an enclosed space without face coverings and this has once again been the driver for our decision.

We are confident that our students here at Wellfield will respond well to the reintroduction of this measure.



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### What type of masks can they wear?

- We would discourage disposable masks due to environmental concerns.
- Masks should be 'plain' or with a simple pattern, as long as these are appropriate for school.

### Why can't students wear visors instead of masks?

In the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, a face covering is something which safely covers the nose and mouth. These must securely fit round the side of the face.

In the context of the requirements imposed in response to the coronavirus pandemic, a visor or face shield is not a face covering. It is made of waterproof material, fits loosely over the eyes and extends down such that it may lie over but not cover the nose and mouth. It cannot fit snugly around the nose and mouth as it could impair breathing and may fog.

For our teachers however, the guidance has allowed for visors if somebody 'speaks for a living and has difficulty making themselves heard when wearing other types of face covering'. This is the reason teachers are wearing visors to teach and not masks.

### Will masks inhibit learning?

In the past, some parents have raised concerns about how students will be able to engage in the lesson, develop relationships and feel comfortable enough to concentrate. The following actions and strategies will be encouraged to ensure students receive a full learning experience and enjoy positive relationships in the classroom:

- Teachers will continue to use static seating plans so that we know who our students are and what their needs may be, as well as assisting our internal 'track & trace'
- We will continue to encourage students to carry, use and refill water bottles for use in and out of the classroom to ensure they remain hydrated while wearing masks
- If students need a quick break from their mask, this will be allowed for a short period
- Conversations and question/answer will be encouraged and quietly managed with careful, quiet listening used as a strategy
- Teachers will be actively encouraging other ways for students to engage in learning e.g. through use of individually allocated whiteboards and other forms of non-verbal communication.
- Additional pastoral staff have been recruited if any students feel anxious and need 'time out', which will be discretely handled

Yours sincerely,

Mr J Lewis

Head of School



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