



20 August 2021

Dear Families

I do hope you are having some quality family time now that some of the Covid restrictions to which we have all been subjected have been eased. With only a couple of weeks of the school holidays remaining I thought it timely to give you a few brief updates. Our school improvement priorities this coming year include putting the fun back into school after a couple of years where your children have been starved of many of the joys of being in school and participating in sport, music, school productions etc. We will not only be re-engaging students with our extra-curricular programme but also, critically, looking to re-engage them with their learning and make up for lost ground in some cases. The take-up of chromebooks as part of our digital learning programme has surpassed expectations and we will be integrating those devices far more into the learning journeys of your children in the year ahead.

Examinations

Earlier this month our Y11 and Y13 students received their examination grades in what proved to be a far simpler and smoother process than at the same time last year. Students and their families are right to celebrate their achievements which have come about in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. It will be this year's cohort, I strongly suspect, having had the whole of their two year programmes of study adversely affected by Covid, that prove to be the ones most negatively impacted. It was great to see the joy on the faces of our young adults and their families as they collected the grades for which they had worked so hard and for so much of the time remotely. Our very best wishes and congratulations go to all those students and families as they move forward on the next stage of their educational journey.

This summer's hard-working students were not assessed in the same way as in previous years and schools implemented the system they were instructed to by their political masters. Neither students nor schools should be berated for following instructions and students, in particular, deserve immense credit for their achievements when faced with the greatest educational disruption we have witnessed since the second world war. National comparisons with previous years, when the assessment regime was completely different, are utterly meaningless. Creating a new baseline for future external examinations would seem to me a considerably easier challenge than dealing with a global pandemic! It is equally evident that those students facing external assessments in 2022 will need significant adjustments to the way in which they, too, are assessed and when those become clearer I will relay them to new Y11 and Y13 families and students.

Covid Update

Today, schools have received new operational guidance for September in relation to Covid. Cases in Tewkesbury (269 per 100,000 people) and across the country remain high, though hospitalisations, thankfully, have not risen to the extent that was widely predicted. Students aged 16 and 17 are now being invited to take up the offer of vaccinations before they return to school and I would urge them to avail themselves of that opportunity. It remains unclear whether the vaccination programme will spread to younger children although there are encouraging signs that this may be the case.

When school returns, we will do so with the same health and safety controls in place as previously. This makes for a more controlled and safer start to the term after youngsters have been mixing more widely. You will already have heard earlier this week of our plans to test children in Y8-Y13 in advance of their return and new Y7 students on their induction days.

Ashchurch Road, Tewkesbury
Gloucestershire GL20 8DF

Reception: **01684 292152**
Attendance Line: **01684 851806**

Email: **office@teWKesburyschool.org**
Website: **www.teWKesburyschool.org**

Headteacher: **Mr G M Watson** BSc PGDip NPQH

Individual appointments will be circulated for a test in school for Y8-13 students and, where this is not possible, we strongly advise children to complete a test at home and report it on the school and NHS systems as previously.

- Report to school - [here](#)
- Report to NHS - [here](#)

Could we remind our new Y7 parents/carers to please complete the testing consent form that has been previously issued. If you have further questions about the testing process, please email office@tewkesburyschool.org

Employees and students continue to be strongly advised to self-test twice-weekly until the end of September when we are told the process will be reviewed.

The concept of 'bubbles' has been removed and schools will no longer be charged with identifying close contacts of positive Covid cases. Close contacts will be identified by NHS Test and Trace and will be strongly advised to take a PCR test but will NOT be expected to self-isolate if they are a family member, under 18 years of age or double vaccinated. I do not envisage, therefore, instructing significant numbers of children to self-isolate as happened before the summer.

The important thing for me to convey against this background is **the critical role that will now be played by self-testing and reporting**. We have made the process as simple as we can and I urge you to ensure tests are both completed twice-weekly on Saturdays and Tuesdays and reported to the school. We will NOT be doing tests in school to make up for those who have forgotten to complete them at home. Please continue to keep your child off school should they display any of the now well-known symptoms of Covid. Over a three week period in early June we had 62 positive Covid cases at the school leading to the enforced self-isolation of over 600 young people. If we are to avoid a similar local outbreak then we really do need your continued support with the testing regime. At the end of the summer term we were routinely testing up to 300 students in school, twice-weekly, who had not completed home tests. This will no longer be happening in September.

Operational Practices - September

Return to school timings and term dates can be found [here](#). With the exception of the incoming Y7 and Y12 students, school starts on Tuesday 7 September. Please note that the October half-term break, as was the case last year, includes both the Friday before and the Monday after the full week.

When your children return, we will be continuing to encourage the frequent washing of hands, the use of hand sanitiser, classroom cleaning routines and making the case that Covid has not gone away. We will also be maintaining our one-way systems and continuing with year group social spaces. Remote parents' evenings proved to be more efficient for parents and, after receiving considerable positive feedback, it is our intention to continue with those as we enter the new academic year. However, if you are concerned, at any stage about your child's personal or academic wellbeing then please contact your child's tutor or Head of Year in the first instance and at the earliest opportunity. The overwhelming majority of concerns can be addressed swiftly and effectively if brought to our attention at an early stage.

Please can I remind all parents that, **for the safety of your children**, there is no facility to drop-off or collect your children from either car park at the start or the end of the day. Collections and drop-offs during the day, however, so children can attend appointments, can be safely accommodated using the Visitors' Car Park at Main Reception by the flagpole. If you need to ferry your child to and from school by car then please drop them at a safe distance from the school and allow them to walk the final section. If your child cycles to school then please do encourage them to wear a helmet. Sadly, last year we had instances where children were seriously injured through cycling or a lack of general road safety awareness.

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Please refer back to my [letter](#) earlier this term informing you of our intention to 'raise the bar' in relation to uniform standards at the school. I would be grateful if you could ensure that shoes and clothes fit before September 7, make sure new shoes are worn in and fashion statement hair dyes, nails etc are removed before the onset of term. We are aware there may be some uniform supply chain issues and we will show understanding in such cases.

We are looking forward to welcoming your children back and, hopefully, getting back to as normal a position as we can. I look forward to being able to deliver more stories relating to student success beyond the classroom and inviting you to school performances and sporting events. In the meantime, I hope you and your families are steering clear of Covid and the associated difficulties and wish you all the very best.

Yours faithfully



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Headteacher

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