

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you have all had a good Christmas, and enjoyed time with your family and friends during the break. As we start the Spring term, I would also like to take the opportunity to wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Thank you to everyone who arranged for their child to attend the on-site testing today, and for those of you who have kindly informed us of a positive LFT/PCR test result during the holidays, and as we start the new term. This will help to protect our school community once all our pupils and students return to school tomorrow.

In relation to testing, there has been a **change to the 90 days rule**. It is now the case that even if someone has tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 90 days, they are strongly encouraged to regularly take Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) at home, once they have completed their isolation period for their prior infection. Test and Trace has advised us that the rationale behind this change is to help identify potential new variants.

I am sure you will have heard on the news, that the Government issued new guidelines on Sunday relating to COVID-19 and the return of pupils and students to school. It remains the case that face-to-face education is the top priority, and we will continue to do our very best to support this. With this in mind, alongside the high number of cases of the new variant, the Department for Education (DfE) has now recommended that **face coverings** be worn, once again, in **classrooms**, as well as in **communal areas**. We understand that this advice will be reviewed on the 26th January, as part of the Government's review of all Plan B measures.

I would be grateful if you would please remind your child to bring an appropriate face covering to school, whilst these measures are in place. If your child is medically exempt, please provide the necessary evidence and contact us at pupilservices@sweynepark.com.

I am sure that you will not be surprised to hear that we are already aware of a number of staff who have recently tested positive, and are unable to return to school until they conclude their period of self-isolation. This staffing shortage is likely to remain the case over the coming weeks, and so I would like to apologise in advance for any disruption to teaching. Absent staff, who are well enough, will provide high quality cover work and/or livestream lessons. Where pupils and students are absent, due to COVID, they will continue to access remote learning in the usual way. Please do bear with us, should your child have more cover lessons than would normally be the case. As with all other schools, staff absence will be kept under constant review in terms of keeping the school operational. Should we meet the threshold whereby this is not viable, we may need to ask specific year groups to move to remote learning. This, of course, will be a last resort, but please do keep an eye on your emails for urgent updates. We will always aim to give you as much notice as possible should this situation arise.

Given that ventilation remains a significant mitigating factor in the spread of the virus, we will continue to ensure appropriate levels of ventilation and monitoring of CO₂ levels in our classrooms. As we are now well and truly in the winter months, pupils and students will be permitted to wear their coats during lessons. However, **full uniform must be worn underneath (including the school jumper)**, and non-Sweyne Park hoodies and sweatshirts will not be permitted.

Given the current state of affairs, it is more important than ever that pupils and students continue to take twice weekly LFTs and to record the results via TestRegister. Should your child test positive, and in line with the updated Government guidance on 22nd December, they should self-isolate for a period of 7 days, taking a LFT on day 6 and day 7 (24 hours apart). If both of these test results are negative, and your child does not have a high temperature, the period of self-isolation can end and your child can return to school from day 7.

And finally, the latest advice from the DfE states that any external examinations scheduled for this month, will go ahead as planned. Should there be any further advice on this, or updates from the DfE, Mr Hawkings (Assistant Headteacher i/c Exams) will write to those concerned.

As we, once again, find ourselves in an ever-evolving situation, all measures and advice are subject to change, and so please do continue to keep an eye on your emails for updated information.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and I wish you and your families all the very best for a happy and healthy 2022.

Kind regards



Katharine Dines
Headteacher

