



17 August 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

An Update on the New Academic Year at Durham Johnston Comprehensive School

I wrote to you in July and explained that we would plan very carefully during August for our full return to school. When providing guidance on the re-opening of schools, the Department for Education identified that there would be other announcements and updates during the summer months and we have waited before contacting you so as to share the most up to date information possible. Attached with this letter is an overview of the safety measures that we will implement to reduce the risk of coronavirus and to act upon the advice issued by the Department for Education on July 2020 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>). There have been a number of recent changes to their guidance and we wanted parents and carers to have the most up to date information.

We are very much looking forward to the return of students to school. As you know, we made sure that all students in Years 7-12 had the opportunity to spend time with their Form Tutors in June and July and that a number of lessons were available between for Years 10 and 12. We felt that this was very important for the wellbeing of students and, hopefully, that will make their return in September slightly less daunting. There will clearly be a number of differences in how the school will operate, but we will continue to offer a higher level of support for all students and will explain any necessary changes very clearly. This letter and its accompanying document outline some very important information and I would ask you to read it very carefully with your child so that they are fully prepared for the new school year. We will also spend time explaining all of the key changes to students upon their return.

The start of term

- The first day of the new school term is **Thursday 3rd September 2020**. Only new Year 7 students will be expected to be in school on that day. The closure of schools in March 2020 and public health guidance in June 2020 had a significant impact upon our usual transition programme and we feel that it is important that our newest pupils have the opportunity to settle into their new school. A small number of new Year 12 students who are joining us from other schools will also be invited into school on that day.
- On **Friday 4th September Years 11, 12 and 13 will return to school** so that we offer support for those students most affected by school closures and **Years 8, 9 and 10 will return on Monday 7th September 2020**.
- We expect all students to return to school in September. We have worked very hard over the summer to provide a safe environment and the Department for Education has identified that usual attendance procedures will apply from September onwards. **Please read the 'Attendance & Safeguarding' section on page 1 of the attached document.**

Changes to the School Day & Daily Routines

- There will be some temporary variations to the school day and our usual routines. These temporary arrangements are based upon guidance from the Department for Education and Public Health England in response to the ongoing Covid-19 emergency. We will adapt our plans based upon any changes to national or local guidance and will review them on a weekly basis. It is important that all members of our community understand that we will monitor and adapt our plans based upon experience. At this point we are unsure how long these temporary measures will be necessary.
- **Before School** – We will not be operating a staggered start to the school day as a large number of our students travel by school bus. Students **should not** be on the school site before 8.00 a.m. and will not have access to the school building before the start of the



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school day. They will have designated outdoor areas based upon their protective bubbles and will be asked to enter via designated entrances at specific times. Can I please request that you speak to your child about their journey to and from school and ensure that they understand the importance of social distancing. Please advise them not to gather in large numbers outside local shops and to go home immediately at the end of the school day. We will take firm action against any students behaving in an anti-social manner within the local community. **Please read the section on 'Travel to and From School' on page 2 of the attached document.**

- **Staggered break and lunch times by group** – Each protective bubble will have designated break and lunch times. **Please read the section on 'Lunch time and Outdoor Areas' on page 3 of the attached document.**
- **After School** – There will be a staggered end to the school day. Each protective bubble will be dismissed separately, with those who are walking home or being picked up leaving the school site immediately and those travelling home by school buses being dismissed and escorted to the school buses by their Year Leader and members of the school Leadership Group.
- **Uniform, Packed Lunches, Water, Lockers & Equipment** – As I wrote in July's parental letter, it is our expectations that all students will be in their full school uniform, in accordance with the Department for Education guidance. Detailed information regarding our uniform is available on the school website and a leaflet was sent to all parents in July too. Students will be given specific advice regarding PE lessons and the kit that will be needed upon their return to school. Students should bring their own water to school and we advise that those who can, should bring their own packed lunch and nutritional snacks. All students should bring their own equipment to school and will, unfortunately, not be able to borrow or use school equipment. Students will need a pencil case, blue/black pens, pencils, a pencil sharpener, 30cm ruler, eraser and glue stick. It will be vital as of September that students bring the materials that they need to school on a daily basis and that they are well organised. Please also be aware that school lockers and water fountains will not be available as part of the new temporary measures that are in place.
- **Face Masks** – The current advice is that face masks are not required in school. However, if you would like your child to wear a face mask then they are allowed to do so. Students should also be aware that some teachers and support staff might wear face masks or visors in the classroom, or as they move around the school. All face masks should be plain or patterned; they cannot have slogans, badges or any offensive terms or phrases. **Please read the section on 'Uniform & Equipment' on page 2 of the attached document.**
- **Protective Bubbles** – The school will be divided into a number of protective year group bubbles to limit the number of social interactions that take place within the day. Each bubble will have its own classrooms, toilets, outdoor space and entrances. One way systems will also be operated within each bubble.
- **Social Distancing, Hygiene, Cleaning, and Use of Toilets**– We will emphasise, on a daily basis, the importance of good hygiene and social distancing. We expect all members of our school community to understand why such measure are necessary and to be considerate towards others. We will open all available windows and doors within the school to aid ventilation and students need to be aware of why this is necessary and will be continued as the weather grows colder. **Please read the sections on 'Social/Physical distancing, Use of Toilets and Hygiene and Cleanliness' on page 3 of the attached document.**
- **Lunch arrangements** – We will have temporary dining arrangements in place from September onwards. It is advisable if possible that your child brings a packed lunch, water and snacks with them. However, we will be serving lunch in year group bubbles in the main dining area, with healthy grab and go options and hot meals being served. Each protective bubble will have its own dining space and we will encourage students to be outside in the fresh air at lunch and breaktime where possible. Staff and 6th form students will not be able to leave the school site at lunch time and the current national advice is that students or staff members leaving for an appointment cannot return until the following day, so as to avoid the potential for community transmission. **Please read the sections on 'Lunch Time' on page 3 of the attached document.**

- **Parents & Carers** – The current Department for Education advice is that the school should limit access to the school site for all external visitors, including parents and carers. This is clearly far from ideal. We will provide parents and carers with a weekly update outlining any changes to our plans and will also make sure that telephone or conference calls are made where parental meetings are not possible.

Changes to the Classroom & School Curriculum

- **The Timetable for September** – We have tried to maintain a 'normal' timetable for September, whilst also providing an increased level of safety and fewer opportunities for community transmission. As you will appreciate, this has been a difficult balancing act in a large, over-subscribed comprehensive school. We will review our current provision on a weekly basis and will make adaptations where we feel necessary. The school will deliver a full curriculum entitlement in different zones, with specialist classroom provision being prioritised for Years 10 to 13. Students will be taught all lessons within their protective bubble. We have worked hard since July to ensure that we deliver a full curriculum entitlement for all students and one that allows us to offer additional support where possible.
- **Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9)** – We will start the school year by teaching students in their form classes for the majority of their lessons. They will be assigned a classroom for the majority of lessons, there will be seating plan and students will sit at the same desk where possible. Teachers will rotate from lesson to lesson, always maintaining a 2 metre distance in the classroom. Our planning allows for some setting to still take place in Maths and English within the year group bubbles, if, over time, we feel that it is safe enough to do so. This will mean that students will only be able to access specialist classrooms for practical subjects (Art, Computing, DT and Music) on a rotational basis, or not at all. Our teachers in those subject areas have been thinking very carefully since July about how they will continue to deliver a full and enjoyable curriculum in non-specialist classrooms and without access to their usual range of resources.
- **Key Stages 4 & 5 (Years 10-13)** – Guidance from the Department for Education acknowledges that the curriculum for GCSE and A Level courses requires students to access specialist classrooms. We have planned very carefully so that Years 10-13 can access the full range of specialist classrooms where necessary (Art, Computing, DT, Music & PE) and so that an effective cleaning regime can be implemented. All GCSE and A Level subjects will be taught within the designated protective bubbles and we have turned our main hall, activity studio and former library into teaching spaces. Whilst this has taken a significant level of effort over the summer months, we feel it to be essential in order to give students the best possible chance of success in their 2021 exams and to also offer Years 10 and 12 a positive start to their qualifications.
- **Microsoft Teams** – We will continue to develop our Home Learning offer and to develop our protocols for Teams. We have planned additional training sessions for KS3 students via their Computing lessons and form periods. We will maintain all of our current online resources and all classes will be assigned to a new Team with their subject teachers as of September. All of the key materials used in lessons will be uploaded so that absent students can continue to follow the curriculum.
- **The Classroom** – Students will sit within a designated seating plan for each of their lessons. This is an important part of our planning and is intended to support the NHS test and trace system if necessary. Teachers have worked hard in the summer months to streamline lessons and to plan the curriculum very carefully. We will provide a half-termly update on the curriculum content being studied by each year group and the nature of assessment and additional support being offered.
- **PE Lessons** – Lessons will take place as normal, with a focus on sports that allow for greater social distancing and independent, outdoor activities. The PE changing rooms are within the Year 7 & 8 protective bubble. Therefore, Years 9-11 need to wear their PE kits to school on the days that they have PE lessons. We will explain this very clearly to students and there will be no PE lessons in the first week of term.

- **Exercise books & Marking** – Students will need to be very organised from September onwards and will need to bring the correct exercise books and resources on a daily basis. All assessed work will be completed on paper, or via Microsoft Teams.
- **Homework & Planners** – All homework will be set in the usual manner, with work being set via the students' planners or Microsoft Teams. Students will be issued with their planners on their first day back at school and the normal routines and expectations will apply. Whilst teachers will not sign planners, they will check for a weekly signature from parents and carers.
- **Extracurricular Activities & Clubs** – We traditionally offer a substantial amount of enrichment activities at Durham Johnston and participate in a huge number of competitions, performances, clubs and societies. Clearly, this will not be possible in the short term as we prioritise safety, social distancing and the curriculum. However, if possible, we intend to trial some after school PE activities in the third week of term and then to identify which other clubs might be possible. We will provide a weekly update via the school's Friday Bulletin.
- **Rewards and the House System** – We will continue to award House points and to run house competitions. We will reward students for helping others, making a positive contribution to the school community and coping effectively with difficult circumstances.
- **NHS Test & Trace and Possible School Closure** – All organisations in recent months have had to hope for the best, but to plan for the worst. We are hopeful that the re-opening of the school will run very smoothly and that students will quickly adapt to our new routines and systems. However, please read the guidance on '**NHS Track & Trace**' on page 4 of the **attached document** very carefully so that you understand what is necessary if you or a family member display symptoms. In the event of a wider outbreak in school and the possibility of closure we will move to full online provision as soon as reasonably practicable.

We are very excited about a full return to school. The students that came into school in June and July had a very positive experience. Students and their teachers clearly enjoyed spending time together and school provides an opportunity to study, forge friendships and to learn from others. All of these things have been denied in the short-term, but we have planned very carefully since July so that a degree of normality can be restored for all those associated with the school.

We have learned a great deal from our recent experiences and, inevitably, the next few weeks will represent a very steep learning curve. You have my assurance that we will regularly review the systems that we have put in place and will do all that we can to keep students safe given the context of our size and building. We will work very hard to guarantee a wide curricular offer and the additional support that will help students to feel confident about their subjects, whether they are starting their first year at secondary school or preparing for GCSE and A Level examinations in 2021.

Yours faithfully

A J. O'Sullivan

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Headteacher