16 July 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

The school year ends officially today. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your support with your child's learning at home during the school closure, we know this has been a challenging time for us all. Thank you for also your patience as we have been considering carefully the government guidance on the full reopening of schools and the subsequent development of our plans for welcoming all of our students back in September.

As you know, last week the government stated that ***‘It is our plan that all pupils, in all year groups, will return to school full-time from the beginning of the autumn term’.***

We agree with the statement that ***‘returning to school is vital for children’s education and for their wellbeing’*** *a*nd we have been pleased to successfully welcome back students in Year 10 and 12 to school for some face to face contact over the last five weeks to provide some normality and reconnection with their learning. We are however aware that many students will not have had any face to face teaching for five months when they return in September.

For this reason the leadership team and governing body have formally considered the government guidance whilst taking into account the impact of lost learning on our young people. We want to provide, as the government states, a ***‘full educational experience…and start to reverse the enormous costs of missed education*’**. We acknowledge that it is not possible to ensure a totally risk-free environment but we will be introducing a wide range of ***‘proportionate protective measures for children and staff’***

**From September then we will aim to reintroduce as much as possible ‘education as usual’, with additional precautions to make this as safe as possible.** We will endeavour to find a workable compromise which enables ‘education as usual’ to go ahead as much as it can, while also minimising contact between pupils as much as possible.

We aim to minimise the potential for contamination so far as reasonably practical for our school and as such, from September, students in different year groups will operate in temporal ‘bubbles’. This approach means that students can continue to access a broad and balanced curriculum whilst avoiding any significant contact with other year groups which makes it quicker and easier in the event of a positive case to identify those who may need to self-isolate, and keep that number as small as possible.

Based on the advice of the health protection team schools must send home those people who have been in close contact with a person who has tested positive, advising them to self-isolate for 14 days since they were last in close contact with that person if they were infectious. Close contact means:

* direct close contacts - face to face contact with an infected individual for any length of time within one metre, including being coughed on, face to face conversation, or unprotected physical contact (skin to skin)
* proximity contacts - extended close contact (within 1 to 2 metres for more than 15 minutes) with an infected individual
* travelling in a small vehicle, like a car, with an infected person

**In order to minimise ‘close contact’ different year groups will have slightly staggered starts and ends to the school day, and will have all breaks and lunches at different times and in different areas of the school. This will allow us to deliver the best possible curriculum, avoid students being left in classrooms unsupervised, and will minimise contact with other year groups to transitionary situations.**

**Students will still move around the school for their lessons in order to allow us to deliver the full range of curriculum subjects and provide specialist teaching and although the government states that *‘passing briefly in the corridor is low risk’* we are also introducing a one way, open door, system to further minimise the risk and avoid busy corridors, entrances and exits.**

As students will be operating as a large year group other measures from the system of controls are therefore very important to minimise transition we will therefore have:

* Staggered break and lunch times in order to reduce pressure on social spaces and keep year group bubbles apart.
* Separate social areas, so that where students from different year group bubbles are on break or lunch at the same time, they are kept separate from one another.
* Some limited staggering of start and finish times to reduce pressure on entrances and exits.
* There will be a one-way system on corridors and stairwells will be one way too – either up or down only.
* Visual reminders around the school site
* Robust hand and respiratory hygiene
* Hand sanitisers in every classroom
* Regular hand washing regimes and outdoor wash basins at different points around the school
* A briefing for all staff and students at the beginning of the year and regular reminders
* Robust procedures should a child or member of staff display symptoms of coronavirus
* Students will face forward or side by side with the teacher at the front of the class
* Windows will be open for increased ventilation
* No assemblies or large gatherings
* Outdoor sports where possible
* More regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces - touchpoints will be cleaned throughout the day and toilets.
* We will ensure that, wherever possible, students use the outdoor routes around the building to minimise passing other students in corridors.
* We will be advising staff and students to maintain social distance at all times in the classroom and all we will seat pupils side by side and facing forwards and we will introduce seating plans in place to minimise students mixing within different classrooms and to make it easier to engage with NHS Test and Trace process.

We feel that the control measures implemented are sensible and proportionate to reduce the risk to the lowest practicable level however they will be regularly reviewed at the end of every half-term and if we experience a coronavirus case.

We very much look forward to your child starting back at school in September and hope you agree that the measures we have put in place strike an appropriate balance between providing the best possible educational experience for your child whilst minimising any potential spread of the virus.

**First week of term**

As I explained a couple of weeks ago, the first three days of term in September will look different to previous years.

**Monday 31 August** is a Bank Holiday and the school will be closed.

**Tuesday 1 September** is a Training Day for staff.

**Wednesday 2 and Thursday 3 September** – new Year 7 only

**Friday 4 September** – Year 7 will attend the whole day; the other tear groups from Year 8 to Year 13 will come in for three hours at some point this day.

* Year 8 will attend from 9am to 12pm
* Year 9 will attend from 9.15am to 12.15pm
* Year 10 will attend from 9.30am to 12.30pm
* Year 11 will attend from 9.45am to 12.45pm
* Year 12 and 13 will also attend this day for a tutorial and familiarisation visits – the time will be confirmed after enrolment.

While I know you will be very keen for all children to be back as soon as possible I hope you understand our rationale behind this. Many other schools do this every year anyway but I am sure you understand that the students who are joining our school next year have had no transition activities whatsoever and many of them will not have even been to our school yet. It will be daunting for all young people coming back to school as it is, but it will be especially daunting for the new Year 7 students. Other local high schools are doing something similar. Throughout the three days that week, Year 7 will be involved in arrange of activities which will allow them to spend time with their tutor and their form class, meet key staff, find their way around the building and learn more about routines and expectations in their new school.

For Year 8 to Year 13, all students will need a full induction and there will be a lot of changes we will need to take them through. To enable this to be successful, we are asking students to attend for a half-day on that Friday to spend time with their form tutor. There will be a brief break during the session but there will be no lunch. Thank you for your understanding and patience around this.

The full timetable will then begin on Monday 7th September.

**What will school look like in September?**

We envisage that school will look as normal as possible in September with the school day running from 8:40am until 3:00pm. Slightly staggered start and end times, and staggered and separate break and lunch times will be in place in order to reduce pressure on social spaces and keep year groups apart. This will be explained fully to the students in September but the access times to the building will be slightly staggered between 8.30 and 8.40 and end times will be between 2.50 and 3.05 (though students who need to get the scholars bus will all leave in time). Each year group will still have a 15 minute break at some point between 9.45 and 11.00 and each year group will have a 30 minute lunch at some point between 11.50 and 1.20pm. Hygiene regimes will be in place to keep everyone as safe as possible. This will include hand washing and/or hand sanitising upon entering the building and at the beginning and end of each lesson and break / lunch time. Frequent hand washing where possible will also be encouraged and the necessity for good respiratory hygiene will be emphasised. Classrooms will remain well ventilated and pupils will be encouraged to move between lessons using the outside space wherever possible

**What will our classrooms look like?**

They will look very similar apart from the fact that all the tables and chairs are in rows and are facing the front. In the occasional classroom where this is not possible (for example a couple of Science classrooms) other measures will be put in place.

**Will the school be following a full timetable of curriculum subjects?**

Yes, we fully intend to offer all our children the usual breadth of subjects available at George Stephenson High School. Teachers will gauge where the children are in their learning and tailor their lessons accordingly for any learning that has been missed.

**Will the children be required to wear school uniform?**

Yes. Please refer to our uniform list for what your children will need to be ready for school.

The government guidance encourages all schools to return to their usual uniform policies in the autumn term. They say that uniform can play a valuable role in contributing to the ethos of a school and setting an appropriate tone and that uniforms do not need to be cleaned any more often than usual, nor do they need to be cleaned using methods which are different from normal.

**What about PE?**

We want to make sure that children can have access to their PE lessons every week. We will confirm in September exactly how PE will work. Hand sanitisation will take place at the beginning and end of each lesson. Currently Government guidance is advising against any contact sport being taught and we will be following the guidance and await further updates.

**How will the children get to school in September?**

Schools have been asked to encourage parents, staff and pupils to walk or cycle to school if at all possible. Nexus have also asked us to actively promote walking and cycling as the best choice for pupils and provide where possible facilities to support this. We have new larger and secure bicycle storage facilities.

Nexus will be planning to run the scholars’ buses, as in previous years. More details will follow. They have asked us to remind parents that the wearing of face covering on public transport is mandatory for children aged 11 and over, except where an individual has exemptions for medical reasons. People without face coverings may be refused travel. The government guidance says that pupils on dedicated school services do not mix with the general public on those journeys. This means that the advice for passengers on public transport to adopt a social distance of two metres from people outside their household or support bubble, or a ‘one metre plus’ approach where this is not possible, will not apply from the autumn term on dedicated transport.

**Can we meet our children at the end of the day?**

Government guidance clearly stipulates that parents and carers should not gather around the school gate at the beginning or end of the day and we request that this guidance is followed.

**How can parents communicate with school?**

Unfortunately, parents and carers are not allowed on site unless they have made a prior appointment. The school planner has traditionally been an important line of communication with school. Parents are also welcome to contact the school by phone and email.

**Catering**

The school is still finalising the details of our Catering Cashless provision for September, thank you to all parents that have register their biometrics consent so far. More details will follow in the coming weeks.

We know that you may have some concerns over the time your child has missed at school and want to reassure you that, from September, teachers will take the time to understand what your child has learned and what they might need more support with. Much of this support can be given in class but, where a student needs additional help, other intervention will also be available. We hope that the school will not need to close again, but should that be necessary, we have plans in place to transition back to a remote learning model similar to that which has operated this half term with teachers setting weekly work by email, making regular contact with students and providing feedback. Your child's learning is of paramount importance to us and we will endeavour to do everything we can to support them over the next year.

Over the summer, we feel it is important that students take a well-earned break and try to get outdoors and begin to socialise with friends and family in line with government guidelines. I hope you and your family can manage to have an enjoyable and relaxing summer and We very much look forward to your child starting back at school in September.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Wilkinson