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...still "outstanding"
(Ofsted, May 2013)

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Dear Parents/Carers, Staff and Governors,

I am very pleased with the way things have gone over the last five weeks; staff and pupils (Year 10s and Year 12s) have responded very positively to the partial re-opening of the school and all the necessary changes in routine. However, with the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, having spoken on Thursday of last week about the plan to re-open schools in September, I should now like to share with you our interpretation of the very latest guidance and how it will affect pupils, parents/carers and staff at the start of the new academic year.

On Friday of last week the Senior Management Team met to discuss the options and reached a number of conclusions; conversely, some of our strategies have yet to be finalised. Despite the lengthy document that has been published to help schools prepare for re-opening, there are still some unanswered questions. Even when further guidance is provided, I suspect that our plan will evolve slightly once we start to implement it in September; we may even have to reverse some of our decisions as we react to the situation on the ground. Mr Williamson has also made it clear that contingency plans will be needed in the event that the R-number increases and we are forced once again into full or partial lockdown, something that could happen nationally or, more likely, locally.

Mr Williamson's determination to get all pupils back into school was always going to clash with any attempt to keep all pupils and staff *completely* safe; the nature of the virus and how it is transmitted means that compromises would always be necessary. It is my job as Head not to eliminate the risk (which would be impossible) but instead to reduce it as much as I can in the context of our school and our ethos. I hope you agree with our general principle here: to resume as full a programme as possible of teaching and learning and to help pupils re-immerses themselves in a social environment with a view to supporting their mental health, both of which have suffered over these very difficult last few months.

The way the virus behaves, according to the experts, means that staff are at greater risk than the pupils, certainly when it comes to symptoms and illness. The measures we will be putting in place are therefore focussed on keeping staff away from the pupils and from each other as much as possible. As far as the pupils are concerned, Mr Williamson seems happy for them to mix socially, but it is important that we try to keep year groups apart as much as we can. By so doing and in the event of a pupil developing Coronavirus, we can quickly identify the extent of the possible contagion and potentially send a group of children home to self-isolate whilst retaining the majority in school. For 5 hours of the 6 ½-hour day, when pupils are in lessons, this will be relatively straightforward as pupils are not taught in mixed-age groups and seating plans will enable us to identify those children who have been in prolonged contact with a child who develops symptoms. The greater challenge comes at break and lunchtimes but even here, we can reduce the risk.

I have highlighted here the things that are different from the usual routines:

Staggered start of term (first week only)

- Year 7s and Year 12s ONLY will come in for one day, **Wednesday 2 September**. (Year 7s will have missed out on their usual transition day and will need our close attention and support as they get used to a new environment, in addition to the revised COVID Code of Conduct. Year 12s require an induction day of sorts. These two year groups can also be kept apart for much of the day, as can the staff involved in looking after them.)
- Year 8s and Year 9s ONLY will come in for one day on day 2 (**Thursday 3 September**).
- Year 10s and 11s ONLY will come in for one day on day 3 (**Friday 4 September**).
Welcoming back only two year groups at a time in the first week enables us to communicate more effectively the many messages and instructions, some of which are specific to certain year groups and all of which have increased as a consequence of the coronavirus restrictions. It also allows them to get used to the one-way systems etc. in a comparatively calm environment and without the presence of other members of the school.
- 'Normal school' will then resume for all pupils in all year groups on **Monday 7 September**.

Home-to-school transport

- We are liaising with the Local Authority and local bus companies but we are envisaging that the wearing of facemasks *may* be either advisory or compulsory. In all other respects, transport will, in theory, run as normal. We will of course update you as and when we receive additional guidance.

Equipment for Learning (E4L)

- In addition to the usual 8 items of equipment we expect pupils to have (writing pen, pencil, sharpener, ruler, eraser, calculator, red pen, green pen), we will now insist on them bringing the following with them every day:
 - Their own **mini-white-board and pen** (which we will provide on the pupils' first day back in school). This is to prevent the sharing of this frequently used teaching and learning tool.
 - Their own **glue stick** – for the same reason.
 - A **pocket-sized bottle of hand sanitiser**. Whilst the school have plenty of dispensers in school to cope with the Year 10s and Year 12s we have in school currently, the sheer number of additional pupils and the increased frequency of need will render our provision of hand sanitiser unmanageable. Moreover, if pupils are able to access their own supply before and after lessons, before and after using the toilets etc., this will maximise teaching and learning time and will reduce queuing at dispensers. At the most critical points (e.g. near the cash top-up machines and keypad codes), pupils can still make use of the dispensers on the wall.
- Pupils are also advised to bring with them:
 - **A packet of tissues** for personal use
 - **A bottle of water** (as water fountains may still not be in use)

Please note that we cannot lend out equipment anymore. With the virus still very much at large, equipment changing hands is an avoidable risk. (If teachers need to hand out paper/books etc., they will be required to sanitise their hands first.)

Tuck and lunch

- In the initial stages, tuck will only be provided at break for Year 10s and 11s (because they tend to use this service more than other year groups) and on a rota basis. Year 12/13 students can access the facilities at the start of period 3 if they do not have a lesson. (The risk of virus transmission is too great here if more than two year groups have access to tuck simultaneously, and the short length of the break makes it virtually impossible for us to get mixed-aged groups of pupils safely through the canteen.) Pupils in other year groups can bring a healthy snack from home to eat at break in their classroom.
- Lunch will continue as normal – as per the usual year-group rota. However, pupils will not be able to mix with other year groups and will be designated a row of tables by the member of staff on duty, as they come through the queue. Each row of tables, as each is vacated, will then be wiped down by the duty staff before the next year group arrives. Pupils will be required to sanitise their hands immediately prior to using the thumbprint machine by the till. (The same will apply when they use the cash top-up machines around school.)
- Those with a packed lunch will have their lunch in J-Block Hall (not the Main Hall), partly to alleviate the increased logistical problems in the Main Hall. This will be monitored by staff to reduce cross-year-group transmission.

Children's free time

- This will present the greatest challenge for all concerned as we try to reduce the risk of year groups mixing. When the weather is fine, the risk is minimal as most children tend to go outside. In inclement weather, we will designate areas where pupils can congregate; this is likely to be their Form Room.

Intimacy between pupils

- Although this has always been frowned upon at NTS, pupils should expect us to be even stricter on this front and for obvious reasons.

Close contact sports (e.g. rugby)

- These will not take place for the foreseeable future. This is a great shame and we are hoping to provide COVID-safe alternatives until the ban is lifted.

Use of equipment in Art, Science, Technology, Music and PE lessons

- This is one area that requires greater consultation and more detailed investigation by/with the relevant Heads of Department but essentially, each department will have their own means of reducing the risk of virus transmission and the use of equipment is likely to be slightly reduced, especially if it cannot be cleaned safely between sessions.

Marking of pupils' books

- Teachers have a number of options here. They can wear gloves to protect themselves when they take in, mark and return books or use mats/card/material placed under their hand. The alternative is to leave the books untouched for 72 hours before they are handled but this is likely to be impractical in most cases. Some teachers are likely to make the most of electronic marking as a fourth option, something that has become customary over the last few months.

Homework for Years 7-9

- Key Stage 3 pupils will receive no homework for the first 3 weeks. Given that these pupils have not been in school since late March, the focus in the initial stages will need to be on re-establishing basic school routines and teaching and learning in the classroom, and younger pupils are likely to find this quite tiring at the outset.

One-way systems and signage

- Although the risk of transmission is minimal as pupils pass each other in the corridors, the layout of our site means that some corridors are quite narrow for the volume of traffic. So, we will retain the remnants of the current COVID-safe one-way system (with minor alterations) in addition to the 2m distance signs and tape on the floor – as a visual reminder to all that the virus is still prevalent. Pupils (and staff) will be advised to use the outside space where possible as they move from one area to another.

Pupils facing the front

- Although pupils face the front of the classroom in most lessons, some classrooms will need slight alterations to the furniture layout (where possible). In some cases, this may not be possible but we are considering using Perspex screens in such instances.

Staff gatherings

- Staff will be advised to avoid common rooms and keep 2m away from pupils as much as they can. (At the very least, occupancy will be limited.) The clinically vulnerable will have Perspex screens installed on the desks for further personal protection and will be subject to personalised risk assessments. PPE will continue to be provided for those whose roles require closer contact with children. Briefings/meetings will be held either virtually or with socially-distanced seating.

Postponed events

- It is with deep regret that we will have to **cancel or postpone indefinitely the following Autumn Term 'set-pieces'** as they constitute too great a risk to the safety of those attending. (We may be able to host some of these later in the year if the virus becomes less prevalent.)
 - Year 11 Results Day (You will receive separate details pertaining to the 'solution' here).
N.B. Year 13 Results Day will take place *but with strict social distancing rules.* (This is a much smaller cohort and there will also be greater need for one-to-one conversations to take place with our advisers.)
These arrangements are subject to us receiving further guidance.
 - Year group assemblies in the Main Hall. (Although guidelines suggest that pupils in the same year group can mix, sitting all pupils in an entire year group shoulder to shoulder is an unnecessary and avoidable risk. Assemblies are therefore likely to be delivered virtually if chairs cannot be spaced out sufficiently.)
 - All Parent/Teacher meetings. (We are working on a 'solution' here!)
 - Open Evening (although there will be 'virtual' presentations, and we will be able to give carefully controlled tours to visiting families provided they book in advance and do not mix with other visitors)
 - School Photos (whole school and individual)
 - Music Concerts

- Prize Days. (**Certificates and prizes will still be issued to Year 11s but as part of a more low-key event**)
- Work Ready Day
- Remembrance Service for visitors (in the library); members of the school will attend as normal but with year groups separated
- Carol Services (St. Mary's Church)
- All UK overnight trips
- All international trips

Founders' Day Service (in St. Mary's Church): this *may* still go ahead as only two year groups attend and it should be possible for them to observe social distancing.

Visitors on the school site

- Given the risk posed both to and by adults visiting the school site, visits will be by appointment only and will need to be conducted within social distancing guidelines.

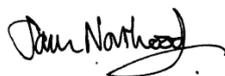
In most other respects, the school will run as normal.

This, then, is a broad outline of our plans for September. Between now and then, things may well develop, but at least you have an idea now of how things might run. If you have any queries or suggestions, please let me know.

I will update you when I can if we make major changes to the above arrangements.

Finally, I should like to reiterate my thanks here for your support of the work we have done over the last few months. I have heard numerous accounts of parents/carers pulling out all the stops to encourage their children to complete work and I am very grateful to you all. I do hope children acknowledge the lengths both parents/carers and staff have gone to; although pupils may not appreciate it now, they will of course be the ultimate beneficiaries.

Kind regards,



Mr DS Northwood
Headmaster