

4th Jan 2022.

Dear Parent or Carer

Happy New Year to you and to all of your family! I hope you've made the best of the winter break and managed to spend some quality family time together in the last two weeks.

Covid update.

Throughout the winter holidays, I, alongside other school leaders, have been monitoring the ongoing situation regarding the Omicron variant and constantly listening out for relevant updates and new information coming from central government.

The headlines are both worrying and encouraging at the same time. When I began writing this letter on the 30th of December, the reported new daily cases hit just under the 190,000 mark which set a new record but encouragingly, government, and many media outlets, are increasingly reporting that the now more common Omicron symptoms are significantly milder than Delta variant symptoms.

The government are aware that the current self isolation expectation is an issue for all frontline services like ourselves and you'll probably already know that people testing positive for Covid only need to self isolate for seven days now. You may also know that the government are under pressure to lower this figure even further given the high number of self isolating NHS, teachers, police officers and other essential public service personnel at the moment. My understanding is that this is under constant review as the challenge of maintaining sufficient numbers of healthy staff is a clear problem for all these services at the moment.

This morning Sunday, 2nd January, the government have just informed schools that all frontline/ face to face workplaces can expect to have 25% staff absence in the coming weeks and the top headline from now on is that, unless exempt, **secondary school students and staff will need to wear face masks in all indoor or classroom based lessons and activities.**

At WHS.

Here at school we had approximately 10/15% of staff either having tested positive or self isolating due to close family member infection at the end of the last half term. We had additional staff test positive at the beginning of the holiday period and, although this sadly took away their opportunity to spend Christmas with their families, the vast majority will be able to report for duty as expected at the beginning of this term.

You may also know that my office has again been converted to a testing centre at the school and will be in use throughout the staggered start for all year groups from January 5th.

Given the high levels of transmissibility of this particular variant, I will be continuing to insist that children and staff, unless exempt and as well as continue to test at home, all wear masks in communal areas around school and follow the standard Covid approach of **Hands, Face, Space** to help keep everybody as safe as possible.

Please do make it clear to your child that, unless they are exempt, from now on they will also be expected to wear a face covering in classrooms.
I'm hoping we don't have to come to this and I realise how challenging it will be for everyone at WHS wearing a mask all day, but in the interests of safety at this challenging time for us, any refusal to comply may lead to your child being sent home.
Please see Mr Raw's letter, which I've added at the end of my letter for more information here.

Our options if the situation worsens.

It remains a very high priority for me to ensure that every one of our students continues to be able to come to school every day and receive the highest standards of education here at WHS. A number of other local Tower Hamlets schools were forced to send individual year groups home due to a lack of available staff at the end of last half term but thankfully we managed to avoid being in that situation.

What WHS and other schools have found compoundingly concerning is that the supply agencies which we often use for teacher cover have also now only limited numbers of available supply staff due to Covid isolation.

The number of new cases growing at the rate they are is, of course, worrying and if the situation worsens then I cannot guarantee that I will be able to have enough staff to provide a safe and adequate learning experience for everyone.

Although I fully intend to avoid sending any individual year group home, I may well have to take this necessary action if these additional staff can't be found and/or the government decide not to reduce the isolation period which is looking increasingly unlikely now.

If we do need to take this action then rest assured we will ensure the quality of remote learning is the very best it can be and we will resume face-to-face learning as soon as staff become available again.

Volunteers

You may well be aware that the government is asking for retired teachers to help out at this critical time regarding predicted worsening staff absence from January onwards.

You may also be aware that in the USA, other members of local communities around schools that have been equally hit hard by school staff absence have also been asked to give up some time to help support their local school.

I would therefore like to ask any of you that has a current DBS check, and is a retired teacher or a retired LSA, or somebody that does community work etc, if you would like to help us out in this most challenging of situations then please do contact me directly on headteacher@wappinghigh.org and I'd be delighted to work out with you how you might help. We would all be most appreciative here if you could help out in any way you feel you can.

Finally, please do take care at this continually challenging time and do your best to get your child upbeat and optimistic about the remainder of this important year of their secondary education.

My best wishes for 2022.



Gary Nelson
Headteacher

Letter from Mr Raw, Deputy Head.

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that this letter finds you well and you managed to enjoy some well deserved family time over the winter holiday.

You will no doubt have already seen by now in the news that students will be required to wear face masks in classrooms upon their return to school. While I appreciate that this is not ideal in terms of comfort, I do feel that this is the right decision when you consider the rising levels of infection due to the Omicron variant. As Mr. Nelson has mentioned in the earlier part of this letter, it is essential that teachers and school staff are kept free from infection as much as possible so that we can continue to remain open at full capacity.

For clarification, face masks will of course still be mandatory in corridors and communal areas of the school as before in addition to the new classroom requirement and it is the responsibility of the parent/carer to ensure that your child is equipped with a mask. While the vast majority of students do turn up wearing a mask, the school does continue to give out a large number every day to students who continually forget to bring one in. I am sure that you can appreciate that our supply is both finite and comes at a cost which would be better spent on education so I must appeal for your support here.

Finally, it is essential that students do follow the rule of wearing a mask in order to keep everyone as safe as possible from Covid-19 unless they are exempt. Should a student repeatedly refuse to wear a mask then I am afraid that the school may well have to ask him/her to go home until a meeting between the school and family can be made where assurances will need to be given. This is not something that I take any pleasure in writing but the school must prioritise the education of all students along with the health and safety of all students and staff over an individual who cannot follow this important directive.

In the meantime, we look forward to welcoming your child back for the staggered start to term beginning on Wednesday. This is as follows:

Wednesday 5th - Year 11

Thursday 6th - Year 10

Friday 7th - Year 9

Monday 10th - Year 8

Tuesday 11th - Year 7

Thanks and best wishes to you all.

Mr. T. Raw
Deputy Headteacher