



18 February 2022

Dear Parents/Carers,

I hope that you, your family and your friends are all well.

Firstly, I would like to outline why I took the decision to close the school today following the issue of a 'red weather warning' for the Southeast at 4am this morning. It quickly became apparent that, with the cancellation of train services, the announced closure of an increasing number of primary schools (to the children of our staff), the concern surrounding safe travel home for students and the risk of personal injury to students and staff, that the right decision was to close the site and ask students to work remotely. Since making this decision, we have received affirmation from West Sussex County Council that this was the correct course of action. I apologise for any disruption to you and your family and I am hopeful that you will understand the reasons for the decision as outlined above.

I am also writing to outline our plan to return to an optional use of face coverings for students and staff from Monday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022. The government guidance which outlined that students were no longer advised to wear face coverings in classrooms, corridors or communal areas was issued last month. Our decision to maintain a policy of requesting continued use of face coverings, in corridors and communal areas, was made as a result of the high number of cases of Covid-19 contraction we were facing last month. I am pleased to inform you that, we are in a much better position at present. In view of this, I now feel more confident that the school can work to a level which supports the optional use of face coverings for those who would wish to use them. This decision is based on the following information:

- the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 has reduced by approximately 60% in February 2022 alone
- half-term and end of term holidays have previously acted as a natural 'firebreak' which has seen reported case contraction rates significantly reduce, even further, when students return to school
- there are no concerning contraction numbers in any of our year groups at present

I do accept that the decision to return to a lower level of covid-safety protocols will polarise opinion. Some will feel that it is too soon for a return to a more traditional experience of school life and some will feel that this decision should have been reached before now. Whilst recognising that there is no perfect solution to please everybody...I can promise that any member of our school community will be supported to feel confident and comfortable to

continue using a face covering if they choose to do so. The support of our students and staff has been invaluable in ensuring site safety whenever we have needed to step-up our security processes. This can only work, in any organisation, for reasonable amounts of time before that support starts to fray. Rather than see that happen, and not be able to call upon it again in future times of need; I would sooner make the decision now to encourage each individual to feel comfortable and confident to decide what works for them whilst understanding that our site-safety procedures will return as and when necessary.

Further to this, the government has confirmed that public examinations will go ahead for Year 11 students this summer. In view of this, we have had to take the decision to familiarise Year 11 students with largely populated examination venues such as the school hall. The hall will also be used for examinations in other year groups which means we need to support students in feeling confident to be back in larger spaces. Having monitored the contraction rates for Year 11, throughout the mock-exam period, we can confirm that our fully air-conditioned school hall has proven to be as safe a venue as any other area around the school (corridors/dining halls etc) even though face coverings were not compulsory during mock-examination periods of up to 2 hours. As a result of this, I now feel it appropriate to start a phased use of our school hall again for assemblies, within year group bubbles, as is the case in the other local schools that we benchmark with. Having the assemblies again will give us the opportunity to celebrate the many successes our students show and give us a better chance to come back together as a school community than we have been able to do whilst having remote assemblies. This position will, of course, be reviewed if we see any concerning rise in the number of confirmed cases of covid-19 within our school community.

I would like to thank you, in advance of your support and understanding for the decisions we are having to make and, also, for your support throughout the difficulties we have encountered over the last two years. Clearly the future will involve navigating our way through a continuation of difficult times. Please rest assured that we will do our very best to ensure that we are putting our school community first in the decisions that we make.

Once again, thank you most sincerely. I hope that you can enjoy any family time that you can have with your daughter over half-term.

Yours faithfully,

**Chris Keating**  
**Headteacher**