

CWA/GHA

23 August 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: Arrangements for the Start of the Autumn Term

I hope it's been a productive week since I last conversed with you. It certainly has been from an academy perspective with a fantastic new Year 7 Summer Camp taking place involving 120 students, large numbers of supporting staff and lots of fun activities mixed in with some really good classroom-based work too.

We also enrolled excellent numbers into the College and Year 12 last week, as well as continued with the significant amount of maintenance, decorating and reparation work that commenced the day after last term ended. Therefore, as things currently stand, both campuses will be looking as good as they ever have been come the start of next term, however, with the start of next term very much in mind, please find a number of points relating to this, and in the usual detail those of you who were parents and carers already will be used to in terms of the specific detail and actual length of the correspondence.

For those parents and carers who are new to the academy, this is how I usually brief our parents and carers before the start of a full term, especially since the onset of the pandemic period. This is so as to ensure our families are made fully aware of everything that is relevant and that they need to know, especially in terms of any changes from central Government and which in recent times, tends to come without notice or any form of prior consultation.

As last Monday's letter stated, I opted to delay writing and sending this letter by at least a week as multiple experiences throughout the pandemic period has taught me to expect further change even after the various updated guidance documents have been distributed. Low and behold, the day after, several unannounced very detailed updated guidance documents were sent out and it is primarily on these that the contents of this letter will be based. However, please note that for our current families, the vast majority of what we put in place, embedded and maintained even when the Government restrictions relaxed somewhat, will remain in place certainly for the majority of the first half of the Autumn term.

For anything that I believe is a significant change from what was in place previously, I'll be highlighting this in red. This will primarily relate to self-isolation and the identification of close-contact protocols and which I'll endeavour to explain as clearly as possible later on in this letter.

One final very important point to note before laying out the information you all need to know for the start of next term and that is it is of paramount importance is that as the stakeholders who make up the Plume Family, we need to adhere as best as we possibly can to what will now be highlighted. If we do, we will without doubt continue to benefit from almost negligible COVID-19 cases actually emanating in our academy as has been the case since the pandemic period started some 18 months ago now. It will also ensure that we remain vigilant for any cases that emanate within our local community – again, something I genuinely feel we have all done exceptionally well to date. Nevertheless, whilst keeping a very open mind with regards this ongoing matter that continues to affect all of our working and personal lives, it is abundantly clear that it will be around for some time to come and therefore, we must continue to treat the potential impact it can have in the most vigilant of manners.

Arrangements for the start of term

The majority of our staff will start back on Wednesday 1 September 2021 and engage in a professional development and final preparations day.

Our students will start back at 8:30am on Thursday 2 September with the exception of Year 13 who will return at the start of period 2.

They will all spend time in their form groups with their 2021-22 form tutors receiving relevant updates as well as their new timetables. Additionally, each year group will join a virtual assembly with their respective campus lead who will clarify the key contents of this letter as well as standards, expectations and aspirations for the academic year ahead. I usually conduct this assembly on a whole academy-level, however, this year, I have briefed Ms Everett for Years' 7 and 8, Mr Stoneman for Years' 9-11 and our new College lead, Mr Saunderson, for Years' 12 and 13, as to what the core content will be as I would like them to take these. I will be taking each year groups 'Discipline with Dignity' assemblies for the following week though.

Accessing Timetables

This year, students will only be able to access their new timetables via the platform FrogOS from 1 September 2021. As many of you know, this can usually be done a few weeks earlier, however, because of changes made by the company themselves, we are no longer able to do this at present.

As is always the case, to ensure a cross-campus timetable for over 1800 students and nearly 130 teaching staff is completed successfully and on time, work has to start on this for the year ahead almost as soon as the new academic year starts. However, due to the sheer numbers involved, there will invariably be the odd tweak that needs to be made. Therefore, if this proves to be the case for your child, they simply raise it with their form tutor who will direct them to their respective Assistant Head of Year. They will then raise it with our timetabling lead to investigate. Then, if anything needs adjusting, it will be done without delay.

Attendance

From the start of the Autumn term, attendance is mandatory. Normal absence notifications and requests will apply with any ensuing absences being passed through our dedicated option number via our main telephone lines, preferably before 8:30am on the morning of the absence.

All term time holiday requests need to be passed through to me direct.

Tracing close contacts and self-isolation

As it is highlighted in red, this denotes an aspect that has changed in terms of previous requirements and associated protocols.

Schools stopped being required to be involved in the identification of close contacts of confirmed positive cases from 19 July 2021, and close contacts are now being identified via NHS Test and Trace. As with positive cases in any other setting, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case and/or their parents/carers to identify close contacts with schools will only be contacted in exceptional cases to help with identifying close contacts.

Individuals are no longer required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, and any of the following apply:

- They are fully vaccinated.
- They are below the age of 18 years and 6 months.
- They have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial.
- They are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons.

Instead, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and strongly advised to take a PCR test. We also strongly urge any individual to take a PCR test if they are advised to do so.

Staff who do not need to isolate, and children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school, and have been identified as a close contact, should continue to attend school as normal. This is unless they return a positive test result themselves or are displaying any COVID-19 symptoms.

18-year-olds – members of our Year 13 cohort - will be treated in the same way as children until 6 months after their 18th birthday, to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated. At which point, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and so if they choose not to get vaccinated, they will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

Testing processes and protocols

Testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within schools. Therefore, as my previous letters about testing state, continuing to take regular rapid tests will only help us to identify infections early and reduce transmission.

As my previous letters also stated, over the Summer break, all academy stakeholders were encouraged to continue to test regularly which was why we provided testing kits to all of our families who opted into the academy's testing programme. This was because many of our students will have potentially mixed with lots of other people during the holiday period. Therefore, my colleagues and I also very much encourage as many of our students and their respective families to continue to test twice weekly at home until the end of September 2021 at least and when this process will be reviewed.

I strongly recommend that one of these tests takes place on the afternoon of Wednesday 1 September 2021, the day before our students return to the academy.

To our new Year 7 families, please find a link to the testing letter I sent out to you on Tuesday 20 July 2021 [here](#). Please pay particular attention to the testing support we are offering **from 9am on Wednesday 1 September 2021 at our Fambridge Road Campus**, as well as the link to upload your child's/children's LFD test outcome if you opt to do it at home instead.

Positive rapid lateral flow test results

This has not changed so anyone with a positive test result will need to let your child's Assistant Head of Year know as soon as possible and:

- Self-isolate in line with the [stay at home guidance](#). If they test positive whilst in the academy, as per established protocol, we will swiftly liaise with the student's parents/carers to confirm the next step arrangements.
- [Book a further test](#) - a lab-based Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test - to confirm the result.

Whilst awaiting the PCR result, the individual should continue to self-isolate.

If the PCR test is taken within the 2 days following the positive LFD result, and is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD test and your child can return to the academy, as long as s/he doesn't have COVID-19 symptoms that is.

If you have any questions about the asymptomatic testing programme, please email LFTesting@plume.essex.sch.uk and we will respond to you as soon as we possibly can.

If you suspect your child has coronavirus or has a positive test

Do not send your child into the academy if:

- They are showing one or more [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) symptoms](#).
- They have had a positive LFD or PCR test result.
- There are other reasons requiring them to stay at home. For example, they are [required to quarantine](#).

You should continue to follow the latest public health advice on [when to self-isolate and what to do](#).

Financial support to care for a child who is self-isolating

You may be eligible for a one-off Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 from the Local Authority if your child has been advised to self-isolate by their education or childcare setting (even where they have not been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace).

To be eligible, you must be either:

- The parent or carer of a child aged 15 or under.
- The parent or carer of a young person aged 16 to 25 with an Education Health and Care Plan.

You also need to:

- Be on a low income.
- Be unable to work from home.
- Be taking time off work to care for a child who is self-isolating.
- Be living in England.
- Meet the full [eligibility criteria](#).

You do not require an NHS Test and Trace Account ID number in order to claim.

Further information on [claiming financial support under the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme](#) is available. When you apply to the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme the Local Authority will also contact us to verify the information you've supplied. This includes your child's/children's:

- Name.
- Age.
- Dates of self-isolation.

This is a standard check against fraudulent claims, and may take place before or after a payment is made.

Holidays, travel abroad and quarantine

Again, as our families who were already with us have done brilliantly well throughout the pandemic period thus far, I politely ask that you continue to carefully plan your holidays, including that they occur during the published school holiday periods. This is to avoid seeking permission from me to take your children out of school or college during term time. Additionally, your ongoing support in ensuring any travel remains in line with the latest [national travel guidance](#) would be greatly appreciated.

Also, please do keep in mind that you and your children may need to self-isolate when you return from a trip overseas. Therefore, any self-isolation should also fall within the published school holiday periods.

Should such a situation arise where as a family, you are abroad and unable to return, we will work with you to understand your circumstances and your plans to return. We would, however, only encourage you to return when you are able and the latest Government legislation states it is safe to do so.

All students and families travelling back to England should adhere to [government travel advice](#) and plan for any required quarantine or self-isolation to avoid any impact on your child's/children's education. As we know, however, the 'red, amber, green' classification of countries can be changed at any time, and at very short notice, and you will need to respond to the latest rules on international travel, even if you have already left the UK.

Face coverings and school associated transport

The Government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law but expects, and strongly recommends, that they are worn in enclosed and crowded spaces. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to school or college. Therefore, until at least the next formal review by the Government planned for the end of September 2021, whilst moving between lessons and moving around inside both campuses, face coverings will still need to be worn. They will also still need to continue being worn on the buses and taxis our students use to travel to and from the academy.

On the double decker buses, we will also be keeping downstairs for Mill Road Campus students and upstairs for Farnbridge Road Campus students in place for the time being.

Whilst it will not be compulsory at the current time, students may also keep face coverings on in lessons and during form time should they wish to do so. Also, if your child needs to secure a face covering exempt lanyard, please contact your child's Assistant Head of Year in the first instance. However, if your child does secure one, s/he will be expected to wear this whilst moving between lessons and whilst on the academy's corridors.

Other established COVID-19 protocols that will remain in place until at least the next full Governmental review

- So as to ensure optimum ventilation throughout the academy, windows and doors will remain open as often as possible in all classrooms, teaching areas, offices and staff bases.
- Hand sanitiser will remain available in all of the above and students and staff will continue to be encouraged to use it upon entering as well as exiting a room or area.
- Antibacterial spray and wiping rolls will also remain in classroom and teaching areas.
- 'Catch it, bin it, kill it' will also continue to be encouraged and therefore, tissues will remain in all classroom and teaching bases.
- One way systems will remain in place across both campuses **but only during lesson changeovers and between the lesson movement bells, the start of break and the start of lunch. Last year, they were in place from 8:30am-3:10pm and throughout the day.**
- Designated year group areas will remain in place across both campuses during both break and lunch times.

The wearing of PE kit on the days our students have PE or Dance

This will remain in place primarily to avoid any form of prolonged crowding in our PE and Dance changing rooms at the start and end of lessons. We know it was something our families liked last year and for many reasons, however, whilst the vast majority fully adhered to the rule of wearing Plume Academy PE kit only, we fully expect all students to do so from the start of term. If this does not happen and fashion clothing is worn instead, the student will be challenged, contact made with home and an immediate amendment expected to be made. Should any student continue not to adhere to what is expected with regards this matter, his/her license to wear PE kit on the days s/he has PE or Dance will be removed. Still, let us hope we do not find ourselves in such a position whilst remembering that the vast majority of our students were fantastic with regards this matter last year.

Extra-curricular, fixtures, revision and enrichment activities

A full programme of these will commence very early in the new term all of which will be subsequently published through the usual channels including via our students themselves.

Trips and visits

Whilst these will commence in full, every single application will be carefully considered and the latest Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England (PHE) advice and guidance fully adhered to, as has been the case throughout the entire pandemic period.

In addition to everything I have outlined in this letter, please find the link to the latest version of the DfE's parents and carers COVID-19 guidance document which was also updated last Tuesday, [here](#).

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this somewhat lengthy and very detailed letter, including the numerous embedded links. I respect there is a great deal to take in, however, as has proven to be the case throughout the pandemic period thus far, I have every faith that our students will only continue to do exceptionally well in terms of what will continue to be expected of them. Additionally, I also have every faith that my colleagues and I will only continue to receive the same level of parent/carer support as we have done throughout the same period. As a direct result, and when the ongoing efforts of our team of tremendous teaching and support staff is also factored in, I wholeheartedly believe that whatever we have to face up to or overcome in the year ahead, it will be safely and successfully achieved with us also continuing to make our upward trajectory of progress at the same time.

Yours sincerely



Mr C A Wakefield
Executive Principal