



De La Salle School

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Dear Parent / Carer,

Parental Update

I managed to write last week's update about an hour before the regional lockdown was announced, so hopefully, there will be no further change between me writing this and sending it to you; and as it has been almost a day since I last wrote to you, I thought you would appreciate an update for this week.

Current Situation

Let me start by giving you an update on our current situation:

- This week we had 2 students test positive – one in Year 10 and one in Year 7, again these appear to be community transmission rather than school based.
- As a result, no action was required for Year 10 but a Year 7 class bubble was sent home to self-isolate.
- So far since 1st September, we have had 6 of the school community test positive for COVID19.
- We have currently have 91 students in self-isolation and 14 staff off school, these are for a variety of reasons: advice from test and trace, family members with symptoms etc.
- Our current attendance is 93% across the whole school.

Symptoms

Around this time of year, it is common for people to start to get coughs and colds. The following link to the BBC website provides a useful explanation of the differences between cold symptoms and COVID symptoms. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-54145299>

Face coverings

Thank you to the very positive response to face coverings becoming compulsory in shared indoor spaces in school. The vast majority of students have settled into this very easily and, of course, an occasional student might forget them. We are looking to get a small stock of re-usable masks which, if a child forgets their own, parents can purchase on ParentMail and we will provide to the child at cost.

Can you also echo our messages to your child that they should be worn in shops and at all times on buses.

Exemptions / Visors

We are aware that some students cannot wear a face mask for medical reasons eg severe asthma or for comfort reasons eg wearing glasses. In these cases we are happy for these students, or any other students, to wear visors rather than masks if they wish, or if exempt, they can be given a choice of badge / permission slip to show if challenged. We require parents to inform us of any exemptions and the reason for the exemption, via the main office.

Lunchtimes / Bad Weather

Apologies that this explanation is over-long and, if cold weather lunches are not an issue for you and your child, then please skip it, but several parents have been in touch about lunchtime arrangements.

Firstly, **all students** can access the dining rooms to eat their lunch, whether having hot meals or a packed lunch, they may, however, have to queue so that we can control the seating.

In normal times, finding a solution for the young people in bad weather at lunchtime is a challenge, and we would normally call upon our larger venues: Sports Hall and Main Hall to help accommodate up to 700 students, along with the dining room, some corridor space and a small number of classrooms we can just about manage.

Under current restrictions we cannot do this:

- We need to ensure students remain in bubbles.
- The Main Hall is not available as we are using it as a dining room to allow greater capacity for dining and cleaning in between bubbles.
- We can't have large gatherings of students, even when in the same bubble so this would mean smaller venues i.e. classrooms would need to be used.
- Using classrooms however is also not a regular possibility because:
 - o Students would need to be sat at their form desk (for track and trace we know who has sat in which seat / desk) as we cannot have students wandering and touching different desks etc For our cleaning staff, lunchtimes are busy ensuring toilets, dining tables etc are cleaned.
 - o Students would therefore need to be sat based upon their form seating plans, often away from their friends, in the seats that many will have been in for 5 hours of lessons.
 - o Our staffing at lunchtime is usually 15 staff which we struggle to recruit for, especially this year as working arrangements for staff are much more challenging e.g. with teaching staff having to move every lesson. If students were in classrooms, each would need supervision which, allowing for 2 year groups in the dining rooms, would still require an additional 16 staff, which we simply don't have.

I share these details to show that there are no simple solutions. Our current answer is the following:

- Lunch is 50 mins but of that:
 - o students have 5 mins to pack away and make their way to their areas
 - o We start staggering their return to class 10 mins before the end of lunch
 - o Each year group has around 15 mins in the dining space
 - o This leaves around 20 mins that they are exposed to the elements (without factoring toilet visits)
- I have already asked parents to ensure that their child is well wrapped up and dressed for that day's weather conditions.
- Yrs 7, 8 and 11 have existing shelter from rain in their yards, or nearby areas.

- Year 10 and 9 have very little shelter so on wet days we re-order the lunches to ensure Year 10 or 9 are last in for lunch, allowing them additional time in the dining room. This leaves just 1 year group to find additional space for.
- In **extreme weather (extreme cold / very heavy rain)**, our policy can then change to a classroom solution and additional staff have agreed, on these rare occasions, that they will give up their lunchtimes and help supervise students being in classrooms.

I realise this is not ideal but it is the best that we can manage with the resources and restrictions that we have. I know many young people will go out of an evening or weekend regardless of the weather for hours at a time, so hopefully, with your support and a decent coat and hood, the students can cope through the 20 mins they might be outside for at lunchtime.

Year 7 Pastoral Meetings

It is at this time of year that we usually arrange for Year 7 parents to meet with their child's form tutor to discuss how they are settling in. I am sure you will understand that it is not possible to bring large numbers of parents onsite at this time. Therefore, over the next two weeks, the Year 7 form tutors will be contacting all Year 7 parents by phone, in place of a face to face meeting.

Parking

We were doing so well, but as the weather has become a little colder, some parents are moving back to the school gate. On Thursday this meant 2 of the buses couldn't get through and blocked all of the road for about 10 minutes. As well as the raft of complaints I then receive from understandably irate neighbours, it makes crossing the children dangerous. Please think of others.

Students in isolation - school work

As the number of students required to self-isolate increases, we have begun to move towards using Microsoft TEAMS much more widely to ensure that all students have access to the materials and teaching that has taken place in school if they are absent.

Your child should check their class page on Microsoft TEAMS. This will direct them to the work that needs to be completed. This will usually be via Microsoft TEAMS, but may also direct them to other platforms such as Mathswatch and Educake.

I have attached a user guide for Microsoft TEAMS with this letter.

Open Evening

The local lockdown has now meant that we have had to change our plans for our Open Evening this year. We will now be holding a virtual Open Evening on Wednesday 7th October at 4.30pm and 6.30pm. Any prospective parents should email open@delasalleschool.org.uk for a choice of Zoom or Teams link to the event. We also have a range of information, virtual tours etc. on our website at <http://www.delasalle-st-helens.sch.uk/open-evening/>

Letter from Public Health England

Not only have you had to battle through my letter, but Public Health England have asked all schools to share a letter (attached) with parents.

Finally

Again I offer my thanks for your understanding and support throughout this time. It is certainly not how any of us want things to be, but it is important that we make the most of the situation for our students.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Rannard

Headteacher