



**The Priory School**

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Dear Parents and Carers

You may be aware of the recent update in government guidance, in relation to the wearing of face masks in schools. We have looked at this in line with our current case numbers for both staff and students in school. Whilst our case numbers are certainly lower than in the middle of the autumn term this is largely due to students and staff doing so well at adhering to the wearing of masks. Their introduction certainly helped us to significantly reduce the effects on the spread of Covid amongst pupils but also helped to preserve staffing levels ensuring we were able to provide face to face education on a daily basis. This is vitally important to not only ensure the best outcomes for our students but much more importantly provide the daily social and emotional contact with their peers. The current guidance still carries a heavy recommendation to wear a face covering in busy or crowded areas. Due to the nature of our older building and our student numbers, corridor spaces and classrooms are incredibly busy places where we cannot guarantee social distancing.

There were times during last term where staff absence due to Covid illness, was becoming very difficult to cover and specialist supply staff were in high demand. The increased use of supply staff also places an increased pressure on our school budget during a time where there has been no increase in our funding to compensate for this. Many of our teachers were also covering for colleagues during their own preparation time, willingly giving their time to keep the school open at all costs. This inevitably impacted on their well-being and workload. Within the latest guidance, although self-isolation has potentially been reduced we have not had a member of staff well enough or testing negative before the 10 day period (even though they are fully vaccinated) and therefore they are unable to return. This self-isolation period is still a requirement in the current guidance. If we were to remove face masks prematurely we could leave ourselves prone to staffing disruption which would not only affect curriculum delivery but our extra-curricular offer too.

In addition, we are aware of cases still being high in the wider community which could lead to a further spike in school. This is mirrored across our Trust of schools, where all schools will be retaining the wearing and use of face masks until we see a further dip in cases. The government have made it clear that there will be a further review of Plan B on 26<sup>th</sup> January. We always review our Covid plan on a weekly basis and as this date is only a week away we will reassess and review the guidance at this point. In the interim we will be continuing to ask students to bring a face mask to wear in school, unless they are exempt.

Thank you to all of you for supporting the school through this challenging time.

Kind regards

Mrs Pope  
Headteacher