

4th March 2021

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Chief Executive: Andrea Arlidge

Dear Parent/Carer,

### **Wearing of face masks in WMAT secondary schools**

I am writing to explain why we have decided to introduce the wearing of face masks by staff and students in classrooms. We have taken this decision because we believe it is essential at the current time to support the safe re-opening of our secondary schools from 8<sup>th</sup> March.

Prior to the current lockdown, the government's recommendation was that face coverings should be worn by staff and students in secondary schools when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing could not easily be maintained. We did introduce this into our secondary schools and believe that it was an effective control measure. It will continue to be a requirement and existing school regulations will still apply.

In light of the new variants that are more easily transmissible, the government is now also recommending that face coverings should be worn in classrooms, and during activities in secondary schools, unless social distancing can be maintained. In light of this new recommendation we are now introducing this requirement into our secondary schools for situations such as lessons where students cannot keep a two metre distance between themselves and another person.

We understand that some students and their families may not be in agreement with this and it is not a decision that has been taken lightly. The decision has been taken because we believe it is an important extra control measure that is warranted in light of the new variants that we know have been found in our area. It is a public health measure and very much in line with the message that we all have a responsibility to keep each other safe. We know that the wearing of face coverings helps to slow transmission, alongside the other measures such as asymptomatic testing, hand washing and good respiratory hygiene. We also believe it will help those individuals who are vulnerable or anxious to feel safer. The wearing of face masks in classrooms is being introduced as a temporary measure and will be reviewed at Easter. Face masks will not need to be worn doing PE lessons or in smaller group setting where social distancing can be observed.

Face visors or shields should not be worn as an alternative to face coverings. They may protect against droplet spread in specific circumstances but are unlikely to be effective in preventing aerosol transmission when used without an additional face covering.

Public Health England has provided the following information to support the safe wearing of face coverings:

- clean or sanitise your hands before and after touching your mask – including to remove or put it on
- store your face mask safely in an individual, sealable plastic bag between use
- bring a spare face covering to wear in the event that your face mask becomes damp during the day.

The normal exemptions will apply:

- individuals who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical impairment or disability, illness or mental health difficulties
- individuals who speak to or provide help to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate

We are very pleased that schools are re-opening as children and young people need to be in school. However, we know that the fight against the virus is not over. The decision to extend the wearing of facemasks into classrooms is, in our view, a sensible precaution to take and one which we hope will have a significant impact on our ability to control the spread of the virus in our schools. We have all made many adjustments, and sacrifices, over the last year and it is important to keep our guard up and continue to do everything we can to beat this virus, whilst we wait for the vaccinations to take effect.

Please give us your support with this and I hope we can continue to work closely together in keeping our schools open and students and staff safe.

Please accept my thanks in advance for your support.

Yours faithfully,



**Dean Anderson**  
**Principal**



**Andrea Arlidge**  
**Chief Executive**