

19th March 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

We have very much enjoyed the start of this week and welcoming all of our students back into school. It is wonderful to see them in person again, and for the school to have its characteristic purposeful buzz. Most students have been greeted with a LF test throat-swab, which is not how we would choose to do things ordinarily, but the students have been real champions and just got on with it. Staff have supported students this week to settle back into school routines and we are pleased to see that the students are focused on their learning and are already making good progress.

Over the recent lockdown, we have seen the completion of two additional outdoor spaces comprising of the MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area) and an outdoor social dining area next to the restaurant which we call the Canopy Area. I am so pleased that we were able to secure funds to develop these areas that will have a direct impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of our students. As you also know the government have asked that students wear face masks when in lessons as social distancing cannot be maintained. Students have been really good at complying with this expectation and we are very proud of their resilience as we understand how uncomfortable that may be.

As students have been in lockdown for so long, on their return we wanted to make best use of our new outdoor spaces so that students can breathe fresh air and have the opportunity to take off their masks when outside. We created a plan that maximised the use of these facilities and allowed all students to get outside during the day. It should be noted that due to the many protocols that we have needed to adopt since our full return in September, the operational management of all schools has become increasingly challenging. Introducing the use of outdoor space to support students involves complex planning to ensure we can do this safely (without mixing bubbles for example), and to implement this with sufficient supervision is a very staff intensive activity. Regardless of how challenging this has been, staff have worked very hard to achieve this as we are keen to give our students as much opportunity as possible to be healthy.

As with all of our new strategies, we constantly review the impact of them once in operation. This week, we have sought feedback from staff and students about how this new system of outdoor breaks has worked. Many students have really valued the chance to go outside and socialise in a less formal setting than a classroom, however some have reported that they found it challenging to eat outside and were not keen on being exposed to the elements when the weather turned slightly. Staff have reported that students' concentration was stronger on their return to the classroom later in the day, but on occasions the transitions impacted upon the prompt start we expect for all lessons. We have also received a small number of concerns from parents about students going outside, mostly relating to them having suitable spaces in which to sit and eat. Due to the feedback received from our staff, students and some parents, we have made the decision to suspend the use of our outdoor spaces for breaks for the remainder of this week (yesterday and today) whilst we revise our plans.

Decisions that we make in school are always made with the best interests of the students at the forefront of our minds, and our communications regarding this are mostly carried out internally with our student body whom it directly affects. We will be sharing our revised plans with them next week and I am sure they will be excited to tell you about it.

Your sincerely,



Mrs Reynolds
Principal