25th November 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I write to keep you updated on the impact of COVID on our school community.  A couple of weeks ago we were in the midst of copious new cases and our capacity was at its limits. I became conscious that our communication focused on ‘need to know information’ and that we were so consumed with dealing with cases that we didn’t have time to share the bigger picture.  The following information is to keep you in ‘the loop’ and intended to show how valuable your support and cooperation has been.

Since the beginning of November we have had 27 new positive cases confirmed from students.  After tracing contacts, some of these cases meant that we had to ask large groups of people to isolate but many of these cases had no impact on others due to the fact that the student was already isolating 48 hours preceding symptoms, either because we had asked them to because of potential contact in school or because a household member had gone for a test.

Out of the students we had isolating from 4 year groups 21 went on to have symptoms and received a positive test.  It is always with great reluctance that we ask students to isolate because we recognise the impact on children and their families but with hindsight, we now know that our decisions saved the virus from growing out of control within our community. Thank you to you and our young people for cooperating with isolation requests.

During this time we had 9 members of staff who tested positive.  Some members of staff and their loved ones have been in a critical life threatening position and many staff and students have suffered bereavements due to COVID.  18 members of staff have had to isolate at some time this term.  We have had a small number of external supply staff in but we have been trying our best to cover duties by staff in school.  I am thankful to all those staff who have given ‘above and beyond’ to cover for others to keep school open and safe and to students, parents and carers who have been patient while we adjusted plans.

Whilst we have no conclusive evidence to say that staff cases are connected to student cases it does highlight the need for students and staff to keep socially distant and wear face coverings in communal areas.  We have started to contact parent/carers if their child forgets a mask more than once but we do ask that you check your child wears it on public transport and has one to wear in school. We give out about 40 each morning.  Our site team have also been affected by COVID and we have explained to the young people the importance of placing their litter in bins and not leaving others vulnerable.  Please speak to your child about this. A small minority of young people are still not seeing the impact of this selfish behaviour. The senior team, technicians and cleaners across school have stepped in, often working long hours to fill in to cover for site staff, sanitising lunchtime areas, locking and opening up site and ensuring that school can remain open safely.

Currently we have 30 students from Year 8 isolating (some for the second time) after a student tested positive earlier this week. We have tightened up seating plans so that we can monitor who is classed as a contact (when not wearing a mask)for any future positive cases.  This will allow us to pinpoint with more precision who needs to isolate.

The Prime Minister has announced that families are likely to be able to meet up with two other households to form a Christmas bubble over the specified 5 days within Christmas period.  I am conscious that many of us have not seen some loved ones since the beginning of March and that this is a significant time for families but great caution should be applied to protect the most vulnerable.  In theory, if we got a positive case in school in the last week of term I could spend the first half of the Christmas holidays following advice from Public Health, contacting families telling them that they have to isolate over the Christmas season. I am sure that you will agree that we have to avoid this at all costs.  Therefore, we need to do all we can today, to stop this from happening.  Please could you help us with the following:

1.       Make sure you child has a face covering and understands the need to wear it on public transport and in communal areas in school. Failing to do so could mean that they or others need to isolate over Christmas or worst still it could leave some members of our community fighting for their lives.

2.       Tell your child to wash their hands regularly throughout the day.  The new wash facilities make this very easy to do. We monitor student use of hand sanitiser on entry to the canteen.

3.       Speak to your child about the need to put their litter in the bin.  Failing to do so puts others at risk.

4.       Keep your child at home if they or another member of your household has any COVID symptoms and book a test immediately.  Please contact school if you are struggling to access a test.

5.       Instruct your child to sit in their usual seating plan even if a different teacher takes the class.  This might allow us more precision when tracing contacts.

Let’s pray for a COVID free end to this term leading to a much deserved restful break for our whole community.

Thanks for all your continued support.  Take care and God Bless!

*Tony McCabe*

*Headteacher*