26th January 2022

Dear Parents and Carers

**Bolton Public Health Advice – Masks to worn in Communal areas until February half term.**

As we emerge from national ‘Plan B measures’ I shared with students this morning that the DfE advised that masks were no longer required in school ***unless*** we receive any local public health advice to the contrary. Unfortunately, a statement has just arrived in school with advice to continue wearing masks in communal areas of school and to continue with twice weekly testing for those without symptoms at home. I know that we are all mask fatigued, but it is important that we support each other to follow public health advice. At St Joseph’s yesterday 5% of our students were off with the virus and 7% of staff were absent for Covid related reasons. Bolton Council Public Heath team explain:

*“In line with the national guidance (‘Contingency Framework’)*[*Managing coronavirus (COVID-19) in education and childcare settings - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)*](https://clicktime.symantec.com/3Jtme44Ty28s1ySDJojVFgq6H4?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fpublications%2Fcoronavirus-covid-19-local-restrictions-in-education-and-childcare-settings)*, the local authority and schools in Bolton have continued to work together to plan for and respond to cases of COVID-19 amongst staff and students in a way that prioritises the quality of education and support to which students and staff are entitled.*

*Whilst overall case numbers have fallen in Bolton in recent days, they are not yet low and rates among children and young people continue to increase, with the rates in primary and secondary aged pupils being higher than any other age groups.  The current rate of new infections in children aged 5-10 is currently 1749 per 100,000 and 10-15s 1448 per 100,000.  Many schools are seeing significantly high levels of covid-related absence and also experiencing challenges with staffing capacity as a result.*

*Further to the Prime Minister’s announcement we have carefully reviewed and updated the local for Bolton education settings taking into account local transmission patterns and along with changes to the national guidance.* ***This review has been carried out by Bolton Council Public Health and Bolton Council Children’s Services, in consultation with the School’s Tactical Group.***

***We continue to strongly recommend the continued use of face coverings by staff, visitors and students (year 7 and above) in communal areas and advise caution when considering any gatherings.*** *Our public health team are continuing to work with schools to support those that are seeing high case rates. This is in line with other areas in Greater Manchester.  At this point the recommendation is temporary until February half term when there will be a further review, and does not extend to the wearing of face coverings in classrooms. Many of our schools are experiencing active outbreaks and we will continue to support and agree measures as always to minimise transmission and disruption within individual settings. The public health team continue to monitor the local situation in Bolton on a daily basis.”*

To summarise, we will need to continue with the existing local advice which strongly recommends that education settings across Bolton should continue to adhere to:

* Wearing of face coverings in communal areas for staff, visitors and students
* Staff, visitors, students and their households to undertake twice-weekly lateral flow testing for people without symptoms
* Assemblies will be virtual until February half term.

Please support us by making sure your child has a face covering for use in school.

Many thanks for your understanding and cooperation.

*Tony McCabe*

*Headteacher*