

Headteacher: Mrs Julie Bloor
BA (Hons), PGCE, NPQH

Mark Rutherford School
Wentworth Drive
Bedford MK41 8PX



MARK RUTHERFORD SCHOOL

October 2020

Dear Parents, Carers and Students

Thank you for your continued support in getting all students back into school safely over the past month. All of us are committed to providing the best education possible for your child, whilst ensuring the health and safety of our whole school community. Thank you for continuing to follow public health guidelines and encouraging your children to do the same.

You are already aware of the steps we have put in place to ensure the safe return of all pupils to school. We know that you will be keen to understand the impact that our safety measures have had in our first weeks of the term, and what our plans are to ensure all students catch up with any missed learning and what will happen if a student or students are asked to stay at home over the coming months.

That is why I am writing to you today in order to keep you fully informed. This letter will also be published on our website and is being sent to our governors.

School reopening

The school gates open at 8.15 each morning and we ask students to enter by certain gates to try and maintain their bubbles. The end of the school day is 20 minutes shorter than it would normally be due to a shortened lunch which ensures students can remain outside without it being too long a period of time. Many of the students I have met have said they prefer the shorter lunch.

From Monday 12th October we are able to offer inside spaces for students to sit and eat their lunch while remaining in their bubbles. We are also able to keep them inside if the weather is inclement. While they can remain inside to eat, if the weather is fine, we will be asking them to spend the rest of the time outside as that is the safest and healthiest place to be.

From Monday 12th October school will finish at 14.35 for all students rather than the staggered end we currently have.

Attendance

Attendance in the first week of term was fantastic at 98.66% - nearly 1% better than the same time last year. I think this shows your support and trust as parents/carers for everything we are trying to do to stay as safe as possible, and how much you value the education your children receive. We do have staff and students that are isolating and quite a number have had tests. There have currently been **no positive cases** and those with symptoms have been due to common colds. We appreciate parents continuing to follow the government guidelines on this. If we do get a positive case I will work with Public Health England to support a track and trace system of close contacts and will inform you of this, and of any implications for your child.

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Coverage of the Curriculum

We are covering the full curriculum and departments have spent the first weeks of term assessing gaps in students' knowledge and working to implement a suitable teaching sequence to restart the curriculum. We will be implementing a catch up programme for those we have the most concerns about over this term.

We suspended all extra-curricular activity in the first weeks but are now implementing after school and lunch time sessions for Year 10 to Year 13 as we feel their need to have a catch-up curriculum is most pressing at the moment.

Remote Learning – March to July

When we went into lockdown in March there was no warning. Staff had limited time to prepare and many staff did not have the training to access the on-line learning as we would have liked.

Another complication was that the whole country was on lockdown and large numbers of staff had small children that they had to home educate as well as trying to plan their teaching. Much has happened since then and staff and students are now much more skilled at using Its Learning and Zoom. During the lockdown period the work set on-line did build over time however, we still have some students who have limited access to a computer, often sharing with family members. We are working with the Department of Education to access more devices and we are also very grateful for the funding we have had from the Harpur Trust and a recent project from the Lord Mayor and Rotary Club. We hope to be able to support more students who have limited access in the future.

I have met with students from all year groups and some feel that they had too much work in lockdown and others not enough (often children from the same class have these differing views). The difference is often about the detail students give to each task and this is where it is difficult without teacher direction. As a rule students should expect tasks set to take the same amount of time as a lesson and so they should aim to complete tasks in a suitable amount of detail.

Remote learning in the future

As we know some form of remote learning for cohorts is probable in the near future. Departments are working on plans for how they can switch their curriculum offer to be delivered remotely, should the need arise. We plan to have a combination of Zoom lessons delivered by the teacher and online learning activities.

We should be in a position to share the timetable for this in the near future and our Policy for Remote Learning will go live on our website.

We do not envisage a full lockdown but there may be year group isolation periods or isolation for close contacts of a confirmed case, and we need to be prepared for this eventuality.

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Support with our safety precautions

Please continue to ensure that your child has a mask to wear, brings their own sanitiser where possible and carries tissues. We are currently having to provide a large number of masks every day as students forget them or lose them and it is proving a drain on resources. We currently have no extra funding to support this.

Students are still being asked to come in their PE kit on days they have PE or Dance to avoid using changing rooms. A number of students are not wearing the correct PE kit. Please ensure that your child has the correct uniform.

Mental health and wellbeing

A number of studies completed over the last few months have highlighted the decline in the nation's mental wellbeing, particularly in those that suffered with poor mental health prior to the pandemic. As a school we are continuing to address these issues and support our young people. Over recent weeks we have had virtual assemblies delivered by Kooth (an on-line mental health and wellbeing site offering free counselling), activities to support mental health and discussion boards. Students are also able to access Its Learning 'Mental Health and Mindfulness' which has some really useful websites and resources for students to access from home to support their mental health.

Finally, we have asked that students, wherever possible, avoid public transport. More students are walking, cycling and being dropped off by parents or carers. However, I receive daily complaints from local residents about parking around the school. We are very badly serviced for parking and I know it is challenging. The rugby club car park is being used more and the nursery that operates there is concerned about the safety of their children. Please, wherever possible, park away from the school and be mindful of road safety. We have already had two minor accidents at the front of school involving cars.

Thank you for your support in these challenging times. Please remember to follow both the school's and public health guidance to keep everyone learning safely.

Yours sincerely

Mrs J Bloor
Headteacher

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