

23 September 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

As I stated in my last letter, I will write to you all and keep you as up-to-date as possible regarding any COVID-19 positive cases identified within our school community. I can confirm that one of the non-teaching staff, who was originally identified as being in direct prolonged contact with our first positive case, has now also tested positive after developing symptoms whilst they were self-isolating. This now means that their whole household must self-isolate for 14 days.

I recognise that having two cases in such a short time period may be alarming for some of you and so I have sought reassurance and guidance from the Local Health Protection Team that the measures we are taking are the correct ones. I have spoken with the Cumbria Public Health Team and they are satisfied that this transmission is within an isolated school staff team and that our contact tracing methods are robust. No further staff or any students have been identified as coming into direct prolonged contact and, as such, no one else has been directed to self-isolate for 14 days.

For clarity, we have not been advised to close any area of the school for deeper cleaning as our increased cleaning, sanitising and deep clean schedule has been deemed more than sufficient.

I think it is important to recognise with you that the measures we have taken to reopen our school are not perfect. They include:

- Face masks worn by everyone in public places;
- Student year group 'bubbles' zoned in separate areas of the school and strict seating plans for every lesson;
- Split lunchtime, specified year group areas and seating plans for eating;
- Regular and monitored hand washing and sanitising on entry to the school in the morning, at break, at lunchtime and other times;
- Directional flow for student movements so that there are infrequent opportunities for students of different year groups to mix;
- Segregated year group break areas and places of entry to the school building;
- Only teaching staff moving between classrooms;
- Perspex screens/shields between staff and students whilst being served lunch;
- No staff socialising room and all staff working areas are set out with social distancing measures in place.

There are many other measures, such as not sharing equipment and year group only toilets, and the list goes on. We are under no illusion that these measures cannot entirely stop the transmission of coronavirus or that our cleaning schedule sterilises the building, but what each and every one of the measures does do is attempt to reduce the transmission of the virus as much as is feasibly possible. For example, the zoning and bubbling of our students into their year groups; keeping them for the majority of their time in one area and only having staff move reduces the number of people moving and passing one another from just under 1,300 to less than 90.

By having our students in strict seating plans in lessons and when seated at lunchtime, means that if we do get a positive COVID-19 case in one of our students, we can very quickly identify and inform parents which other students may have been in direct prolonged contact for over 15 minutes and direct them to self-isolate for 14 days. No other member of the household needs to self-isolate if a student is directed home unless the student or someone else in the household develops symptoms.

Staff are also ensuring that, where possible, they adhere to the social distancing measure from each other and students and, where this is not possible, the length of time they are closer is kept to an absolute minimum.

As I have explained in previous letters, none of this is an ideal way for us to operate our school, but if this is what we have to do so that we can remain open to care for and educate your children, then this is what we have to do.

It has certainly been a tough few weeks for staff and students at the start of the year and I am constantly overwhelmed by the resilience and perseverance that everyone is showing. It has not been easy for the teaching staff to move from room to room, in some cases from one side of the school to the other, and then turn it on to deliver their best lesson and do it all again 6 times a day. I know they will be missing their own teaching room and the security that brings, the social interaction and support that they normally rely on from their colleagues in their departmental teams and I take my hat off to them for their diligence and stamina.

Against the backdrop of rising cases each day and the dreadful scaremongering in the local and national media, it is understandable that anxiety levels will rise. We take the service we provide to our school community very seriously and we will endeavour to continue this service and remain a constant in the lives of our students and their families now, throughout and beyond this pandemic.

Once again, I must thank you for your support which has been immense throughout these difficult times and helps to sustain the energy required to keep going forwards.

If you have any questions or require any further information about this letter, please contact the school via info@furnessacademy.co.uk.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S.P. Laheney', with a horizontal flourish underneath.

Simon Laheney
Headteacher