



1<sup>st</sup> September 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

### ***The Use of Face Coverings During the COVID Pandemic***

#### **Changes to national policy on face coverings for secondary school pupils**

We appreciate that the recent focus on face coverings in the media, alongside the WHO report and decisions made in Scotland and other countries, may have significantly increased both staff and student anxiety and increased the desire to wear a face covering. Therefore, although not a PHE requirement, staff or students *may* choose to wear a face covering:

- When moving around the school, such as on corridors
- When in communal areas where there may be more mixing, such as the dining area

Face coverings **should not be worn** by students or staff in a classroom (except in particular circumstances of close supervision already identified). The government guidance clearly states that wearing of a face covering in a classroom is not deemed necessary (even in areas where transmission of COVID is high). This is because the risks are lower (less mixing and adults can socially distance from students or use appropriate PPE where social distancing isn't possible). This lower risk is also balanced against the negative impact on teaching and learning when face coverings are used in a classroom situation.

If staff or students choose to wear a face covering on corridors or communal areas the expectation is that they supply their own and be responsible for wearing and storing them appropriately and cleaning or replacing them as required.

Consistent with PHE new advice, we may in the future need to take additional precautionary measures in areas where the transmission of the virus is high. These areas are defined as areas of national government intervention. In these local intervention (lockdown) areas, face coverings will be required to be worn by adults and pupils when moving around, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain. As in the general approach, it will not usually be necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective measures already mean the risks are lower, and they may inhibit teaching and learning.

On top of hygiene measures and the system of controls recommended in the governments full opening guidance to schools, permitting the use of face coverings for staff, pupils or other visitors will, we hope, provide additional confidence to all parents to support a full return of children to school. The situation will be kept under review and subject to change in response to local or national circumstances and updated government guidance.

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## The use of face coverings in a school context

Previously, DfE guidance clearly stated that the use of face coverings in schools was **not** recommended. On 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020 the DfE updated their guidance. They now state that in specific identified geographical areas, where transmission of COVID is high, “face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils in secondary schools when moving around the school, such as in corridors and communal areas.” If any of our schools fall into a high risk and high transmission area, the wearing of face coverings in corridors and communal areas will become compulsory.

Overall, the government is not recommending that face coverings are necessary in corridors or communal areas of other schools, but each school has discretion to require face coverings in communal areas. Therefore, as government guidance is not recommending that face coverings are compulsory, the Trust will not make this a requirement in communal areas or any other part of school except in specific circumstances already identified in the Risk Assessment process.

As explained by Public Health England, it important to note that:

- Frequent removal and replacement of face coverings will be necessary so their effectiveness is likely to be reduced as it increases the need to touch the face and touch the face covering – both of which increases risk of infection
- The likelihood that students may not wear masks appropriately or accurately or not wash reusable masks frequently enough (or at all!), may reduce effectiveness as there is likely to be increased touching of the face and touching of the possibly contaminated face covering.
- Wearing of masks poorly may also give a false sense of security and reduce the focus on social distancing as well as hand and respiratory hygiene.

Face coverings could therefore increase risk of transmission rather than reduce it. For these reasons it is vital that face coverings are worn correctly and that clear instructions are provided to staff, children and young people on [how to put on, remove, store and dispose of face coverings](#) in all of the circumstances above, to avoid inadvertently increasing the risks of transmission.

I recognise that this is a very contentious issue and that there are different views about the best way to proceed in school. In developing this approach, we have consulted with our Headteachers and taken time to review the actions of other schools nationally along with our Trustees. We will continue to keep this approach under review and will respond immediately to any updates from the government. Our overall priority is to allow every child to return to school as safely as possible and to give you the confidence in the systems of control we have put in place.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Sheriff', written in a cursive style.

**Richard Sheriff**  
CEO – Red Kite Learning Trust