



Whitburn Church of England Academy

An Academy with Specialist Status in Maths and Computing

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'Excellence for All'

4th September 2020

Returning to school September 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

It seems quite a long time since I wrote to you on 15th July outlining our plans for a full reopening of the school from Wednesday 9th September. Over the past 7 weeks, schools have rarely been out of the media and with the national debacle around both A level and GCSE results, we have worked hard to ensure that our students achieved the examination grades that reflected their hard work and effort. Teaching staff spent many hours looking at and deliberating final grades and I am confident that the grades attained were an accurate reflection of what our students would have achieved if they had sat the exams.

In preparation for reopening schools, the government released on Friday evening further information and guidance for schools to follow. The late release of this information has meant that we have had to revisit our original plans drawn up in July and make some changes to some of the planning that we have previously shared with you. Please can I ask you to read and share with your son/daughter the new reopening guidance available on our website?

Welcoming you all back

Wednesday 18th March seems a very long time since we last had a school building full of students.

Over the past 6 months, many of our students have made great progress in terms of adapting to remote learning via Microsoft Teams. However, I also know that many of us have missed being back at "real school", the interaction with friends and staff, the daily routines, school dinners and been in a classroom enjoying learning new knowledge and concepts.

I know that all of the staff are looking forward to seeing you all next week, with some slightly different rules to get used to, but we all really want to get back into the classroom. We must ensure that we keep each other safe and work together to minimise as many risks as we can to prevent this virus from spreading.

As you will have seen in my previous correspondence, we have decided to stagger the number of year groups returning to school over a 3-day period, reaching our full capacity on Friday 11th September. This is to ensure that all students understand rules regarding good hygiene, handwashing routines and the new one system around the site to prevent large crowds gathering. A reminder of the start times for next week are as follows:

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On **Wednesday 9th September 2020**, our new Year 7 students and those going into Year 13 will return to school. The day will start as normal at 8.45am and will end at 3.30pm. The scholars' bus service will run as normal. This will mean that Year 7 will have a day to familiarise themselves with the building, new rules and expectations and allow them to settle in comfortably for their first day in their new school. Year 7 need to enter the building through the North entrance and go directly to the Lecture theatre.

On **Thursday 10th September 2020**, Years 10, 11 and 12 will return to school from 8.45am alongside Years 7 and 13. Year 10 will go to the Lecture Theatre, Year 11 will go to the Septimus Hall and Year 12 will go into the Sixth Form building. The staggered start allows us to conduct Health and Safety briefings with each year group 'bubble', issue timetables, planners and other important information to ensure all are aware of the new routines and expectations. Our focus in the first instance has to be our exam year groups of Years 11 and 13.

Finally, on **Friday 11th September 2020**, Years 8 and 9 will return to school, meaning the school is at full capacity. The day will begin at 8.45am with Year 8 going to the Lecture Theatre and Year 9 going to the Septimus Hall.

Scholars' Buses (as advised from Nexus 1st September)

School Transport from September will operate a close door system that will only allow students to board. By doing this and under government regulations we can now increase capacity to a full seated load to approximately 60 passengers on double decker buses depending on vehicle configuration. We would still encourage you to promote walking/cycling or any other mode of accessing school wherever possible to alleviate the pressure on school buses.

Throughout the first few days of term, Nexus will monitor service capacity and try to pre-empt overloading problems and provide additional services wherever possible. As with all new starts to the Autumn Term, Nexus have asked for your patience and understanding as punctuality of services may be hindered by new students/drivers on new routes in the first week or so. Nexus will endeavour to provide their usual high standard of service and with your assistance; they can achieve a safe School Transport provision.

Nexus have asked me to share with you the following information before boarding any scholar's bus service:

1. School Transport will be restricted to students only (No adults allowed)
 2. Capacity will be a full seated load with all students to face forward and remain seated at all times.
 3. **Over 11 year olds must wear a Face Covering** (other than with a medical exemption)
 4. Ask students to sanitise prior to boarding and after they disembark
 5. Wherever possible request students to remain in their year bubbles
 6. If paying by cash ensure they have the correct fare as some operators may not return change
- If using contactless payments check to see if the operator in both directions have the facility. (Only Go NE, Stagecoach, Arriva have this facility)

In order to avoid overcrowding on Rackly Way at the end of the school day, we are organising the bus queues on the All-weather pitch. Staff will then ensure safe embarking onto the buses, avoiding congestion on the pathway and will aim to seat students as best as possible in their relevant bubbles.

Masks (face coverings)

As you will have heard recently in the media, the subject of masks and face coverings in schools has been very much a topic for debate. In order to minimise contact between students from other year group bubbles whilst in communal areas and/or moving around the school building, both staff

and students are expected to wear a mask or face covering at all times. Students should also bring a small plastic bag in which to keep their mask.

In classrooms, masks will not be necessary, as students will be remaining in their Year group bubbles and as government guidance states, “face coverings would have a negative impact on teaching and their use in the classroom should be avoided.”

It is the responsibility of each student to bring a mask or face covering into school to be worn at all times when moving inside the building. The school is unable to supply masks for all of our 1200 students, as the cost of this would be unsustainable. I must emphasise that all of the school community, whether a young person or adult, has a responsibility to ensure that we are all doing what we can to make our environment safe and to prevent any outbreaks of this virus.

Rules and behaviour expectations

I am proud to be part of a school community where the majority of our students regularly conduct themselves with maturity and excellent behaviour. OFSTED were very quick to comment upon this last year when they inspected us. Respect for each other and our environment is one of our key values that we hold and demonstrate on a daily basis.

We will be sharing with each year group when they return some new rules that we will all have to abide by to ensure we minimise any potential risk of transmission within the building. The one-way system, designed to ensure more fluidity around the school is key to this and I know that this will take a little time to get used to, so I do ask students to listen and follow staff instruction with minimal fuss, in order to keep us all safe in our building.

School Uniform must be exemplary and as you know, I will not compromise on this. I am proud to work in a school where our students are impeccably dressed and ready to learn and lead the way in terms of demonstrating high standards in terms of the way they present themselves and behave themselves.

In advance of returning to school please read the ‘New School Routines’ slide on the power point which explains many of the changes that will be taking place. In particular please familiarise yourselves with break and lunch arrangements as these are based in zonal areas of the schools according to the year group bubbles.

Can I also remind all parents and carers to make sure that ParentPay accounts are activated to ensure all students have enough money on their accounts in order to purchase food on their designated lunch days? You will also see when you log onto ParentPay that there is an option to purchase in advance a number of sandwiches and baguettes and a drink, which will be delivered to the appropriate classroom at the start of lunchtime for the remaining days.

Visiting the School

Please can I ask you not to come onto school site until after 4pm? If you do need to speak to a member of staff, please email office@whitburncofeacademy.org or call the Main Academy Office, where an appointment or a return telephone call can be organised. We have to make sure we control the numbers of visitors accessing the school site, in order to minimise contact between individuals and the maintenance of social distancing. Any routine absence reporting should continue to take place via the dedicated absence line, texting service or MyEd app <https://www.whitburncofeacademy.org/report-absence.html>.

Finally, I wish to thank you for all of your support since March. There have been times where we have had to respond quickly to changes from the government and of course, our risk assessment

ensures that we will be regularly reviewing our new systems implemented from September to make sure that we are as COVID secure as we can be.

Once again, please familiarise yourself and your children with the reopening power point on our website, as this will help when returning to school.

I look forward to seeing all of our students safely back next week.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J E Crowe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

J E Crowe
Principal