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Community Schools
Alliance Trust

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Think for yourself, act for others

Rob Pavey- Headteacher

4 September 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Cheney School full re-opening; responses to questions

As you are aware, we have held three in-person Q&A sessions, and one virtual one. I would like to thank all members of the Cheney community for their engagement, and their responses, which have helped us adapt how things will run in the next few weeks. This letter sets out a collection of answers to questions raised over the last week.

We are running another **online Q&A session next Thursday** (10th September) from **6pm to 7pm**, on the following link: meet.google.com/pvb-hexj-yep

We will also be sending out a parent survey in a couple of weeks' time.

Before we start the Q&A responses, I would like to say how grateful I am for the support of parents and carers in Years 7 and 12, who have been in school yesterday and today. It has been a great pleasure to have students in school again, and it has been a very positive start. I am very pleased to say that we have had close to full attendance, and very few of the students who were absent were unexplained. This is very encouraging, despite the understandable anxiety; thank you.

Q - What is Cheney doing about face masks?

This has been the single issue which has caused most controversy, and is generating the most heat in the media. I have listened to the views of the 250 parents who attended one of the Q&A sessions, taken account of the 5 emails I have received expressing very strong views on the subject, been in touch with other headteachers in Oxfordshire, read the guidance from central and local government, consulted staff and the senior leadership team, and got a view from the governing body. In the light of this, we are adapting our approach slightly; while we are not going to make wearing face masks compulsory (even within the Cheney site, the buildings differ enormously), we are encouraging students to use them where appropriate, and we are creating a norm whereby staff and students will not feel embarrassed to use them. Our motto is "think for yourself, act for others", and this is what we are telling our students: when it gets busy, put on a mask. Judging by how Years 7 and 12 acted yesterday, our students will be able to understand this

message and act on it sensibly.

Q – If you get a case, will you use Track and Trace?

Yes. If we get a case in school we will contact Track and Trace after taking care of the student and contacting their parents. No school knows what will happen then, but we will engage fully with Track and Trace and work through their processes.

Q – What happens in the event of a lockdown or self-isolation?

If local restrictions come into force, the school moves onto what is called ‘Tier 2’ operations. This means that we reduce the number of students on site by going to a rota system: effectively 2 weeks in, 2 weeks out. Years 11 and 13 will remain in school full time, unless there is a full lockdown. Students who have difficulty accessing online learning for whatever reason (sharing devices, noisy siblings, poor internet access etc) will be expected to come into school for in-person teaching. Either way, full engagement and full attendance is expected, whether in person or virtually. Registers will be taken in the normal way, and absence will be followed up. We are still developing our response to this (and there is still a lot of work to be done), but I expect that students will follow their normal timetable, with certain sensible, pragmatic adjustments according to circumstances. I will write again in the coming weeks with full details, and we will introduce students to the way this will work in class.

If the whole school has to close because of a full lockdown, we expect to have more live-streamed lessons, sticking more closely to the normal timetable than before the holidays, with some pre-recorded lessons. The exact mix will depend on circumstances, staff availability and teachers’ childcare commitments.

It is more difficult if some individuals in a given class are missing, and I must emphasise that attendance in school is expected, unless there are special circumstances agreed with the school. I cannot expect staff to teach a full in-person timetable, and then to repeat it all online. We are working towards live-streaming classes, but there are technical issues to resolve, including buying enough equipment to make this possible. In the meantime, there are online platforms which can fill the gap, and teachers will set some work to tide students over, in the way they normally would if a student is ill. It will take some time to get this right, so I do ask parents to be patient while we get it right; constructive feedback will be very much appreciated.

Q- If you have to go into full lock down for a year group, would you do a complete curriculum online, like before the holidays?

Yes. If a year group is out for two weeks we will be able to do online lessons, as all staff will be available anyway. It is unknown territory but that is the expectation.

Q – If a year group is isolated, do you expect staff to isolate?

We are at the mercy of Track and Trace; if they say all staff have to go home, we are back to online school.

Q – Will there be a “catch up curriculum” ?

We are looking forward, not back, and our key message is very positive. We are not going to talk about ‘missed learning’ or ‘lost time’ and we will not be doing lots of high stakes assessment in the first weeks (with the exception of Year 13 and the UCAS predictors). We will do low key assessment by teachers in class, and when we have a clear idea of what has been missed and where the gaps are, we will look at starting interventions in October. In part we will use government catch-up funding, in a sensible, non-panicky way. If it is necessary, it is much better to cover 90% of the curriculum in full depth rather than skating over 100%. We have looked at the curriculum particularly for Y11 and 13, and departments have already identified the areas which are least essential (and which gain least marks in exams) in order to prioritise this year’s teaching. We have already taken published curriculum adjustments (in most cases relatively minor) into account, but I am expecting the most significant re-balancing to be made through grade boundaries in next summer’s exams; nationally all schools are all facing the same problem, and Ofqual’s role is to ensure that a similar proportion of students get the same grades.

Q – Are there curriculum changes?

We are doing a full curriculum but access to specialist rooms will be limited. PE will not be doing contact sports.

Q - What is happening with catering?

Break and lunch times are staggered, and the canteen has been divided in two, so there are two parallel serveries. All food will be takeaway, and there is no seating in the canteen, so students will need to eat in their year group area (and put rubbish in the bin). Hot food is available at both break and lunch, although on a slightly reduced menu (sandwiches, hot paninis, jacket potatoes, pasta). There will be no cash on site, and payments will be made via a card, rather than via the biometric system. Parents will be able to top up accounts via ParentPay in the normal way (Year 7 students should have brought the activation letter home yesterday). When students lose their card, they should report this to their tutor and the facilities team will print a replacement (at a small cost of about 50p). It is also possible to give your name to the catering staff at the till, so that students can be looked up manually, although this adds delay to the queue. We are aware of the possibility of students picking up a lost card and using it: this is fraud. Students must tell their tutors if they lose their card and we can stop it. Parents and carers must also let us know if you think there is an abuse – eg lots of lunches on one day. Bringing a packed lunch will be helpful in the first few weeks.

Q - What are the rules on uniform?

The normal uniform expectations remain in force, and will be dealt with as usual. For PE, students will come dressed in their PE kit, and may wear the Cheney blazer or the school jumper if they want (although they don’t have to). Information on the Cheney uniform can be found on the website.

Q – Should they come into school in their PE kit if they have PE but the weather looks bad?

Yes. We have lots of indoor spaces for PE and we are trying to avoid using changing rooms unless absolutely necessary. If the weather forecast looks bad, it may be sensible to bring in a spare set of clothes. School also has sets of clean uniform that can be loaned in emergencies.

Q – On PE kit days, do students have to wear their blazers on top on the way to and from school?

No, not unless they want to.

Q - Will there be clubs (like sports) in bubbles?

No, not initially. Like music and fixtures we want to introduce clubs as soon as we can. We want to be able to offer the full range of activities, but first we have to get students back in and settled.

Q - How can students use the library?

Please ask your child to return any outstanding library loans to the boxes that are situated in each of the year areas. There are still over 1400 library loans outstanding and in order for Cheney library to function properly in the new school year, it is vital that every book is returned.

If any students have lost their book, please ask them to send an email to Mrs Fenton. During September there will be no replacement charge but Mrs Fenton is keen to know that a book is lost so that it can be removed from the system. Thereafter, a replacement charge will be payable.

In the short term, the library shelves will be closed for browsing and students will need to reserve their books online using the new [online library portal](#). Full inductions on how to use the system will be given during English lessons, including the associated mobile app. All students will be expected to have a book to read at school and Mrs Fenton will deliver all books reserved online to students in their classrooms and is available to help with book recommendations.

Q - Can students go to the library at lunchtime?

No. The library will be used for Year 7 catch-up reading groups in lesson time and will be in the Year 11 bubble during break and lunch. All students have access to the online library catalogue and reservation system, so they can continue to access the books they need and there will be a system to get books to students (possibly Mrs Fenton with a trolley!)

Q - What about students who normally spend their breaks and lunch times in the library?

Unfortunately, this is something that will no longer be possible; we are restricted, and students can only spend their break and lunch times within their year group areas.

Q – What measures are you taking to keep student groups separate?

Each year group has a separate area, including playground and toilets – at no point will students from different year groups coincide in the playground or in the canteen. As far as possible, we will keep students in one consistent classroom, although this is not possible in all subjects; older students have made choices and need to access the full curriculum. We will have separate entrances and exits rather than a staggered start/finish, which should create a natural staggering. We will continue to look at this carefully and keep it under review, for example if we find large groups are congregating at the gates, we will change our plan. There are problems associated with a staggered start/finish (siblings waiting for each other can create groupings, issues with supervision and timings running beyond the school day).

We have put social distancing in place where possible. We have seating plans for every classroom, so in practice students are likely to come into close contact with a relatively small number of people; those they are seated near in the classroom and friendship groups in the playground.

Q – Is there enough indoor space for students to be indoors in the winter/bad weather?

Yes. For wet / bad weather, break and lunch will open up their tutor room in their teaching area for students to use.

Q – If these restrictions carry on after Christmas and into the spring, is there scope to use outside space even more?

We have already allocated outside areas as outside teaching spaces, which teachers can book now if they wish to take a class outside.

Q – Will Year 7 students still be set for subjects like Maths?

Setting does not happen in Year 7 at first; as normal, sets will be arranged once teachers have had the chance to assess students' level. This will happen in the same way as every year.

Q – Will students who need learning support be allowed to go to the SEND rooms?

Where possible. We will do everything we can for students whose learning requires support and who otherwise cannot access learning. We will do what is possible.

Q - Will students doing Science A Levels have use of the labs for the required Science practicals?

Initially no, the labs are not in the Sixth Form bubble area. Exam boards have adjusted the number of practicals required, but our aim is to get students back into specialist rooms, as soon as we possibly can. We need to see what is feasible, possible and safe.

Q – What are the plans for Year 11s studying D&T and Art?

All year groups will be in their blocks. Y11 are in the science block, so the Art department will teach in the science block. D&T will teach the theory side initially. There will be some adjustments to requirements from exam boards in terms of what students are expected to produce. Opening up specialist rooms is complicated in terms of bubbles and Covid security and timetabling, so as soon as we can, we will.

Q – Will there be provision for bike parking at the different entrances different years will be using?

No, not at the moment: the bike parking is in one place. We are looking at this and our site team are costing more bike parking areas for the students.

Q - What is the no physical contact rule and will there be any leeway or leniency?

We cannot enforce social distancing but we can enforce no physical contact as a very clear line. We need to be extremely clear on this from the start, so we will not be able to be lenient. We apologise in advance as this will result in many detentions in the first instance but we think students will get used to it. Students who do not observe this rule will get a 30 minute detention in a year group detention room. Judging by the way Year 7 and Year 12 acted yesterday, and having seen this introduced in other schools, students will get used to it pretty fast.

Q – When there is a change (eg to procedures/guidelines), how quickly will it happen?

If it is something urgent and immediate we will text and email home, if it is a change we need you to be aware of for the next day of school. Otherwise we will give as much warning as we can.

Kind regards

Rob Pavey

Headteacher