



CHENEY SCHOOL
Think for yourself, act for others

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Mr Rob Pavey – Headteacher

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Dear Parents and Carers

Return to specialist teaching rooms

I am writing to you today because I would like to return to specialist teaching rooms at the earliest opportunity. This is a significant change to our existing arrangements, and we need broad support across the whole school community before we can enact it: there is a short survey at the end of this letter to allow us to gauge the level of support and to allow you to make any comments you may have. We will close the survey to new responses on Friday morning. This is something that a number of schools in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire (for example St Bartholomew's in Eynsham and Aylesbury Vale Academy) have already done, and which both governors and staff have expressed strong support for.

The reasons for doing this fall into four broad categories, which I will address in turn.

1. Better Covid security.
2. Better educational experience.
3. Better staff welfare.
4. Better student behaviour.

Better Covid security

Dividing the school geographically into year group zones for teaching was a necessary measure to allow the school to open, but after a full 9 weeks of operation, we now have a much better idea of the reality of running a school in a pandemic. To be clear, the only thing we will be changing is the teaching rooms. **Split break and lunch times, separate recreation areas, separate canteen facilities and separate gates will all remain unchanged.** The reasons I believe moving back to specialist teaching rooms will improve Covid security are laid out below.

Greater consistency in routines: when members of staff are back in their own classrooms, teachers are better able to establish and control hygiene routines, such as consistent use of

hand sanitiser and consistent cleaning of surfaces. Teachers will also be more able to ensure masks are put on at the end of lessons, as they do not have to rush to get across the site to their next lesson.

Avoiding pinch points: the strict adherence to geographical divisions has had a few unintended consequences. In particular, it has meant that there are a few locations in school where a whole year group only has access to a single staircase. This creates a bottleneck, which is not ideal from any perspective, including Covid security.

Mask wearing in corridors: almost all students now have masks on them (inevitably some forget on a given day). With suitable reminders, compliance with wearing masks in corridors is now good; not surprisingly, when I or other senior members of staff are in a corridor, we quickly have almost 100% compliance. Senior members of staff cannot be everywhere, however. With teachers receiving students in their own classrooms, it is much easier for them to 'own' the five yards of corridor directly outside their room. When having to rush across site, it is very hard for teachers to deal with issues like masks, as they are conscious that a class is waiting for them elsewhere.

Better ventilation: we will more easily be able to ventilate rooms properly between classes if teachers are in their own rooms.

Experience with Track and Trace: having recently had our first positive cases in school, we now know that Public Health England and Track and Trace do not count fleeting contact in a corridor as a significant risk. Close contact counts as being within 2 metres for more than 15 minutes without a mask, or within 1 metre for a lesser time. Passing a student from a different year group in a corridor does not count.

Vulnerable staff will be able to avoid crowds: we have some staff who are in a more vulnerable category, and it has proved difficult for them to avoid crowds in corridors. Staying in their own rooms and controlling their teaching spaces will make it far easier to maintain the necessary social distance, both during lessons and during lesson changeover.

Better educational experience

This is a very easy case to make. We have gone as far as we can possibly go in reintroducing specialist rooms while maintaining the geographical division of the school in any meaningful sense. It is obviously better to learn science in a science lab, music in a music room or design technology in the DT workshop. Our staff have done an excellent job in delivering the full curriculum thus far,

but we are getting concerned about the long term effect on our students' education, on top of the effect of the first lockdown. There are a few additional points to make:

Better live-streaming: one of the barriers to successful live-streaming to students who are absent is the extra time it takes to cross the site, to log on and then to set up the webcam and the Google Meet, on top of taking the register and starting the lesson's slides. Many parents have noticed that live-streamed lessons rarely start on time: this is the reason, and it would be much improved if teachers could set up their room just once at the start of the day, rather than five times per day.

More student movement: one of the problems our students face is being in the same space for a large part of the day. By returning to specialist rooms, students would at least get to move a bit more.

Fuller use of lesson time: currently a proportion of each lesson is lost to teacher movement, setting up and logging in. 10 minutes per lesson quickly adds up to over four hours per week or almost three school weeks by Easter.

Better staff welfare

The extra burdens of having to move room have made life much harder for staff. This is from the obvious things like the daily distance travelled to more subtle things such as always feeling behind when coming into a room, rather than feeling in charge of the class. The stress caused to staff who need to calm an unsettled class, adapt lessons for non-specialist rooms, or who feel they are not doing as good a job as they want, should not be underestimated. I have mentioned the benefit for vulnerable staff, who can avoid crowds, but there is also a risk of staff burn-out and increased sickness. Our staff are very resilient, and we have only just this week had to bring in agency cover staff for the first time, but this is a problem which has been widely reported nationally, and Cheney is not immune.

Better student behaviour

It is not a stretch to say that better behaviour is also better for Covid security. It is when students are unsupervised that they are most likely to make poor choices, or act in an immature or unsafe manner: almost always, this is in the transition between lessons, rather than in class. The huge majority of our students continue to behave very responsibly and maturely, but there is a small minority who need greater adult supervision. Having classrooms supervised in lesson changeovers will remove a lot of this issue, and will also prevent a small number of students going back into

classrooms during break or lunch and behaving thoughtlessly. This will improve the school day for everyone, both staff and students.

Mitigation of possible risks

For all the above reasons, I think the return to specialist teaching rooms is urgent and important, especially as we have entered a national lockdown. I would like to emphasise that all other Covid security measures remain in place, including keeping year groups separate in other areas, the engagement with Track and Trace and the enhanced cleaning regime.

As you will be able to see from the results of the staff survey linked below, most staff (79%) think additional mixing in corridors will either present less of a risk than current arrangements, or be neutral. It is clear from the bar charts that the risk of transmission in corridors is the only issue which gives staff a degree of concern, however. To mitigate this risk, we will institute one way systems in buildings to ensure a smoother flow of students, thus ensuring that any fleeting contacts in corridors are as brief as possible. We also believe that this will improve compliance with mask wearing, and that these two measures between them will ensure that the risk is minimised. We are looking carefully at the possibility of some kind of staggered finish to lessons (although this will cause more problems when students arrive early at their next class), or removing the end of lesson bells so there is a small amount of natural staggering, but plans for this have not been finalised.

To ensure improved safety of all members of the school community, we would also ask parents to re-emphasise the basic common-sense messages of acting maturely, and to reinforce the importance of bringing a mask to school and then wearing it in buildings. We are going to start issuing detentions for students who aren't wearing masks from next week, after issuing one warning.

The return to specialist rooms will take effect on Monday 30 November.

The link to the parent survey is below:

<https://forms.gle/X72N7ANGf4xbJAhf9>

For your information, I have included a link to the results of the staff survey on this topic that we completed last week:

[Return to Specialist Rooms - Staff Survey Results - November 2020](#)

Kind regards

Rob Pavey, Headteacher