

SCA/BDA

12th March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to you at the end of the first week just to give you an update as to how the re-opening has gone so far. It has been an absolute delight to have the students back and the school has felt a happy place, with friends re-uniting and getting back to classroom learning. The students have had a superb first week and I have enjoyed going around lessons and welcoming them back to the school. Behaviour has been good and students have thrown themselves back into their work and are putting effort into their studies. I have been impressed with their mature attitude and how they are conducting themselves when facing such uncertain times.

I am pleased to say that attendance has been excellent this week. Some schools around the country have reported hesitancy in returning but our attendance is 95% and that is a really positive sign.

Control Measures

The processes that we have in school in response to the crisis are working well. All of the control measures that we had in place in September are still in place. Students are following the one way system sensibly and I am pleased with social arrangements in that we are keeping all year groups separate.

I know that there has been increased concern about the government and PHE advice about wearing masks inside the classroom. I do understand these concerns and it does make teaching more difficult. However, the advice from PHE is that it will help prevent transmission of the virus and that is the most important consideration. I would like to say that the students have been absolutely superb in following this instruction and we have had no issues in classrooms whatsoever. Credit to the students for behaving so maturely under these difficult circumstances. To help support the school, please could you check that your child has a mask on their person before they leave the house in the morning. This would help us tremendously.

Testing

I have been delighted at how the testing process has taken place at NGA. It has been a slick, professional operation and the testing staff and students have done exactly as we had wanted.

Steve Campbell Principal

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There have been no confirmed cases at our school so far this week and that has been the case in the majority of schools in North Tyneside, as we see infection rates fall in the region. However, it is important that we do not lower our guard.

We will have completed the in-school mass testing programme by Tuesday of next week and we will then be moving onto home testing for all consenting students that have completed their 3 tests in school by the end of the week. Staff have been doing this for the last fortnight and although it seems complicated at first, it soon becomes second nature. A small group of students have been piloting this this week and so far it has gone well. More details will be sent out next week with clear directions and guidance but the clip below will give parents an insight as to what is involved:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvaBZskxS7tzQYIVg7lwH5uxAD9UrSzGJ>

There will no doubt be positive cases that we have to deal with in the coming weeks but our systems are robust and we will deal with these efficiently and correctly. Can I say a big thank you to parents for their support in this. It is a difficult situation when students have to be sent home at short notice through close contact scenarios but we are all in this together and need to follow government guidance.

If you're a member of a household or childcare bubble of a pupil, student or staff of a school or college, you can get a twice-weekly test. All information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rapid-lateral-flow-testing-for-households-and-bubbles-of-school-pupils-and-staff>

Uniform

I would like to say a huge thank you to parents for getting students back to school in their correct uniform. We realise how difficult it has been during lockdown with the shops being closed and of course some students have shot up over the last few months! From next week, we are going to be having a further push on uniform to make sure we are as smart as we can be. We appreciate that parents have informed us of any issues relating to uniform and confirmed when these will be rectified. Remember, if there are any financial difficulties with regards to uniform then please contact your Head of Year. There are things that we can do to help.

Recovery curriculum

Following lockdown and school closure, we are very worried about reintegrating students back into school and helping them recover from lost time at school. I can assure you, and we have assured our students that our strategy is forward thinking, positive and addresses the problems that might be causing great anxiety in young people at this time.

What we have done therefore is introduced the setting of specific 'recovery' work on Frog that is a condensed version of what they *may* have missed while they were away. The key part of the strategy is that students are getting time, space and support in order to start to make up for some of this lost time alongside their teachers and form tutors. For students we are especially concerned about, we have gone even further and ensured that they receive more specific mentoring from key staff at the school. We aren't interested in being negative or telling anyone off, but we are interested in ensuring that the students can look forwards to a bright future and don't feel disadvantaged by what has happened. If you feel concerned as a parent, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Awarding of Grades process-Year 11

In my last update I wrote to you about plans for Y11 gradings. Since then, departments have been working on assessment plans which satisfy the current guidance. These plans are being shared with students on an individual subject basis through class teachers, but it comes with the caveat that 'things may change.' I really hope they don't but without the exam board guidance (due to be released just before Easter) I'd rather be open and honest about the situation we are in.

Our current plans include:

- Most subjects will have some form of assessment before Easter which is likely to contribute to the final grade-this is nothing new as students have been expecting a mock process anyway.
- The slight change from the mock process is that most assessments will take place in classrooms rather than larger venues. They will be supervised by teachers to ensure work produced is the students' own.
- Most subjects will then continue to have assessments from Easter to May half term which will also contribute to the final grade. Advanced warning will be given on when these will take place. However, our strong advice is not to wait for dates, but to keep revising now just like you would have been if exams were still taking place this summer.
- Teachers will assess pupils on content covered. However, enough work will need to be covered to allow them to progress to Post 16.
- The school will have internal quality assurance processes to make sure teachers' grades aren't too harsh or lenient.
- Exam boards will also quality assure the school's work. They'll check that internal processes are as fair as possible and might ask to review evidence.

As we embark on this process, I appreciate your support in allowing staff the space to complete this work. As the Head of Ofqual announced this week, parents should not place teachers under pressure or make them feel uncomfortable over grade decisions.

Last day of term-Friday 26th March

I would just like to remind parents that as usual students will be dismissed at 1pm on the last day of term before the Easter break. Buses have been amended accordingly.

I would like to finish off by reiterating that I have been delighted with the first week back at school and am pleased that students and staff are in good spirits. Can I thank you for your continued support for the school and wish you an enjoyable weekend.

Yours faithfully,



Steve Campbell
Principal