

1st September 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Face coverings in education settings

You will be aware that there has been considerable debate over the wearing of face coverings in public places, and that this debate has now extended to their use in schools. The government issued [guidance to schools](#) on 26th August 2020.

As you are aware, we have been working successfully since lockdown to ensure a high-quality educational provision, and to provide as safe a framework as possible under which a full return to school next week can be envisaged. Thamesmead School has completed a full risk assessment to support the return of students next week and we will share details of these steps with you separately. We are aware there is a lot to take in and do not want to overwhelm you with lots of information in one go. This letter is to explain our expectations regarding face coverings.

After a change in the Government guidance last week, the school has decided to take the following proactive measures. These measures supersede any previous references to face masks or coverings in communications with parents:

1. Face coverings must be worn by staff and students in corridors and interior communal areas
2. Face coverings to be worn by visitors on arrival as a minimum (the nature of the visit to school and the areas visited will dictate whether or not face coverings may be removed)
3. Face coverings may be worn at all times if an individual chooses to do so

If your son or daughter is not able to wear a face covering for medical or other valid reasons please let us know so that we can manage this sensitively.

It is vital that everyone affected (parents, staff, students and visitors) are given clear instructions on the safe and correct wearing, removal, storage and disposal of protective face coverings, and that all are clear that face coverings **do not provide protection to the individual - they protect others from themselves**.

A face covering is something which effectively covers the nose and mouth. It is not classified as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which is used in a limited number of settings to protect wearers against hazards and risks. **We would like students to use reusable face coverings**. This is to reduce the negative impact of waste produced by disposable face coverings. You can buy these or make your own [hand-made cloth covering](#) but these must securely fit round the side of the face. We also ask that these are as plain as possible, with only simple patterns and do not carry any advertising, logos, slogans, images or other messages which could be construed as controversial. We also ask they are not embellished and decorated. We ask that students do not wear bandanas as these are less effective, will cover more of the head than is necessary and will make it harder for us to identify students.

1. A face covering should:
 - Cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably
 - Fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face
 - Be secured to the head with ties or ear loops

- Be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton
 - Ideally include at least two layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three depending on the fabric used)
 - Be able to be washed with other items of laundry according to fabric washing instructions and dried without causing the face covering to be damaged.
2. When wearing a face covering you should:
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on
 - Avoid wearing on your neck or forehead
 - Avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could be contaminated with the virus
 - Change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it
 - Avoid taking it off and putting it back on a lot in quick succession.
3. When removing a face covering:
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing
 - Only handle the straps, ties or clips
 - Do not give it to someone else to use
 - Wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric
 - Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed
 - Once removed, store reusable face coverings in a sealable plastic bag until you have an opportunity to wash them

The school will provide training to all staff before students return to school, and will talk to all students on their first day back to school about safe practice with face coverings. However, we do need to ask you to prepare your children as fully as possible before they return to school. We will not be providing face coverings, given the necessity for their use in wider society, although where anybody is struggling to access a face covering, or where they are unable to use their face covering due to having forgotten it or it having become soiled or unsafe, we will have a small contingency supply available. No-one will be excluded from education on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering.

Students will need to come to school equipped with enough coverings to provide them with safe cover throughout the day, and separate sealable plastic bags to store them in prior to use and after use.

We are aware of the additional burdens this puts on families at short notice. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have concerns about the return to school.

Yours faithfully

Phil Reeves