



Headteacher  
Debbie Smith B.Ed, NPQH

# Sandhurst School

the opportunity to succeed

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Dear Parents/Carers,

Welcome back to our new school year. Thank you so much for your patience with us as we have had to make changes to the start of term to accommodate testing. We have also had a few issues with our communications – both technical and human but these are now resolved.

The students have arrived ready and eager to get on with a new school year. Catching up with them when they came in for their COVID testing and on the first few days has been really lovely and reminds all of us what a real privilege it is to work with such incredible young people.

Whilst the guidance for dealing with COVID has changed and we are no longer required or indeed allowed to identify close contacts – and I am very relieved and happy that we no longer have to send close contacts home to isolate – we do still have a duty to report cases and monitor any outbreaks.

The guidance now is that if there are 5 or more students or staff who test positive over a 10 day period and who have likely been contacts of each other we need to inform Public Health England and the current strategy is that they will advise us to close that 'group'. This could be a year group or part of a year group. This is not an unlikely scenario as 5 or more positives over 10 days seems to be quite a realistic possibility.

For this reason we are asking students to continue to bring a mask to school. We are not insisting they wear them but I have explained that it is the best way we have of protecting them from transmission and whilst there is not a requirement to isolate as a close contact those who test positive do have to isolate and this could affect not just school, but life outside school too – no football, dance exams, visits to family or much looked forward to events.

The other change is that family or household members no longer have to isolate if someone in their household is positive. You would be recommended, in such an instance, to have a PCR test. However the experience of most households (not all) is that once COVID is in the home it tends to spread quickly. If students do wear masks in more vulnerable situations then hopefully that may prevent COVID coming into your home.

Whilst bubbles in schools are no longer required we, along with other secondary schools, have adopted a stepped approach to ending COVID safeguarding and routines. As you know we have reverted after 8 years to tutor groups based on years rather than vertical (a mix of years). This goes some way to keeping year groups separate and will hopefully mitigate against the spread of COVID between year groups. It means we can also carry out focussed work with year groups during tutor time. They are all adversely affected and impacted by COVID lockdowns and other strategies but all in different ways. Having year groups together enables us to offer bespoke support.

We will be holding Subject Evenings online and will offer the opportunity for some Information Evenings such as Year 7 and Prospective Year 6 events to be held in school and others such as Year 10 & 12 where families are more familiar with us will be virtual.

We have continued to operate 2 breaks and 2 lunch breaks as this helps support the informal bubble system and because of the space we have available.



Last year we had a twenty minute break and a thirty minute lunch (although both were in effect reduced by a 3 minute warning bell to indicate the end of the break).

The thirty minute break was too long for many students in all year groups . The groups became restless after 20 minutes. Having looked at other schools who have two shorter 20 minutes breaks and including the school my children attended, we decided to make the change.

I know Facebook has lit up with comments regarding this and we have been carefully monitoring the queues over the week.

At the start of term we always find Year 7 students take longer to choose their food and so we allow them into the canteen early. My own twin granddaughters started school this week and one of the skills my daughter and her husband have been practising is focussing on their eating. Not daydreaming through a meal as they do at home. We'll see how it goes. They chose Toad in the Hole for their first school lunch.

Another reason for moving to the shorter lunch is, because we are very limited on space. We still have scaffolding, temporary classrooms, a nursery build and heating engineers on site working in the boiler room. We do not, even without the building works, have the space for every child in the canteen at once and so it is likely we will have staggered lunches for the foreseeable future. A thirty or even forty-minute lunch for 6 years groups still means people are at the back of the queue.

We did do checks on other schools where 20-minute breaks work and I am confident we this will work here too especially once Year 7 settle as only two year groups are in the canteen at once. However, on reflection I am not sure those schools offer such a varied lunch choice – including full roast dinner!

We no longer have the warning bell to signify the end of lunch and this means that children don't start to head inside on the first bell. We will also because far fewer children eat and or use the canteen at break, reduce break to 15 minutes and increase lunch to 25 minutes. This will not affect the start or finish of times or impact on our statutory requirements.

We will continue to monitor the situation and will see how we progress as everyone settles back in the school routine.

In terms of communication, our usual day for sending letters is a Friday (although I am sending this today) and along with the weekly newsletter these will keep you updated. Calendar dates are on the website but are also listed in the newsletter. We also have copies of letters and the newsletter on our website should you lose an email or letter.

It is genuinely wonderful to be back and I hope we can get back into our familiar routine and that together we can achieve and offer our children every opportunity to succeed.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs D Smith  
**Headteacher**

