

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we come to the start of a new academic year, I would like to extend a particular welcome to all families who are new to the school as they become part of the RGS community. I am confident that they will be well looked after by those around them, though all will be having to adapt to the new arrangements required for reopening the school.

New academic year, new normal

I do recognise that, while it will be good for pupils to return and see their contemporaries, many will also feel nervous about the return to school after such a long time out. They will be feeling a mixture of excitement and trepidation about the return next week. To help, we have put together a short video about what to expect, which is being emailed to all students and is also available for parents to see [here](#). At the start of term, students will be asked to sign a charter that lays out expectations of behaviour in this new environment and the pastoral team will be working hard to ensure that your children will be well supported in the transition back to school.

As in any year, we have a number of new teaching staff joining us and I am sure you will all extend a warm welcome to the following:

- Jayden Blacklock - Drama
- Sam Chapman- Junior School
- Lucy Crowley – History
- Simon McMenzie - Physics
- Matt Moore - Computer Science
- Marguerite Wiggins - Chemistry (maternity cover)
- Mark Wright - EDT
- Zoe Winn - Maths

You will have had opportunity to review the planning documents that have been circulated by Mr Keenan for the Senior School and Mr Miller for the Junior School. These are live documents that will continue to be updated but it will be clear from the versions that have been circulated that, while we shall continue to operate the full timetable, the requirement to keep students in bubbles will place limitations on the amount of access to specialist teaching spaces. That said, we still aim to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum.

Government guidance continues to be that all pupils of compulsory school age must be in school unless a statutory reason applies. However, in the coming months we also anticipate that there are likely to be pupils and teachers who will be required to self-isolate. We are working to ensure that we can still provide continuity of education in such a situation and we will do our best to adapt to the circumstances. If a teacher is self-isolating, in most cases we anticipate that they should still be able to teach remotely using Microsoft Teams but this would need your children to have access to a charged device (a smartphone, tablet or laptop) in school. As we also said last term, please let us know if access to a device is likely to be an issue for your child.

Given the complexity of all the arrangements we anticipate that staff will be very busy in the coming weeks. To that end, if you need to contact the school, email may be best as people may not always be able to answer their phones. Please remember that I have previously asked staff not to respond to emails after 7pm or before 7am and it will be even more important in the coming months that we look after our staff.

Wearing of face coverings now required in corridors and communal areas

Since our planning documents were published and the video above was created, further

Royal Grammar School, Eskdale Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4DX
T: 0191 281 5711 E: hm@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk



guidance was put out by Government and yesterday the Director of Public Health for Newcastle confirmed that:

"local public health advice is that for senior and middle schools, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around, in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain."

While I know that this will provoke mixed feelings, students in Year 7 and above will need to bring face coverings into school to wear in communal spaces, along with a plastic bag to place them in when not being used.

Access to the school site

It should go without saying that students must not attend school if they experience any symptoms, or have recently returned from travel abroad, unless the country appears on the Government's [travel corridor list](#). When reporting an absence we would appreciate you letting us know whether it is Covid related. I should also reiterate the need to cooperate with Test and Trace and inform the school immediately of the outcome of any tests.

I should also note that parents should not come on site without an appointment and are asked not to gather at the school gate. We will continue to do our best to communicate regularly with parents and, following trialling an online parents' conference at the end of last term, we anticipate using this technology again this term, starting with the Lower Sixth Pastoral Parents' Conference on Tuesday 15th September between 4pm and 6pm. We will communicate details of these events separately.

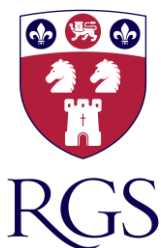
Risk assessments for returning to school

The overall Risk Assessment for the return to school is published on the school's website [here](#). This is a live document that will be periodically updated as we learn from the experience of having the whole school return under such unusual conditions. However, we are aware that some people will have very particular circumstances including the increased risk of Covid-19 to the BAME community, of whom we have many in the school. We believe that our plans should do as much as possible to protect whole community but parents should contact their child's Head of Year, copying Sarah Longville, Deputy Head Pastoral, on s.longville@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk, if they believe there is a need for a specific risk assessment for the circumstances of their child.

Impact on the co-curricular programme

We recognise that there are constraints on our ability to offer a normal co-curricular programme. However, we are keen that students do engage with the variety of sporting, performing arts and other activities that we are able to provide and this may give the chance for students to try something different. It has been good to see so many students engaging with the pre-season sports training over the last couple of weeks and Mrs Ponton will be writing shortly laying out the plans for the sports programme over the coming term. This will include details of the before/after school activities and the Saturday programme of internal tournaments across a variety of sports to start with as well as looking forward to external fixtures hopefully in due course. Meanwhile, Mr Fazlic has already written to parents about how music lessons and ensembles will be conducted. A wide range of other activities will continue to operate, including CCF, debating, drama and many more. Taking part in such activities outside the classroom continues to be integral to the RGS experience so please do sign your children up for these opportunities.

Government guidance also expects us to ask parents to limit the number of different out-of-school-settings providers they access, as far as possible. Where parents use childcare providers or out of school extra-curricular activities for their children, parents should seek assurance that the providers are carefully considering their own protective measures, and children should only attend settings that can demonstrate this. The Department for Education has also issued guidance for parents and carers that



can be found [here](#).

It is also worth highlighting that the government currently continues to advise against domestic (UK) overnight and overseas educational visits. This advice remains under review but we anticipate that this will affect all trips at least until the end of the calendar year. We will be discussing with agents and insurers the position with regards to deposits that have already been paid.

PlayerLayer and Threadaware

We are aware of some delays in parents receiving sports' kit orders, and for the first few weeks of term we will allow students some latitude, for example wearing plain sports' kit/t-shirts and shorts where PlayerLayer orders have not yet arrived. We shall be keeping the Threadaware uniform store open for the first few weeks of term, providing second-hand items to help where orders have not been delivered by PlayerLayer. During this time we will continue to allow parents in to school by appointment.

Northern Rail travel offer

I recognise that using public transport will be necessary for many of our pupils and I have previously written about staying safe while travelling into school. We have been approached by Northern Rail to offer parents a 50% discount on their child's season ticket. The season ticket carries no restrictions, which means that your child can travel worry free during evenings and weekend too. To take advantage of this offer, please visit www.northernrailway.co.uk/educational-season before 30th September.

Anticipating local lockdowns in the coming months

Last Friday evening in the guidance published by Government there was information about how schools may need to operate if Covid-19 cases should rise locally.

Tier 1: This is the default position that education and childcare settings will remain open.

Tier 2: The Junior School would remain open. The Senior School would move to a weekly or fortnightly rota model, combining on-site provision alternately with remote education. Full-time attendance on site would be limited to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers in years 8 and 9.

Tier 3: The Junior School would remain open. The Senior School would allow full-time on-site provision only to vulnerable children, the children of critical workers in years 8 and 9 and selected year groups (to be identified by Department for Education).

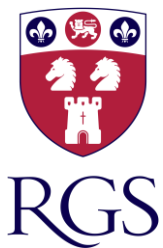
Tier 4: the whole school would revert to remote education with full-time attendance on site only available to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.

We also recognise that staff, parents and pupils may be concerned about continuing attendance at school under tier 2 during local restrictions and we shall be reviewing how our protective measures may need to be adjusted in such circumstances. The government guidance recognises that each of tiers 2, 3 and 4 will present challenges for parents, pupils, and staff but the expectations for tiers 3 and 4 should be familiar from the summer term.

2021 exams and potential impact on term dates

We note that there is continuing speculation in the media about suggestion of pushing 2021 exams later into July and a statement is expected from the Government in the next few weeks but there is no confirmed news yet. We have previously highlighted that this would affect term dates for this academic year and asked parents to hold off from booking holidays in July. If this were to happen it would mean that additional weeks of holiday may need to be inserted earlier in the year but we will keep parents informed as soon as we know more.

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And finally...

While the coming year may feel very different from normal in many ways, I am very clear that as in any year our aim should be to inspire and motivate your children. I remain very grateful for all your assistance in making sure that the ongoing relationships between parents, students and teachers are mutually supportive, helping our students to engage with their learning and allowing the whole RGS community to continue to thrive in the coming months.

With all good wishes,

Geoffrey Stanford

Headmaster

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