

9th January 2022

Dear Parent / Guardian,

I hope that this letter finds you and your families safe and well, and I'd like to wish you all a very happy New Year. I thought that it would be useful to write to you all with some important updates from our school and to also, once again, make reference to the COVID-19 pandemic and what that means for GMA.

COVID-19

Last week Mark Wilson, our CEO, wrote to you all regarding the Trust's Coronavirus position – we are really clear that we fully believe that all children are better off in school rather than at home during term-time; however, only when we can offer our provision safely. The health and safety of our whole school community must be paramount at this time, and if we need to close classes then we will inform you as early as possible. Last week, our first week back, the inevitable happened – staff absence is high, as it is national, and for reasons that I explained in December covering gaps with supply staff is not always possible or indeed the most effective solution.

The following paragraph is taken from this week's *Schools Week* magazine;

"Pupils across England returned to school this week as cases of the Omicron Covid variant continue to surge. One-third of schools had more than one in ten staff off already, with warnings that absence rates will continue to rise. While most schools have opened over one-third have been unable to source cover from stretched agencies. Meanwhile, some supply firms say the government's call to arms for retired teachers to plug the gaps is making little impact. Schools hit hardest by staff shortages have been forced to partially close this week and request certain year groups stay home. Outwood Academy in Ormesby, Middlesbrough, closed to pupils in Year 9 and 10 on Wednesday, while nearby Outwood Bydales closed for Year 10. An Oasis Community Learning school in Birmingham was also partially closed. Many schools are teetering on the edge"

Unfortunately, we are no different to schools across the country, and at the moment it is common for us to have in excess of 10% of our staff absent – a situation that leaves us in a very difficult position. Please know that should we call you and explain that your son / daughter's class is closed then this is an absolute last resort, but it is a decision made with the health and safety of your child at heart. We fully appreciate that childcare might be an issue for you, and that knowing that they will not be attending school the next day might not be the news that you are wanting, but please work with us, and hopefully we will see some daylight on the horizon over the coming weeks.

Principal – Mr Gavin Hosford

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At the start of the Spring Term last week, the government announced new guidance and a raft of measures to tackle the Omicron variant of Covid. Here's some reminders of what you need to know:

Masks to be worn "in classrooms where pupils in Year 7 and above are educated"

The updated advice on face coverings, applicable to all classrooms and teaching spaces for Year 7 students and above, will be in place until 26 January, when Plan B regulations are currently scheduled to expire, at which point the guidance will be reviewed. The secondary school advice also applies to special schools providing education for secondary aged pupils. There was no additional guidance on the use of face coverings in primary schools.

At GMA we fully understand that pupils who are exempt from wearing face masks will not be wearing them. However, we do encourage pupils to if they can, and also for staff to wear masks in all communal areas of the school.

The seven-day isolation period has been confirmed

Changes to the isolation period required for Covid cases does apply to school pupils. The 10-day self-isolation period for those who record a positive PCR test result for Covid-19 has been reduced to seven days in most circumstances, *unless you cannot test for any reason*, and the DfE has confirmed that this applies to those who attend schools. Individuals may now take rapid lateral flow tests on day six and day seven of their self-isolation period. If those test results are negative they no longer have to complete 10 full days of self-isolation.

Isolation rules for close contacts

As before, those who are fully vaccinated, or pupils and young people aged between 5 and 18 and a half, who have been identified as a close contact of someone with Covid, should take a lateral flow test every day for seven days and, unless they have a positive test result or develop symptoms at any time, they should continue to attend school as normal. Children under the age of 5 should not do a daily test or self-isolate and should attend their provision unless they receive a positive PCR test result.

Staffing Updates

As you will be aware, we were joined at GMA by Todd Cheetham last term who took up the vacant Assistant Principal role on an interim basis following David Bergan's departure in July last year. We advertised the position last Autumn, and unfortunately, we did not feel that we had a strong enough, or broad enough, field of applicants and we took the decision to re-advertise the position this month. This does mean however, that we were unable to appoint a new Assistant Principal. Todd has returned to his previous school, Greenacre School in Barnsley, as planned, as clearly travelling across each day from Barnsley could only ever be a temporary arrangement. The job advert is live now, and we are hoping to interview before the end of the month – I will keep you posted with any updates.

For the interim period we are delighted to have been joined by Shona Crichton. Shona is Headteacher of Springwell Leeds, and will be working alongside myself and Louise Graham until a new Assistant Principal starts with us. Shona brings a wealth of knowledge and leadership experience with her, and

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she will certainly add value to our existing team. I'm certain that you will want to join me in welcoming Shona to our fantastic school.

In December we also lost Amanda Jeffrey and Sam Rigby from our teaching team. Emily Richmond, previously at Rawdon St Peter's, has moved to GM as the Class Teacher for Red Kites, and Jill Parker has taken on Kestrels with immediate effect, until our new appointee can begin later this Spring. Jessica Wallace was interviewed just prior to the holidays and will leave her current school to join us as Kestrels Class Teacher later this term.

Building Works

The building works continue! I wrote to you in July with details of a 6-week programme of works that would be finished in time for the new academic year, but unfortunately this didn't come to pass. The roof replacement at our primary school caused significant issues, and major flooding of our site as a result meant that several classrooms were hugely damaged, which in turn meant more building works and repairs were necessary. The whole project is now in its 6th month, and at the time of writing remains unfinished, but we are very close to the finish line. The entire primary school roof has been replaced and the front elevation has benefitted from timber cladding and new signage – and it looks fantastic. We have also demolished the old car port that was at the front of primary (as it was too low for minibuses and ambulances anyway!) and the whole area is far brighter and opened out. The secondary school has also been timber clad, with new signs, and again it looks great.

The two classrooms that were closed due to flood damage have been fully refurbished and opened once again last week – they are truly stunning! Red Kites and Falcons have now got the best rooms in the school, and a difficult few months has led to a fantastic result that will undoubtedly enhance our pupils' learning experience. The Meeting Room at our secondary school has been renovated, modernised, and equipped with a state of the art 65" flat screen to be used for meetings and for video conferencing.

In the Autumn, we moved into the new build at Benton Park, and our new Meadows Park Base is fabulous – staff and pupils all report that it has made a tremendous difference working in a set of classrooms designed specifically for our use.

Next on the list for modernisation and redevelopment is the Reception area at our primary school. For those of you that know the primary school you will understand why we are extremely keen to gut the area and to rebuild a cleaner, airier and fit for purpose space – without the 1970s varnished pine interior! Work starts on January 17th, and there will be a disruption for a few weeks as Reception will need to be closed, however we will inform you all of the 'workaround' and communicate that to everyone.

It is undoubtedly an extremely challenging time, however I am proud to work with such a strong team of dedicated professionals who are all willing to go above and beyond to support your children. Please continue to work with us in the way that you always have done – ultimately, we all have the same common goal; to ensure that your child has the very best possible start in life. We are better when we work together, and I look forward to welcoming you all back into school in the future. Fingers crossed it won't be too long.

Gavin Hosford

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