13th January 2021

Principal’s Update

Dear student/parent/carer

I will try to maintain regular contact and updates with you all at least once a week this term, as I reported last week the college buildings are remaining open and staff and a small number of students are working from college. Where possible we will ensure that all the usual support offer continues for all students remotely via MS Teams or phone/email.

Unfortunately, the rates of Covid in our area have leapt back up to the very high levels we saw in the Autumn, in light of this we have been asked by local authorities and Public Health England to share letters with you – the St Helens and Knowsley letters are attached.

I would like to thank and congratulate our students for their efforts to maintain their learning, I did write about this on Friday, but it is worth repeating. As a college (and as parents) we are very aware of the new challenges arising given that in many homes other family members may now be working or studying from home and competing for resources and space.

Please do let us know if you think that there may be anything that we can do to support you with any particularly demanding circumstances.

Following this last week’s announcements about summer exams, we continue to be extremely frustrated by the lack of further detail we can share with you all, for now you know as much as we do.

What we can report is that the next stage of the process is that Ofqual will conduct a two-week consultation on proposals for teacher assessed grades. It is hoped that this will provide an opportunity for people involved in education to comment upon and perhaps influence decisions which are made. There may well be an opportunity for students and parents to also take part in this consultation, we will keep you as up to date as we can.

In the absence of any information about what might happen next, our position is that we will continue to deliver teaching online so that schemes of work can be covered and so that our students are as prepared as they can be for any eventuality. We will continue to provide support through Progress Achievement Tutors and by whatever means possible, for those in the Upper 6th please note that the UCAS deadline has now been extended to the 29th of January – so please, if you were a little behind with your application or are still pondering contact your PAT and get an application in.

We have now set up a lateral flow Covid testing centre at the college and from this week we will be offering those staff and students who are coming into the college the opportunity to take a test, we will share with you all, more information about this next week, and we are now planning how we
would scale up this testing whenever we are given the directive from Government to start planning for the return of face to face teaching.

Thank you for your patience, your understanding and your support. It remains my hope that we will re-open College towards the end of February. In the meantime, please take care of yourselves and support one another through what will hopefully be our last lockdown.

Regards

Mike Hill
Principal

/koa
12 January 2021

Dear parent/carer

We hope this letter finds you and your families safe and well.

We want to provide you with an update on the situation across St Helens in relation to COVID-19.

Prior to Christmas we were successful in driving down the rate of infection across the borough and we would like to thank you for the part you played in this. However, since Christmas we have witnessed a significant rise in cases, especially in the last week. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we continue to work together to stop these figures rising further.

As of 8th January, the weekly infection rate in St Helens stood at 849.5 per 100,000, that is over 1500 new cases in a week. We expect the levels to either rise or continue at these high rates over the coming weeks, until lockdown measures start to be realised in the rates. While at lower levels than some other age groups, the rate of young people aged 5 to 10 years having a positive coronavirus test has more than quadrupled over the last fortnight, to the highest levels since the pandemic began. This shows the importance of avoiding infections in younger age groups.

As you are very aware, in an attempt to control the spread of the virus across the country, the Prime Minister declared, on 4th January 2021, a national lockdown. It is vital that everyone follows the lockdown rules and makes every possible effort to stay at home.

As part of this announcement, the Prime Minister stated that schools would provide a remote learning offer and that only the children of critical workers and those deemed to be vulnerable should attend education on site. Our schools, with very little warning, worked tirelessly to put such provision in place. We are wholly grateful for their hard work and dedication.

Schools recognise that emergency provision is crucial for some families and they are doing all they can to accommodate need. However, with the rates as high as they are now, it is vital that we work together to keep the number of children in school at a minimum, in order to keep staff and those children in attendance as safe as possible. For this reason, we are appealing to parents/carers to only take up a place at school if it is absolutely essential.

On Friday 8th January, the government updated their guidance. It now states that even those who are critical workers keep their children at home if they can and only take up a place if they are working in a critical role and have no other childcare option available. It is hoped that such action will help to reduce the transmission rates.
A number of our school leaders have expressed concerns about the extremely high demand for places. This is putting them under greater pressure in delivering a remote offer to those at home and in ensuring they can adequately staff schools when staff have to self-isolate or are absent for other reasons.

School leaders know their communities well, they have put in place rigorous risk assessments, but they are trying to respond to an ever-changing situation. We would ask that you respect the very difficult circumstances in which they are working. The offer from schools may be subject to change according to staffing and changes in government guidance and we would ask for your patience whilst schools determine how many children they can safely accommodate.

Schools will, however, continue to provide high quality remote learning and will ensure the pastoral needs of children and young people are met as best they can.

Thank you for your continued support. We appreciate that this is a very difficult time for all but hopefully, by working together, we can keep one another safe, protect our NHS and drive the infection levels down once again.

Yours faithfully

Susan Forster    Jim Leivers
Director of Public Health  Director of Children and Young People’s Services
11 January 2021

Dear Parent / Carer,

We wanted to provide you with an update on the rapidly changing COVID-19 situation here in Knowsley.

Since Christmas, we have been seeing significant rises in the number of COVID-19 cases in the Borough and, over the last week or so, the rate of increase has been sharper than ever before.

We are clearly seeing the impact of the new variant of COVID-19 here in Knowsley and whilst we know this new variant doesn’t result in more serious illness, we do know that it is more contagious. This means that we all must act now to stop these figures from rising any higher and the virus becoming completely uncontrolled.

You might recall that Knowsley was at the top of the national table for the rate of infection back in October last year. At that time, we had exceeded 700 cases per 100,000 people, and we saw that (rightly) as a serious situation.

So, it is all the more concerning to report that, as at 4 January 2021, the infection rate in Knowsley stood at 1,123.5 per 100,000 and our expectation is that these case levels will continue to rise for some time yet.

As you know, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown on the evening of 4 January 2021, and it is really important that we all follow the lockdown rules and stay at home as much as possible.

Knowsley’s schools have been remarkable throughout the whole pandemic – they worked tirelessly throughout last Monday evening (after the “last minute” announcement from the Prime Minister) to ensure that education provision can continue – either face-to-face or remotely. It is a challenging time for our local schools and for local families too and we appreciate the additional pressure many people are under at this time.

Once again Knowsley schools will remain open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children throughout this latest lockdown. We know that this emergency provision is absolutely essential for some families. However, with rates of the virus currently so high, it is important for schools to keep the numbers of children in school as small as possible. This will allow schools to limit the size of ‘bubbles’ and children and teachers mixing. As such, we would ask all parents / carers to take up these places only if it is absolutely necessary. This will lower the number of households mixing and reduce transmission of the virus.

In line with the most recent government guidance, issued on Friday 8th January, even if you are a critical worker, if your children can remain at home rather that attend school or Nursery, on some, or all days, then they should. Please only use the offer of provision when it is crucial.
for you to undertake your critical role, and when you have no other childcare option available to you.

Many of our schools and settings are experiencing high demand for places; this is placing additional pressure on our schools to deliver high quality remote learning alongside on-site provision. Schools are also managing staff absence and isolation. This means that Head Teachers will need to prioritise access to on site education based on individual need, and on the safety of the school. It is essential that Heads can keep numbers within the school low. Head Teachers will need to make these decisions based on their own risk assessments and the availability of staff. The school offer will be subject to change, based on the availability of staff and government guidance – we ask for your patience and understanding with this.

Please remember for children not attending school, high quality remote education is being provided by schools to ensure that pupil learning can continue at home. School staff are available to support families with this.

It is also important for us to share with you that we are now seeing a spike in cases in young people aged 17-24 years. Unfortunately, this means that we will also undoubtedly see an increase in cases in other age groups as the virus moves through households. We know that the pandemic is impacting on young people in terms of disruption to their education, work, and social life, but, if you do have anyone in your household in this age group, please encourage them to stay at home too.

Thank you once again for your continued support during these challenging times. If everyone plays their part and follows the rules, we can once again, protect our NHS and get these infection levels down.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Graham Morgan  
Leader of Knowsley Council

Councillor Margaret Harvey  
Cabinet Member for Children’s Services