

Date: 25th January 2022

Dear Secondary School/College Parent/Carer,

I wanted to write to you, following the changes to the COVID-19 measures in English schools that the Prime Minister announced last week, to tell you what those changes are, and to explain the local advice that will continue to be in place for our schools.

As you are probably aware, evidence is showing that the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is less severe in terms of the risk of severe illness and hospitalisation for people, particularly those who are fully vaccinated and boosted. However, we now know that it is significantly more transmissible than the previous, Delta variant, which means that it much more easily spreads amongst our population. Nationally (as can be seen on the Gov.uk [website](#)), the numbers of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 have been extremely high in recent weeks, and although these numbers have reduced overall in the last two weeks, we are still seeing an extremely high number of cases in Wigan in general, and in Wigan schools, which is in line with what other areas in Greater Manchester and North West England are also experiencing. The current information on our case rates can be found [here](#).

On 19th January, the Prime Minister announced the ending of many 'Plan B' measures, including the removal of the requirement for secondary school pupils to wear face coverings in the classroom. From 27th January, nationally, the requirement for secondary school pupils to also wear face coverings in corridors and communal areas is also being removed, although the Government has made it clear that local Directors of Public Health may make recommendations to schools in their areas if they judge it necessary for the safety of public health.

Given the current high prevalence in Wigan, and pressures on our health and social care system, as well as the need to try and maintain our secondary pupils' access to COVID-19 vaccination opportunities, I have provided advice to all Wigan secondary schools that they should retain the usage of face coverings in corridors and communal areas. There is now a clear body of evidence that face coverings are effective in reducing transmission, and a summary of the Respiratory Evidence Panel's findings in this respect can be found [here](#). I would like to draw your attention to this sentence in particular:

'the evidence suggests that all types of face coverings are, to some extent, effective in reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in both healthcare and public, community settings – this is through a combination of source control and protection to the wearer (high confidence)'

I would therefore ask you to support your school if they ask your child to wear a face covering in corridors and communal areas. There are also a number of other, also critical, things we can all do to support our schools in trying to reduce the risk of transmission in their setting and keep our children and young people safe, including; participating in regular testing, testing daily if a close contact of a confirmed case, self-isolating if required to, and taking up the offer of a vaccination or booster dose if eligible to.

I am grateful to you for continuing to support our schools and colleges in these challenging times, and wish you and your child or young person the very best during the rest of the 2021/22 academic year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Arden', written in a cursive style.

Professor Kate Arden MBChB MSc FFPH
Director of Public Health