



St Mary's Catholic School

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where everyone can succeed



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Dear Parents and Carers

I hope that you and your family are well.

Students continue to work very well in school and we are very pleased with the progress they are making, despite the challenges that everyone is facing both in school and outside of school due to the national situation. We will continue to support all of our students fully as we move ahead, to ensure they can achieve their full potential this year, despite the disruption caused by COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the level of COVID-19 in the North-East, and specifically in Newcastle upon Tyne, continues to be very high at this time, further evidenced by our area being placed in the highest national tier of restrictions from Wednesday this week. This high rate of COVID-19 in the community is therefore having a significant impact on secondary schools across the area and we continue to deal with regular confirmed positive cases in school. Since I last wrote to you, we have had further positive student cases in all year groups except Year 12. Many of the positive cases over the last couple of weeks have involved siblings and some have involved no close contacts being identified at all, given the students had not been in school in the 48 hours before symptoms emerged. As always, we have followed all Public Health guidance fully and all possible close contacts have been informed and sent home from school to self-isolate, as per the guidance. I realise that it may be worrying for some parents and carers to hear of such regular positive cases at this time, both in school and in the wider community, just to put things into context, since we returned to school in September, in total, only 4% of our students have tested positive for COVID-19, despite the very high levels of COVID-19 in the North-East. I hope this offers some reassurance.

As you know, over the weekend, an unprecedented number of staff informed us that they would be absent from school this week and therefore, we had to make the decision for Year 8 and Year 9 students to work at home initially from Monday to Wednesday this week. We worked very hard during the weekend to evaluate the impact of staff absence on our different year groups, to try to keep the school open for all year groups. However, the level of staff absence is simply too high and we cannot run a school safely for all students with such a depleted staff team. Therefore, to ensure the health and safety of all students and staff in school, Year 8 and 9 students are being asked to work from home. **We will continue to evaluate this arrangement to ensure that health and safety is not compromised in any way and we will be in touch with the parents and carers of our Year 8 and 9 students as soon as possible this week, to let them know if this period of working at home needs to be extended. We will also be in touch with the parents and carers of other year groups, should we need any further year groups to work from home at any point.**

We have spoken to Public Health Newcastle again at the weekend and they have informed us that the spike in positive cases in Newcastle continues and that other neighbouring schools and workplaces are experiencing a similar situation. They continue to assure us that we have all possible control measures in place and that we are doing everything possible in school to keep our students and staff safe during the global pandemic. We will continue to liaise with Public Health as we move ahead, ensuring that we continue to follow and embed all of their advice.

A reminder that if your child develops any symptoms of COVID-19, they should remain at home and arrangements should be made for him/her to be tested. Please let the school know immediately should your child test positive for COVID-19.

Thank you so much for your continued understanding and support.

Many best wishes.

Yours faithfully,

Miss Patterson
Headteacher