



from Tom Lawson MA (Oxon), Headmaster

19 August 2020

Dear Parents

1. Preamble

I have resisted writing despite the many developments over the past days; had I done so I would have been out of date immediately. I apologise for the confusion parents face about exam results, as well as understandable questions over school reopening details and quarantine, all of which affect us. We are left, as you must be, bamboozled by the government's changes at short notice.

The bigger picture

With so much confusion in the media, it can be difficult to see the wood from the trees. The fundamental problems were introduced much earlier with lockdown of schools without an exit strategy and the instant decision to cancel exams. Without examinations, Ofqual were set an impossible task and one that was always going to have unsatisfactory outcomes.

The bigger picture to consider here is that exam results are a validation of learning, not the education itself. I want to reassure parents that your children's enthusiastic learning each school day and the hard work that teachers have put in to instruction will stand them in good stead for later life. Indeed, even if faith in the exam certificates is tested by this fiasco, we know that the good name of Eastbourne College and the high skill levels developed inside and outside the classroom is what really matters in determining the future opportunities of our pupils.

In terms of reopening, we can now draw great cheer from the evidence of other countries where school reopening has not caused an increase in serious illness among children, teachers or the wider community.¹ I am fortunate that our sensible parent body understands that there is no way completely to eliminate Covid risk from schools. They are part of the community, not hermetically sealed, but with the measures outlined in this letter we can be 'Covid-resilient' and your children are entering a safe environment.

2. A-level and GCSE Results

Our A-level and GCSE results will now be the higher of the boards' moderated grades and the centre-assessed grades. Centre-assessed grades are those produced through the evidence-based and thorough process undertaken by teachers and moderated by heads of department and centrally according to [the policy sent to parents in advance](#).

¹ 'The infection appears to take a milder course in children than in adults. While a small number of children have developed a significant systemic inflammatory response, clinical signs are in general very similar to other childhood respiratory infections and very few infected children develop severe disease. There is emerging evidence that children may be less likely to acquire Covid-19 than adults; and some evidence that children, who tend to have a less frequent and milder cough, have a limited role in transmitting the virus both between children and from children to adults. Contact tracing studies have identified very limited transmission by children in school settings... There is growing international evidence relating to the effects of re-opening schools on wider community transmission. As with the analysis of English models mentioned above, WHO reports that modelling studies suggest a limited, but non-negligible, effect of school reopening on wider transmission in the community. Studies from Scandinavian countries, Ireland, France and the Netherlands indicate that school opening has made no discernible difference to community transmission and there is little or no onwards transmission in school settings.' [Chief Medical Officer of Scotland's report, 7 August 2020]

Regarding A-level, UCAS will automatically resubmit the grades to universities in all cases where there is an uplift. It is unclear what universities will do in the event of applicants desiring to change their decisions in the light of this uplift. Anyone unhappy about their current university place after UCAS have confirmed these changes should speak with Miss Gordon. Otherwise changes to certificates etc will happen automatically.

Many pupils will have well-earned excellent grades, and on average the grades this year will be very good. We understand that some pupils will still be disappointed by their A-level or GCSE grades. It is right for ambitious pupils and parents to believe the best case is reachable and feel hard done by, especially if, as I suspect, some other schools may not have calculated grades as thoroughly and objectively as us. Our integrity requires that we deliver bad news as well as good as we calculated the most likely grade using the permitted data and unbiased judgement.

Ofqual have not issued definitive advice on whether grades can be appealed now and on what grounds. It is likely that only the technical grounds that there was a mistake entering the grade on the system or suchlike will be admitted. The College will, of course, review grades on a case by case basis if pupils feel there has been a mistake.

We will update you if there is a significant update from Ofqual or a policy shift on grade appeals or university entry. In the meantime, we focus on congratulating our pupils on the hard work they did over the years to justify the many good grades that will no doubt be published.

3. Return to School Plans

With two weeks to go, finer details still need to be determined, not least because the government has delayed the updated guidance for boarding settings. Nevertheless, our planning over the holidays and the experience from St Andrew's Prep from the end of last term, gives us confidence that we can welcome all pupils back, day and boarding, from the first day of term and minimise risk to an acceptable level. We are fortunate that the levels of Covid-19 in Eastbourne and the surrounding area have been low and are on a falling trend. Nevertheless, as your children's safety is our first priority, we will have measures in place to reduce risk in school.

BUBBLES

The government guidance allows for schools to make decisions about bubble sizes that are pertinent to their settings.

- Each year group – one bubble
- Houses – sub-bubble
- Each school bus group – one 'sub'-bubble

Essentially, pupils within their year group do not need to social distance (but should nevertheless minimise contact where possible). Different year groups in houses should be discouraged from mixing as much as practicable in the given house settings. It is permissible for teachers to teach different classes in different year groups but they should try to keep 2m distance from pupils.

Other than fixed bus groups, activities that mix year groups will take place only by exception with a specific assessment of risk. Sport, for example, will be rearranged primarily to take place in year-group sessions only.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

As well as enhanced cleaning arrangements, sanitiser and other equipment will be provided around the site. Personal hygiene will be actively promoted and required.

Some one-way systems will be introduced and clearly signed. The general rule in two-way corridors and stairs will be KEEP LEFT and try to keep distance from others.

Our air conditioning does not recycle air so will not add to the risk of virus spreading. Windows will be opened as much as possible while the weather is clement to enhance ventilation.

FACE-COVERINGS

Pupils may wear appropriate face coverings if they wish, though government advice is that it is not necessary in a school setting. All pupils should take a face covering to school, however, for use when the risk assessment might particularly require it, especially for bus transport (both public and our own buses) where they are compulsory. Staff have face coverings / PPE available if they are in close proximity, for example nursing staff.

SCHOOL DAY TIMINGS

School will start and stop at the normal times, with the multiple points of entry (houses) achieving the required distancing.

Minor adjustments to the timetable will be made to assist in minimising concentrations of pupils moving at key times including meals. We will monitor and if necessary make further arrangements.

UNIFORM

The new term will start with pupils wearing uniform, possibly with shirtsleeve order depending on weather, but blazers / jackets should be brought to school.

THE CLASSROOM & LESSONS & HOUSES

The normal timetable will obtain except for the changes to break and lunchtimes.

Classrooms will be cleaned and sanitised more regularly by the cleaners. Touch pads, door handles and so forth will be sanitised several times each day. Teachers can request extra cleaning equipment from their heads of department if required. Items of shared equipment (eg keyboards, specialist equipment) will be sanitised after use. Pupils should not share resources except where it is necessary to do so. Special arrangements will be made in departments to clean equipment between lessons / use.

Homework should continue to be set on Show My Homework and, as much as possible, work should be operable online (Teams) to aid any pupils away / isolated and maintain preparedness for any lockdown.

Classes will be arranged so all face the front with the desks spaced out as much as possible and with adherence to seating plans for possible contact tracing.

Pupils should be instructed to take a squirt of sanitiser (provided) on entry to the classroom for every lesson. Pupils will be released from class in a controlled manner to ease flow around campus.

Departments will arrange how they wish the pupils to come into the classroom / lab according to the individual needs and layout of their department such that pupils are not congregating in confined spaces.

CATERING

The catering team have taken special measures to ensure they are Covid safe.

The dining hall will be opened out and zoned to assist improved hygiene standards and seating more spread out. Pupils should be instructed to sit with their year group. Schedules will be more spread out to help with this.

The existing queueing and one-way system will be beefed up and pupils told to wash their hands before every meal as in mid-March.

Communal use of house galleys will be modified so pupils are not having to share knives and so forth to make toast. Instead, morning and afternoon snacks will be provided and sub-divided between year groups. Pupils will still be able to make hot / cold drinks and will have access to water.

Pupils are encouraged to use and carry re-usable water bottles, including at meal times (to reduce transmission risk at water dispensers in the dining hall).

ASSEMBLIES and CHAPEL

There will be no whole-school assemblies. Year-group assemblies will continue and take place with appropriate spacing out. A short Chapel service will take place every Mon, Wed and Fri in single year groups.

PARENTS and VISITORS

For now, parents are asked not to attend any matches / performances that might take place, to be reviewed as soon as we have the co-curriculum fully operational, nor to come into houses except as specifically directed by hsms. Parents are asked not to socialise without social distancing, especially around pinch-points such as entrances to houses.

CO-CURRICULUM and WEEKEND ACTIVITIES

Weekday activities will take place as normal if they can be split into single year groups. There will be no inter-school fixtures for the first three weeks; possible future fixtures will be subject to the arrangements at other schools, reviewed on a three-to-four weekly rolling programme. We will therefore be replacing matches with a programme of games training to provide pupils with a further opportunity to get back into sport and build up their match fitness. Year 9 and Year 10 pupils will be expected to join in their squad training. Older year groups may also join in their squad training or alternatively may wish to partake in one of the alternative sport activities on offer (eg swimming, gym fitness, pilates, badminton, basketball, cross country).

We wish to preserve the guided opportunities of our successful Saturday programme but this will be modified, at least for the first few weeks, in light of Covid restrictions and our focus on the wider College family's welfare. Brunch will continue to be offered. Our programme of academic department drop-ins will continue and, given imminent Year 10 exams and Upper Sixth mock exams in late September, will no doubt be a popular proposition.

There will be no school trips that involve overnight stays.

NB for parents – please support us in discouraging pupils from sharing sports kit! **They need to stick to their own clean kit and please help us promote regular washing to help reduce the risk of virus spread.**

BOARDING

Quarantine rules for a large number of countries have been dropped which means that most boarders can start without isolation. However, Chinese, French and Spanish pupils (and others, possibly, given the situation is subject to change) will have to be quarantined in their rooms for the first 14 days if they have not already isolated.

Hsms will be asked to find spaces in the house where isolated pupils can be concentrated with their own bathroom and kitchen facilities. Pupils arriving from the same country at the same time can share rooms if necessary.

Tutors and hsms have a role in keeping up the morale of pupils in isolation and ensuring they receive schoolwork and pastoral support. Matrons will be asked to bring food etc to pupils' rooms, supported by the soft services team.

Overseas boarders should go to their guardians in exeat but may stay in school during half term. Further details were explained by hsms in an email in late July.

TRANSPORT

Where possible, those from the same year group should sit together. Other Covid-safe arrangements have been made for school buses and will be communicated to parents.

Drivers and pupils should wear face coverings on both school buses and public transport.

SUSPECTED CASES, TESTING and ISOLATION

Parents are asked to adhere to the strict rule of not sending pupils into school who are ill / have any symptoms both to control Covid spread and other illnesses that might overwhelm our medical provision. Once term starts, we will be reminding you regularly to keep an eye on your children's health so that you do not bring them to school if they are unwell. **This is very important.**

The medical centre will confirm arrangements for testing nearer the start of the term. We will manage testing for boarders, and day pupils will be advised on the correct local services and supported through any medical issues.

Gov.uk advice anticipates a move away from immediately isolating whole classes or year groups (and associated staff) caused by a confirmed case (as per June) to a more targeted approach to identify those who have been in closest contact. Academic work will be provided promptly in such cases, via SMHW / Teams.

We will be asking pupils to keep a diary. Seating plans and our bubble arrangements will assist us in tracing contacts should we need to. In turn, we would ask parents to ensure as much as possible that their children's life out of school respects common-sense Covid safety and can be traced.

Individuals or smaller groups who are away from school because of isolation will be catered for as we would pupils at home ill; tutors should coordinate and ensure work is sent to them / accessible and they are pastorally supported.

Our preference will be for pupils who are suspected or confirmed Covid-19 positive to be at home. For those pupils for whom this is impossible, an area of the school outside the medical centre, probably Arnold Lodge, will be designated for pupils requiring further isolation.

SUMMARY

Further details will be finalised and all arrangements are subject to refinement in the light of experience and further discussion. The full risk assessment is being continually updated and reflects our adherence to the BSA (Boarding Schools Association) Covid Safe Charter.

The crucial thing is to apply common sense and for all in the community to remind each other about the sensible measures we can take to reduce virus transmission and stay Covid-free.

We cannot run the school and prevent any virus risk, but we can minimise it through everyone in the community behaving sensibly, and we can be resilient by responding to changing circumstances with balance and judgement.

Thank you to all of you for your support and willingness so we can get school up and running as fully as possible for the beginning of term.

4. Closing

Despite all the trials and tribulations, I hope that, for most of the school holidays, you have been enjoying good family time. I feel excited and positive about moving forward this term, and I cannot wait to have the children back and enjoying their education together.

With very best wishes



Tom Lawson
Headmaster