



You will be aware of ongoing national (and, indeed, international) anxiety regarding the continued spread of COVID-19, with escalating rates of infection in many part of Europe and the United Kingdom.

Until this point, we have derived some comfort from the fact that the South West has experienced amongst the lowest levels of infection across the United Kingdom. Recent figures, however, suggest an upturn even in the heart of the West Country. We are constantly reviewing our policies and protocols, however, and it should be noted that even with the recent regional increase, West Devon remains amongst the safest parts of the United Kingdom, and Mount Kelly's location – on the edge of Dartmoor, far from a major conurbation, with great gales of fresh Atlantic air blowing through the school – is an additional source of comfort.

That said, we are not complacent, and are writing prior to the resumption of school to assure you that we are continuing to do everything possible to keep our community safe.

We believe the measures that have been in place since the start of term have made a significant contribution to the safety and wellbeing of our community, but from Monday a number of additional measures will be in place, as follows:

- The wearing of face masks will be mandatory for all staff and for pupils in Year 7 and above when indoors, apart from when in lessons or at meal times. High-quality, Mount Kelly-branded face masks are available from the School Shop.
- We have also taken steps further to segregate the year groups, both within their boarding and day houses, but more generally.
- We will also be further strengthening our hygiene and social distancing protocols, requiring pupils to sanitise their hands at the beginning or end of every lesson, and very significantly reducing face-to-face meetings between staff and between staff and pupils.

- Though pupils will still be allowed into Tavistock during their down-time, our boarders will no longer be allowed to travel into Plymouth, unless as part of a formally organised school trip.
- We will also be taking a rather more robust disciplinary line with pupils who are unable to operate in accordance with the rules.

We also have at our disposal a range of further measures, which we can deploy at immediate notice, should the national, regional or local situation, or developments within the school, demand it.

On a more positive note, however, a thorough review of the structure and timings of the day has enabled us to make better and more efficient use of the school day, and increase our lessons from 50 minutes to 55 minutes. This may not seem like a great deal of time, but cumulatively this adds up to well over two hours more classroom time each week. Regardless of what next summer might bring in terms of public examinations, this cannot be considered to be anything other than a good thing.

In order to ensure the safety of our boarding community, it is imperative that the parents of all our boarders – apart from those who attended the Half Term Camp – complete this brief [online form](#), prior to their son or daughter returning to their boarding houses.

### **Academic provision for absentees**

We continue to give careful consideration to how we might best support pupils who are unable to attend school – perhaps on account of having to self-isolate, or perhaps due to travel difficulties. In common with just about every other school, we are clear that what is known as *blended teaching* (ie, teaching a lesson both to a live and to an online audience) presents insurmountable technical and practical difficulties.

That said, Teams – our online platform for setting and marking prep, and for hosting meetings and purely online teaching – helps enormously in this respect, and we will be looking for ways in which we can make even better use of this to enable absent pupils to access learning.

## **Quarantine in School**

Again, this is an area of our provision on which we have reflected at length, but we simply are not configured or resourced to offer this facility. The Half Term Camp has been a great success, and we are giving careful consideration to a Christmas Camp, but we are unable to provide for individuals who are required to quarantine during term time.

The parents of international boarders should therefore ensure that their guardianship arrangements are suitably robust.

## **Summary**

As was noted in the previous Update, there is a balance to be struck between a degree of caution so excessive that it would make the operation of the School impossible, and an approach so laissez faire that it endangers the health of our community. That said, we all knew that winter was going to present significant additional challenges, and so it has already proved.

As always, proportionality and good sense remain our watchwords, whilst (and not wishing to miss any opportunity for a nautical metaphor) the best possible educational outcomes for your sons and daughters remains our leading light.