



13 July 2020

Dear Parent(s) & Carer(s),

Returning to Nottingham Free School in September 2020

I am writing with details of our preparations for September 2020, following the announcements made by the Prime Minister on Thursday 2nd July. As was largely expected, schools are to make arrangements to welcome all pupils back to school from September. While this is great news on one level as we have missed our students so much, it does present some operational challenges. This letter contains an outline of the way in which we will be addressing those challenges.

As always, the health and well-being of our students is our priority, and if we are to establish a safe working environment it is absolutely essential that we have the full cooperation of everyone involved. We understand that many students will find the return to school challenging in itself, and while this letter focuses on the operational elements of school re-opening, I would like to take this opportunity to stress that we will also be doing all we can to support students in their readjustment to school life.

How will we be minimising the risk of infection?

The government guidance for schools sets out the steps that schools must take, taking into account the physical size and layout of their site and building, and the elements that make up their curriculum. These expectations are the same for students and staff:

Staying at home if you are symptomatic

The most important step anyone can take is to be self-aware with regards to the key symptoms of COVID-19, and stay at home if they develop a new, continuous cough, a high temperature, or if there is a loss or change in their normal sense of taste or smell.

Keeping your hands clean

We will be providing students and staff with regular opportunities to clean their hands, and we will ask that they use the hand sanitisers located in every classroom, and at particular points during the school day.

Maintaining good respiratory hygiene

There will be tissues available in all teaching areas, and lidded bins for their disposal, so that everyone can 'catch it, bin it & kill it'.

Cleaning areas and surfaces more often

We will be increasing the regularity with which teaching areas are cleaned, paying particular attention to frequently touched surfaces.

Creating 'bubbles' for students

This is one of the most challenging aspects facing secondary schools, due to the way older students are organised for option subjects. This is particularly the case at NFS, where the relatively small size of our building limits the options at our disposal. However, a benefit of our size is that it is perfectly reasonable to 'bubble' two year groups together, and stagger the times of the school day. We appreciate this represents an unforeseen change for September, but it is comparable to the timings that have been in place for many years at our school.

The timings of the school day in September 2020 will be:

Years 7 and 9		
Assemble	08:25	08:30
Period 1	08:30	09:20
Period 2	09:20	10:10
Break	10:10	10:25
Period 3	10:25	11:15
Tutor Period	11:15	11:30
Period 4	11:30	12:20
LUNCH (Period 5)	12:20	13:10
Period 6	13:10	14:00
Period 7	14:00	14:50
Home Study	14:50	16:45

Years 8 and 10		
Home Study	8:25	9:30
Assemble	09:30	09:35
Period 2	09:35	10:25
Period 3	10:25	11:15
Tutor Period	11:15	11:30
LUNCH (Period 4)	11:30	12:20
Period 5	12:20	13:10
Period 6	13:10	14:00
Break	14:00	14:15
Period 7	14:15	15:05
Period 8	15:05	15:55
Home Study	15:55	16:45

Years 11, 12 and 13		
Home Study	8:25	10:15
Assemble	10:15	10:25
Period 3	10:25	11:15
Tutor Period	11:15	11:30
Period 4	11:30	12:20
Period 5	12:20	13:10
LUNCH (Period 6)	13:10	14:00
Period 7	14:00	14:50
Break	14:50	15:05
Period 8	15:05	15:55
Period 9 (<i>not on Fridays</i>)	15:55	16:45

These new timings have been constructed with the following considerations in mind:

- These timings still provide all students with the traditional twenty five hours of taught lesson time per week.
- In order to establish a safer start and finish to the school day, we need students to start and finish at different times. This will also reduce the number of students travelling to and from our school site at any one time. We are hopeful this will also enable a greater proportion of our students to either walk or cycle to school.
- Our Year 7s need to settle in with the most 'normal' timings.
- Our older students are best placed to make the use of the extended home study period in the mornings, as they will be preparing for their examinations next summer.
- We have temporarily extended the lunch break for all students to 50 minutes. When combined with the fact that the number of students on lunch at any given time will be

significantly reduced, we will be able to establish more effective social distancing and hygiene routines in our dining area and outside areas.

- We have been able to rearrange break times to ensure that our students can distance appropriately.
- The most common age gap between siblings is two school years, so we have 'bubbled' Years 7 & 9 together, Years 8 & 10 together, and Years 11, 12 & 13 together. This also gives us the most even distribution of students, with bubbles of 229, 222 and 165 respectively.

We are anticipating that these arrangements will be required for at least the first term of the academic year, if not longer.

School Uniform and Equipment

The government guidance states that students can return to wearing school uniform, and that no additional cleaning of clothes is necessary. However, owing to the additional challenges of distancing in PE changing rooms, we are going to ask that on the day when students have PE, they attend school in their PE kit, with appropriate additional outer layers in colder weather.

Students will obviously need to bring all of their normal stationery equipment for lessons in their pencil cases. Under normal circumstances, when students forget their equipment teachers often lend replacements. Unfortunately this will no longer be possible. In the event that a student's lack of stationery equipment prevents them from participating in a lesson, they will be required to use our school equipment shop to purchase the relevant items.

Our teachers are planning ways in which students can record and organise their work in September, with the strong possibility that students will be asked to take responsibility for a greater range of books on a daily basis. Unfortunately, we are also going to have to change the way in which we run our school library, so we will be asking that all students bring a reading book from home for at least the first few weeks of term.

Enrichment Programme

The new timings for our school day unfortunately restrict what we can offer within our enrichment programme, especially as many of the activities we have offered in previous years would be difficult to run safely. We are therefore pausing our enrichment programme, but it will be reinstated as soon as it is safe to do so. To that end, we are asking students to indicate their preferences so that when restrictions are lifted, we can re-start activities as promptly as possible.

Practical Subjects

The government guidance draws particular attention to how schools should approach the teaching of subjects that have traditionally included a practical element. At NFS those subjects are Art, Drama, Music, PE, Science and Design & Technology. It is our intention to continue to teach all of these subjects, but it is inevitable that the proportion of practical tasks included in lessons, or in some cases the breadth of the activities on offer, will be significantly reduced in September. Our teachers in these subjects will continue to ensure they refer to the specialist advice provided by the government and other external agencies regarding the best ways in which their subjects can be approached.

Student grouping and movement around the school building

As well as 'bubbling' Year groups together, we will also be reducing the number of times students are 'mixed up' for teaching in different subject areas in Years 7, 8 and 9. This means that some students will find themselves in new teaching groups in September. As the academic year progresses and restrictions are hopefully lifted, we will be able to once again take a more subject specific approach to student groupings. This approach will also simplify the movement of students between lessons. In the meantime, we will be reviewing the routes students are allowed to use when moving between rooms and areas.

Catering

Aspens will continue to provide a school meal service from September. However, we regret to advise our water fountains have had to be temporarily decommissioned, so please ensure your child brings a water bottle, alternatively they can purchase a drink from the canteen.

Cashless payment system

Unfortunately, we are going to have to temporarily ask that students do not bring cash in to school to top up their dinner account. This means that parents and carers will need to use the online facility of Parent Pay to top up their child's account.

Travelling to and from school

There will be little point in any of these measures if students do not conduct themselves in a sensible and responsible manner on their journeys to and from school. We will be asking students to maintain distancing if they are walking with friends, and to refrain from congregating in large groups before or after school.

At the time of writing, face masks for those students using public transport will be mandatory. However, the government guidelines are clear regarding face masks in school. Students will be asked to carefully remove and either store or dispose of their mask, before they wash their hands at the start of their school day. They will not be allowed to take them out of their bags during the school day, or they will risk their confiscation.

What will happen if a student or a member of staff becomes symptomatic during the school day?

We have already established an isolation room where anyone who develops the symptoms of COVID-19 can be cared for while we arrange for them to be taken home, or seek further medical assistance. Parents and carers must ensure that we have up to date contact information in the case of such an emergency.

If any member of our school community tests positive for COVID-19, we will work with our local health protection team who will help us to decide on the most appropriate next steps. All stakeholders need to appreciate that even with all of these additional control measures in place, there is still the possibility that we could be forced to close to some or all of our students for a period of 14 days. If this were to happen, we would inform parents and carers via email, and we would expect staff and students to revert to setting work via Microsoft Teams.

Some final messages

Even though all of our staff will start their preparations for September as per the description above, in reality the national and / or local picture could change before then. I stated at the start of this letter that students' safety is our priority, which is true. However, a very close second is our desire to see our students back in school, learning and growing with us. Regardless of what the next few months bring, we will do everything we can to make that happen. Should the situation change significantly during the summer, I will write to you again with an update.

Assuming that does not happen, we will still need to extend the normal arrangements for the start of next academic year, in order to properly induct our students so that they understand how to keep themselves and their families as safe as possible. To that end, we would like students to attend on the following days at the following times:

Year Group	Monday 31.8.20	Tuesday 1.9.20	Wednesday 2.9.20	Thursday 3.9.20	Friday 4.9.20
7	<i>Bank holiday</i>	08:25 – 14:50	08:25 – 14:50	08:25 – 14:50	08:25 – 14:50
8	<i>Bank holiday</i>	<i>Not in school</i>	09:30 – 15:55	09:30 – 15:55	09:30 – 15:55
9	<i>Bank holiday</i>	<i>Not in school</i>	<i>Not in school</i>	08:25 – 14:50	08:25 – 14:50
10	<i>Bank holiday</i>	<i>Not in school</i>	<i>Not in school</i>	<i>Not in school</i>	09:30 – 15:55
11	<i>Bank holiday</i>	<i>Not in school</i>	10:20 – 16:45	10:20 – 16:45	10:20 – 15:55
12	<i>Bank holiday</i>	10:20 – 16:45	10:20 – 16:45	10:20 – 16:45	10:20 – 15:55
13	<i>Bank holiday</i>	<i>Not in school</i>	10:20 – 16:45	10:20 – 16:45	10:20 – 15:55

When students attend school for the first time, they should walk around to the rear of the school buildings where staff will meet them. If students are travelling by car, please can I remind all parents and carers that we do not have a vehicular right of way to the rear of the building, so students must be dropped off on Haydn Road.

It only remains for me to wish you all a safe and happy summer. I look forward to finally meeting everyone in September.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Watts', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Watts
Head of School