

Reflections on the first week back

Dear parents, carers and families,

Firstly, I have to say what a thrill it was last week to welcome back pupils and staff into the school for the first time since March, and what a pleasure it was to feel the atmosphere in our school lift as children returned – never have I been happier to utter the words ‘*tuck your shirt in!*’ as proof that we were indeed back to some kind of normality! Thank you too for your wholehearted support of that return – attendance for pupils last week was 97% (actually higher than the first week last September!), while teaching staff returned with 100% attendance. It was also exciting to welcome our new colleagues to KLA – all 14 of them! Their arrival is in large part down to the fact that the school is now absolutely full, with 900 pupils now taking up every place we have to offer, and the rapid rise in pupil numbers clearly needs an equally rapid rise in teaching staff. I am sure you will join me in welcoming them all to the KLA family.

I am very aware of the confidence parents have clearly placed in the school as pupils return, underlined by such high levels of attendance, and we take our responsibilities in justifying that confidence very seriously. It was lovely to see (and hear!) the joy with which our young people returned to their school, and the positivity they brought with them. I am really proud of how quickly they adapted to the changes we have put in place as part of our risk assessment, and how well they managed them. Members of the leadership team, supported by trust colleagues, have been very energetically monitoring provision around the site, monitoring all day, every day the way in which these measures are working, as well as noting where possible changes might be needed. We appreciate that some parents, pupils and staff may be feeling some anxiety in the current situation for any of a number of reasons, and the school is keen to listen to those concerns and help in any way we can. We welcome all feedback, and encourage any questions to come to either Heads of Year or myself, so that we can reassure, allay any anxieties and, where necessary, agree that it needs to be better and take your advice!

We have taken great care in planning for our return to make sure that our pupils are able as far as possible to continue to study the full curriculum, including art, design technology, PE and drama in Key Stage 3, and all option subjects in Key Stage 4. We have consulted with Year 11 students and parents this week on how best to create additional time for them to catch up, and the possibility of discontinuing with one subject if considered sensible to help reduce workload and stress. I hope you agree with this approach. We are also working hard to (gently and quietly!) assess the extent of learning during closure, and what we need to do next to fill those gaps. We are also carefully watching how our new, temporary setting arrangements are developing each week – we know that these are not easy for all pupils and we do hope that they will not need to be in operation for too long and that we can return to our normal single subject setting as soon as possible – but for the meantime this approach is clearly necessary to meet the needs of the situation.

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As we move deeper into the new term I think it is becoming increasingly obvious that further disruption appears almost inevitable and I am also uncomfortably aware that the clarity of national advice and guidance on what to do in certain circumstances is not entirely consistent. I have therefore tried to summarise some key points below (please note that this is not exhaustive, nor is it entirely beyond the realms of possibility that the advice will have changed by tomorrow lunchtime!)

- There are currently **no confirmed cases of COVID** at KLA. No pupil has tested positive and we have had no contact thus far from either Public Health England or the tracing programme.
- We have had some phone calls from worried parents after they have read some posts on social media about cases at KLA. This has caused unnecessary work for the school and anxiety for families. I would like to reassure everyone that as soon as we do have something to share with parents in this regard, please do trust that we will let everyone know immediately, as well as sharing the steps that we will need to take at that point. I cannot share these in general terms as they are very much dependent upon the specific circumstances of each case, but we will be very active in letting everyone know exactly where we are. You have placed enormous trust in us by sending your children back to school – we will respect that trust by being transparent about any identified cases as they occur.
- I appreciate that an increasing number of pupils (and staff) are likely to be asked to self-isolate in the coming weeks as cases appear likely to rise further – even more so as the symptoms we are looking out for are so closely similar to those of an autumn cold, which we are already seeing signs of in school. I understand that testing capacity locally is currently very limited, which may mean your child has to remain out of school for a little longer, but please do keep to the guidance should anyone in your household develop symptoms; I find the attached checklist from the local authority very helpful and clear when trying to interpret the guidance.
- We have developed our online learning programme further in recent weeks and if your child is off school self-isolating we will be in touch to make sure that work online can be accessed and to try to provide the kind of communication and contact that we did during the long closure period. Work will be based on the Knowledge Organisers that your child should have received in each subject – also to be found on the KLA website from later this week.
- We continue to follow the guidance we have been given on face coverings – that unless the school is in an area of high infection rates (local lockdown) the wearing of masks in school settings is not appropriate. We have however made clear that any pupil or colleague who wishes to wear a face covering for any reason will be supported to do so – we do have PPE in the form of visors ready to be used for anyone who does want to. Again, if the guidance changes or should King's Lynn become an intervention area then we will review the most appropriate approach at that time and let you know in good time of any changes.

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Finally, I need to thank everyone one final time for the patience, support and belief in the school that has been shown over the past week. The organisational challenge of delivering a high-quality education for 903 children in the midst of a pandemic is not an easy one, but my task has been made immeasurably easier by the willingness shown by staff to adapt their practice, the maturity shown by pupils to settle into a very different way of working and the support I have been so grateful to receive from parents and the wider community.

I am looking forward to a second week as successful as the first. I will write again at the end of it to provide everyone with a further update.

Best wishes,

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

Alan Fletcher