

04 March 2021

School Return1 from Monday 15th March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Following the First Minister's statement on Tuesday, all S1-S6 students will be in Newbattle at least once per week from 15th March. S4-S6 have to be the priority for face to face teaching, with S1-S3 having transition days in school for wellbeing and reconnecting. This will not be full learning with their original class teacher or full time for the three week period before Easter. The reasons for this are highlighted below, but in short we do not have enough staff or classrooms to keep over 1000 pupils 2m apart in the building at the same time. Staff are also still needed in our very busy Hub.

We continue to work hard on the best plan for all year groups. You will appreciate that this is a huge challenge for Newbattle with over 1000 pupils, a Hub to run and to keep everyone 2m apart within the building.

We know already that the following enhanced risk mitigations are to be implemented:

- Strict 2m social distancing between all in the school building
- Strict 1m social distancing on school buses, in line with guidelines for public transport
- The wearing of face masks by all pupils and members of staff at all times, except when eating and drinking
- Minimal movement around the school building

Social Distancing

The requirement for 2m social distancing has a severe impact on the number of pupils that can be accommodated in a classroom and school. Most classrooms will only be able to accommodate a maximum average of around 10 pupils with 2m social distancing, with very few having a greater capacity than this.

Many classes in schools will normally have up to 30 pupils. The introduction of 2m social distancing means that a class of 30 will need to be split into three groups of 10 pupils. Each grouping of 10 will require a separate teacher and classroom. In effect, a class of 30 will now require three teachers and three classrooms. This is three times the number of members of staff and classrooms than originally required for the class of 30 pupils.

Hubs

Hubs have been running very successfully since Thursday, 7th January providing critical childcare and supporting the education of some of our most vulnerable young people and those whose parents/carers are key workers. Demand for places in the Hub is far higher than during the previous lockdown.

Currently our school is running over 12 'bubbles', all with 2m social distancing in place. Each 'bubble' requires at least one member of staff to run it. The requirement is for schools to offer this vital support and continue beyond Monday, 15th March. Some staffing for the Hub comes from the school's staffing resource.

Principles of our Return

The principles we are now working on are as follows:

- All students will return to spend **some** time in-school from Monday 15th March until the Easter break; given the need to be 2m socially distant at all times it will be a phased part-time return for all our students
- **Senior Phase students**, who are working towards national qualifications, **will have priority for in-school time**
- It is **expected that all students will receive some in-school education each week** up to the Easter break; we are working through a new timetable model, it is too early to say how much in-school time will be provided for S1 - 3 students and what it means for individual pupils and year groups.

- S1-S3 return is about a focus on transition, reconnection and wellbeing.
- All students will, at least until Easter, be expected to **observe the current requirement for 2m distancing when in school**. This will limit the number of pupils we can have in school at any one time.
- **Face coverings** will need to be worn at all times by all pupils (no age restrictions and including those in S1-3) except for those with notified exemptions
- **Remote online learning will continue for those not able to be in school**. Due to the prioritisation of Senior Phase students and the implications of 2m distancing, inevitably there will be students at home. The increase in the number of students following an in-school programme will also impact on our ability to continue with the volume of on-line learning we have been providing. We are moving to a Blended Learning model until the Easter holidays.
- We are required to maintain our 'Hub' critical childcare for children of keyworkers – this requires a number of our staff (teachers, Learning Assistants and Youth Workers).

Education Scotland published guidance for schools on the phased return last night. We are reviewing this and working with colleagues across Midlothian to ensure the safety of everyone as we bring more students back to in-school learning.

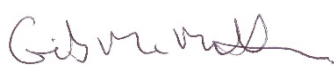
From Monday 15th March, all staff and Senior Phase students will continue to be offered twice-weekly Covid-19 lateral flow testing. We will continue to strongly encourage all senior phase students and staff to take part in this programme of at-home testing, as it is another important way in which we can ensure that our school remains as safe as possible.

We are meeting with the Parent Council on our plans early next week and further detailed information will be shared with you as soon as we can. If you have a question then we are taking questions until Monday 8th March 2021, 3:30pm through our email: newbattle.hs@midlothian.gov.uk. These will then be grouped and discussed at the Parent Council. All minutes will then be shared on our website as normal.

Many thanks for your continued support, trust and patience as we plan equitably for the three weeks leading up to Easter.

We will keep you updated with any further information via our usual channels of communication.

Yours sincerely,



Gib McMillan
Head Teacher

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