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18th February 2022

Dear Families

I hope that this letter finds you and your family safe and well. As we head into the half term break I wanted to take a moment to reflect on this past term and also to look forward to the half term ahead. It has certainly been a challenging, yet hugely successful, half term. Our main challenge has been one of Covid Management. The emergence of the omicron variant in January impacted on all schools, including our own. As we end this half term however, we have very much turned a corner with rates in school, and Ashton, at their lowest levels for a long time.

Covid Testing and Masks

To that end, when we return on Monday 28th February 2022, we will no longer require students or staff to wear masks. Until now, we have had masks as either required at all times, or within communal areas. When we return, we will **no longer require face masks** at all in school. In addition to this, we will no longer be undertaking in-school covid testing within our Asymptomatic Testing Centre. I expect there to be government announcements next week about testing and the national strategy and we will adhere to the newly anticipated guidelines. However, our in-school testing centre has been “above and beyond” the national guidelines and this has meant we have achieved the highest attendance rates, significantly above national averages. With rates falling and a more “normal” existence coming back, it is right for us to now stop the in-school testing. When I know more about the new government guidelines I will write to you with a summary update.

New Website

I am so very pleased to announce that we have launched our new GAA website. Your feedback has been previously that our old website was hard to navigate, hard to find newsletters and updates, and hard to find contact details. I hope you will find our new website much more user friendly. You can access the new site here: <https://gaa.greatacademies.co.uk/> In addition to our new website, I would encourage you to follow us on twitter as we regularly put updates on there. You can follow us at: **@GaaPrincipal** and **@GAAshton_news**. We also have a range of departmental twitter accounts which you can find from both the Principal's account and the main school news account.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

As we return to a more “normal existence” across school and across society, I am very conscious of the emotional impact on our young people of the last few years. Student resilience and self-worth has been significantly impacted upon, across our country. I am pleased to announce that we will be further expanding our safeguarding and welfare teams through the appointment of a full time Emotional Health and Wellbeing Officer. This new post will focus on supporting all students, including our most vulnerable, in building their own resilience and positive self-image. In addition to this post, I have also increased our in-school counselling team to having the equivalent 1.2 full time counsellors on site.

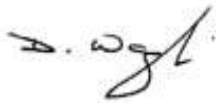
Young people at their lowest point, often “cry for help” in school and we have the support teams, welfare teams and referral structures to support them. If you are at home and you feel your child needs additional support from outside of school, I would recommend ensuring that they are aware of Kooth, an online support platform, details available here: <https://www.kooth.com/>

Looking Ahead

This next half term will be another great term in the life of GAA. We are rolling out into Year 10 our “Learning Modes” framework for lessons, we are significantly increasing our extra-curricular activities and clubs, we have a number of trips and exchanges, our new outdoor canopies will start to be build and our £200K investment in the GAA Library, at the heart of school, will commence building.

Thank you for your continued support. I am blessed to serve our 1305 GREAT Minds and very much look forward to ensuring GAA goes from strength to strength as we move forward in this “post pandemic” world.

Yours faithfully

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

Mr David Waugh
Principal