

Thursday, 17th December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

As I write to you at the end of this most extraordinary term, I am filled with immense pride in the way the Ninestiles community has come together to ensure our students continue to receive the high-class education they deserve. I want to thank you, the parents and carers of our students, for your support and trust, demonstrated by the high levels of student attendance this term, and for your engagement with the many home learning and blended learning opportunities we have put in place. It is a great reflection of our work together that our attendance has remained well above the national averages you may have seen reported in the press, and that the mitigation measures put in place have ensured that positive Covid cases amongst staff and students have remained low. This has enabled us to avoid the large-scale closures that have been seen in many settings and, with the exception of a short period in October, we have managed to remain fully open to all students.

I would also like to take this moment to acknowledge publicly the hard work of all Ninestiles staff to ensure we deliver on our mission statement of removing barriers to learning and tackling disadvantage. Staff have worked tirelessly to put in place a wide range of mitigation measures designed to limit the spread of Covid, whilst still delivering the high-quality curriculum to which we are committed. This has meant many changes to our usual working practices, including teachers moving classrooms for every lesson, teaching in non-specialist rooms, increased cleaning rotas and changes to break, lunch and duty expectations. The Ninestiles team has met this challenge head on, with great commitment, and I am sure you join me in thanking them.

Over the past few weeks, I have been delighted to see that Summit Learning Trust, working alongside the individual schools, has been able to source and supply laptops from various government schemes and issue them to our students. If you were one of the families eligible to receive a device, I do hope you have been able to pick it up from school, and that it will be useful in supporting your child to access the range of online provision that we have put in place.

As thoughts now turn to our return in January, I wanted to remind you of some of our core expectations, which allow us to best support your children and ensure that we deliver the high quality education they deserve.

Timings

The school day commences with the register mark at 8:40 am each day; this means students must be present, in their form room, by this time. Whilst I appreciate that the new, year group specific entrances may have initially needed some adapting to, students should now be aware of how long it takes to get to their designated entrance and should aim for an 8:30am arrival.

Uniform

Our school uniform expectations remain very high and we would all appreciate your support by ensuring your child arrives back in January with the full, correct uniform, including black polishable shoes, blazer and tie.

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Please also note that the uniform policy clearly prohibits extreme haircuts and colours, false nails and coloured nail polish. Make-up should be very subtle and natural; false eyelashes are not allowed. Jewellery is limited to one pair of stud earrings and one ring. If a necklace is worn, it must be tucked inside the shirt and removed during PE for safety reasons. Nose studs are not allowed.

We will continue to allow students to wear their HAL kit for the days when they have a HAL lesson, to support students staying active, however, I must insist that HAL kit is the branded, Ninestiles kit available from our uniform supplier. HAL lessons are not an excuse for the wearing in school of full tracksuits and streetwear. Blazers must be worn over the top of HAL kit.

Behaviour

Our expectations of behaviour remain very high and form an integral part in supporting the safe and effective running of the school in these challenging times. As always, the vast majority of students and their families adhere to our rules unfailingly to support all of our learners. This has allowed us to implement a more robust and rewarding Praise system this term, as requested by parents and students through a consultation process. It has been great to be able to acknowledge the hard work of our students in this way. Unfortunately, a small number of students have not followed our expectations and have subsequently lost their place at Ninestiles. Whilst this is always disappointing, it does demonstrate our commitment to ensuring Ninestiles provides a safe and supportive learning environment for all of our students.

As part of the Covid restrictions, it is currently mandatory to wear a mask in all indoor, communal spaces. Whilst compliance with this rule started very well, there has been significant drop in the number of students arriving at school equipped with a mask. This has led to us supplying students with masks and thus not using our resources for more valuable, learning related opportunities. Please ensure that your child arrives in January with either a reusable mask or a supply of disposable masks to wear every day.

Contact Tracing

We take very seriously our role in protecting you and the local community at this time and will continue to support through contacting the potential close contacts of positive cases. **If your child tests positive for Covid between now and Wednesday 23rd December, please email principal@ninstiles.org.uk.** This email will be checked twice daily, at 9am and 3pm. Follow up with potential contacts will take place immediately after.

Arrival and Departure

The new entrance points for students have been very successful in minimising student bubble mixing and also in supporting our neighbours in the local community by decreasing traffic at the front of school. I urge you again to encourage your child to walk or cycle to school or to drop them off away from the roads immediately surrounding the school. For those parents of Year 9 and 11 students, please do not enter the leisure centre car park, as this is not our property. Please instead allow your child to walk using the pedestrian entrances.

Examinations

There has been a significant amount of news in recent weeks about the upcoming GCSE examinations. Ninestiles staff are working to ensure we have everything in place to support your child in being as successful as possible in this exam series and will share more news in the new year. In the meantime, I wish Year 11 all the best in their preparation for the January Pre-Public examinations. I would also remind all other students to support Year 11 by ensuring that school is an especially calm, quiet and purposeful environment during this time.

Help and support

I know that this period has been an incredibly challenging one for our community and would like you to know that we are all here to support in whatever way we can. Please visit the school website for a range of organisations that we work alongside who can offer support at this time.

<https://ninstiles.org.uk/safeguarding/>

Fond farewells

It is with a heavy heart that we say goodbye at the end of this term to Mrs Jagne and Mrs Stephens. Mrs Jagne, our school bursar, has worked tirelessly to ensure we are able to financially support our curriculum; we wish her well for the future.

Mrs Stephens, our Vice Principal, is moving on to take up her first Headship role at Colton Hills in Wolverhampton. I'm sure you join me in thanking Mrs Stephens for her hard work, dedication and commitment to Ninestiles students and wish her all the best in her new role!

Finally, I want to wish every member of the Ninestiles community a very, happy festive break. It has been an incredibly challenging year and the chance to rest and recover is a very welcome one. I hope you are able to spend it safely with loved ones and take the chance to reconnect as families.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Hughes', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Alex Hughes
Principal