

Westcountry Schools Trust

Expectations on Face Coverings

Background

Government guidance on the wearing of face coverings for members of the public can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

DfE guidance on the wearing of face coverings in schools can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/update-on-face-coverings-in-schools>

The latter can be summarised thus:

- The government revised its guidance on pupils in Year 7 and above on 25 August 2020.
- While the government is still recommending that face coverings are not necessary, schools “*will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas if they believe that it is right.*”
- In parts of the country where transmission rates are high the guidance states that, “*face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils in secondary schools when moving around the school, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain.*”
- Face coverings are still not necessary in the classroom.

Use of face coverings in WeST schools

Coronavirus (COVID-19) usually spreads by droplets from coughs, sneezes and speaking. There is also increasing evidence that airborne transmission can occur, especially in crowded and poorly ventilated spaces. These droplets can also be picked up from surfaces, if you touch a surface and then your face without washing your hands first. This is why social distancing where possible, regular hand hygiene, and covering coughs and sneezes is so important in controlling the spread of the virus.

The best available scientific evidence is, that when used in the appropriate circumstances, wearing a face covering may reduce the spread of coronavirus droplets, helping to protect others.

WeST schools have adopted a wide range of protective measures to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19. However, despite these measures, there are still occasions, specifically in secondary school settings, where social distancing is difficult, such as in corridors or busy communal areas.

Our aim here is to provide a further layer of protection to both pupils and staff.

WeST expectations

All WeST staff, unless exempt for the reasons explained in the ‘Staff and pupils who may be exempt’ section, will be expected to wear face coverings in all communal school areas. This will include - corridors, staffrooms, staff workrooms, shared office spaces where social distancing is difficult, staff toilets and whilst undertaking duties at break/lunch times in enclosed spaces such as dining halls. This will also apply to staff meetings. However, even with face coverings in use, appropriate social distancing, hygiene measures and hand sanitisation should still fully apply.

All secondary age pupils will be expected to wear a face covering in corridors and any communal areas where social distancing outside of the year group bubble is difficult (communal areas will vary from school to school – so local guidance will apply). *Please note – this does not apply to pupils in primary school settings.*

All secondary age pupils travelling to and from school via public transport or school transport will be expected to wear a face covering and follow all appropriate hygiene measures required by the respective companies. *Please note – this does not apply to pupils in primary school settings.*

WeST staff and secondary age pupils should bring their own face coverings to school as they would for use on public transport, shops, and wider society. If any individual forgets to bring a face covering to school, a disposable mask will be provided.

All visitors, including parents, to WeST primary and secondary schools will be required to wear a face covering whilst on site. Disposable masks will be available at school receptions.

Face coverings do not need to be worn:

- By any member of staff or pupil who is exempt (*please see the exemption guidance for further information*).
- By pupils or teachers in the classroom or during lessons, but both are still free to do so if they wish. **Please see below re. Teaching Assistants.*
- Whilst consuming food and drink at break and lunch times.
- By office/admin staff working in a COVID-secure office space. However, those staff are still free to do so if they wish.
- Whilst pupils are mixing with pupils within their own year group bubble only.

**Teaching Assistants in secondary schools who are required to work in close proximity to pupils in the classroom, and therefore unable to maintain social distancing, will be provided with both a face covering and visor. Whilst not required in primary school settings, Teaching Assistants will still be provided with the equipment if they wish to wear it.*

**For members of staff, pupils or parents who have any concerns or queries,
please contact the relevant school to discuss.**

How to wear a face covering

A face covering should:

- Cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably.
- Fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face.
- Be secured to the head with ties or ear loops.
- Be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton.
- Ideally include at least two layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three depending on the fabric used).
- Unless disposable, it should be able to be washed with other items of laundry according to fabric washing instructions and dried without causing the face covering to be damaged.

When wearing a face covering you should:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on.
- Avoid wearing on your neck or forehead.
- Avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could be contaminated with the virus.

When removing a face covering:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing.
- Only handle the straps, ties, or clips.
- Do not give it to someone else to use.
- Place the covering safely in a plastic bag – do not lay it down on the table.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed.
- If reusable, wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric when you get home.

Staff and pupils who may be exempt

All WeST schools promote an inclusive culture and recognise that some staff and pupils will require reasonable adjustments to be made to accommodate their unique circumstances and allow them to access the educational opportunities and workplace in an equitable manner.

WeST school leaders will work closely with pupils and their families who have concerns about the WeST policy on face coverings being worn in communal areas. Wherever possible, it is hoped that by engaging in supportive dialogue any barriers can be overcome so that the pupil will feel able to wear a face covering.

WeST school leaders will be mindful of the following government advice when discussing individual cases with staff and pupils:

In settings where face coverings are required in England, there are some circumstances where people may not be able to wear a face covering. Please be mindful and respectful of such circumstances, noting that some people are less able to wear face coverings, and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others.

This includes (but is not limited to):

- *people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability*
- *where putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause you severe distress*
- *if you are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate*

In the majority of cases it is likely that pupils who, after appropriate discussions between staff and parents/carers, will be considered exempt from wearing face coverings are already known to staff and may well already be registered as SEND pupils.

Supporting pupils who are identified as exempt

WeST Schools should adapt existing local procedures to help identify pupils who have been identified as not needing to wear face coverings in communal areas, e.g. they may be issued with an 'exemption card', similar to those issued when pupils need to be able to leave lessons to use the toilet for medical reasons.

All staff should be aware of pupils who are exempt from wearing face coverings and should be vigilant when supervising communal areas that these pupils are not subjected to any form of harassment from their peers.