

ELMLEA SCHOOLS TRUST APPROACH TO THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS

Information for parents, staff and children

September 2020

Rationale for wearing face coverings

The scientific evidence for the efficiency of face coverings in managing the spread of the coronavirus is constantly developing. There are many different schools of thought, but there is consensus that:

- If properly managed, a face covering restricts the amount of droplets spread by breathing, talking, coughing etc, thus reducing the risk of an infected person transmitting the virus. Since anyone might be carrying the virus without knowing it, this seems a sensible precaution.
- A face covering, properly worn, may provide some, but not full or guaranteed, protection to the wearer if in proximity to an infected person.
- A face covering has little value if it is not covering both the nose and mouth and is not fitted closely to the face.
- If handled inappropriately, a face covering may actually increase the risk of transmission of the virus. The virus may be transferred from fingers to the mask or face.

Current public health guidance does not recommend, or require, the wearing of face coverings by children under the age of 11. The thinking appears to be that younger children are less likely to follow the safety rules rigorously, and more likely to increase the risk to themselves and others by using them inappropriately.

Decisions about the wearing of face coverings are not solely based on the science of virus transmission. For some, the decision is a moral one: by wearing a face covering, I am showing that I wish to protect other people. For others it is a wellbeing decision: I feel more in control in this uncertain world if I am taking proactive steps to reduce the risk of escalating the pandemic.

RATIONALE FOR PUBLISHING AN EST POLICY

The school community rightly expects every reasonable step to be taken to ensure that attending school does not cause a spike in Covid-19 cases in the locality. Adults and children attending school must feel that their health and safety are the number one priority of school policy.

Government policy changes often, with little notice, and it is not always clear how it has been formulated or how it should be interpreted. Our children, parents and staff require some assurance that the school's protection measures will keep them safe. Any assurance we can offer, even if it goes beyond what is requested by the government, will help to maintain the wellbeing and morale of all.

THE EST APPROACH TO THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS

- We would politely request that masks are worn by parents and carers during pick off and drop off .
- Everyone is expected to respect the choices made by others, and no-one will be discriminated against for wearing or not wearing a face covering.
- Children are to be made aware of the pros and cons of wearing face coverings in different situations, and how to manage the wearing of face coverings safely.

Children

Children may wear face coverings on their journey to and from school.

Children are asked to remove their face covering when they take their place in the classroom, and to place it in a sealed plastic bag in their tray.

In exceptional cases, subject to a request from the parent, and a discussion with the teacher, a child may be allowed to keep their face covering on during the lessons. This is on the strict understanding that they are able to follow the safety guidance, and that wearing the face covering is a measure that enables them to participate in school, when the alternative would be non-attendance.

All children will be taught, as part of their PSHE curriculum, about how viruses are transmitted, and how the wearing of face coverings, alongside other good hygiene measures and limiting contact, helps to control the pandemic.

All children will be taught how to put on and take off face coverings, regardless of whether they choose to wear them to school.

Children must not share face coverings, lend them to each other, help each other doff or don them, or interfere in any way with someone else's face covering.

Staff

Staff are not expected to wear face coverings when teaching children.

- For teaching in the classroom, a face covering is not required or recommended currently. The impact of a face covering on communication with children may make the job of teaching harder than it need be, and if the teacher is staying within their zone at the front of the class, the face covering is unlikely to offer significant protection to either them or the children.
- Remembering that the face covering is most effective in reducing outgoing aerosols, the teacher wearing the face covering is, at best, reducing the risk of passing the virus (which they may be unwittingly carrying) to the children. Aerosols produced by the children are less likely to project as far as the teacher zone. Good ventilation of the classroom is recommended.

However, staff may wear a face covering and/or visor when teaching children, subject to discussion with SLT, if it provides them with the reassurance they require to confidently do their job.



Staff may wear face coverings when moving around the building or when using communal areas such as the staff room.

Staff may be asked to wear face coverings if a meeting is held in a room where 2 metre distancing cannot be reasonably maintained. This does not apply to brief encounters, or passing through a busy space (as long as at least 1 metre distance can be maintained) as the guidance is that brief passing encounters do not present a high risk.

Staff working one to one with children may wear face coverings, subject to risk assessment. The RA would need to also evaluate whether the child should also be expected to wear a face covering if the length of time of close up working is likely to be more than 15 minutes.

Staff conducting meetings with visitors to the school may wear face coverings and may ask other attendees to do so. This will depend on the length of the meeting and the space where the meeting is held. Visitors are more of an “unknown quantity” and therefore greater precautions should be taken than when meeting with colleagues.

The isolation room is equipped with supplies of PPE. Staff treating children for injuries or illness may use gloves, aprons, disposable face masks and visors as deemed appropriate for the particular circumstances. In the case of anyone exhibiting potential symptoms of Covid 19, full PPE including masks, aprons, visors and gloves must be worn and treatment will be conducted in the isolation Room.

Parents

Parents are required to wear a face covering when attending the school site to drop off or pick up their children.

If parents are invited to enter the school building, they will be asked to wear a face covering, as they would if entering a shop or other public building.