

WELCOME FROM **Richard Flinton, Chief Executive**

It was heartening to hear today from one of the county's head teachers about how much students are enjoying being back at school and the positive start to the new school year.

Julia Polley, head teacher at Wensleydale School, shared details of the successful return and the systems in place to keep everyone safe, but also happy and stimulated. No doubt, this is a story being repeated in schools across our county.

The new term brought greater freedom for students, said Julia, but there was still an eye to caution, for example in making sure face masks are worn on buses.

Some measures introduced in response to the pandemic have been retained, such as lunchtime arrangements, which has created time for children to choose enriching activities ranging from sailing and geocaching to knitting and dancing.

In addition, the school production is back – High School Musical in April, should anyone want tickets – and a ski trip and visit to France are planned for next year.

"We are trying to make things as normal as possible for everyone," said Julia. "The kids are an absolute delight, they like being back, they are well behaved and are following the guidance. It has become routine, it's no big deal, the students just get on with it."

Schools are a community, of course, and we heard another story this week that demonstrates how you get out of your community what you put in.

When the pandemic hit, Cooper King Distillery, a sustainable distillery in Sutton-on-the-Forest, lost 75% of its trade.

But within a week or so, it responded to demand for hand sanitiser, producing and donating it to health services as well as local people. From there, the company devised a strategy to sell to businesses and the public and use those profits to maintain a free supply to the NHS, care homes and schools.

In the year since, the community has repaid that support.

Co-founder and director Chris Jaume said: "Lots of people we donated sanitiser to came back to us to buy gin. It was really lovely to get that support. The communities we supplied have told us what we contributed was invaluable and we were sent some really heartrending messages of thanks."

The future now looks good for the company, which has been able to take on more staff and develop new projects and collaborations.

Public health and social care

North Yorkshire Coronavirus Data

At 5 September 2021, there have been 53,195 positive tests since 3 March 2020, with 2,012 new cases reported in the past week. The weekly rolling average of new cases is 287 cases per day, allowing for incomplete data in the most recent days. The seven-day rate for North Yorkshire was 353.7 cases per 100,000 people, higher than the England seven-day rate of 328.6. Work continues to ensure effective monitoring of all areas, with support for incidents being provided across a range of settings, which are reviewed daily.

[Find further information on North Yorkshire data provided at county, district and local area level.](#)

Testing Update

If anyone has symptoms, they must book a PCR test. Testing sites across North Yorkshire, as elsewhere in England, are operated and managed by the Department of Health and Social Care and private contractors employed by them. We try to help the Department by promoting the testing site locations and hosting information on how people with symptoms can book a test via the national government portal.

[Find information about where you can get a PCR test on our website.](#)

Everyone is encouraged to test themselves twice a week with home testing kits and report the results to NHS Test and Trace. You can order rapid lateral flow device (LFD) tests online or collect them from participating pharmacies.

[Find out how to order or collect free LFD tests.](#)

Close contacts and isolation

Individuals are no longer required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, and any of the following apply:

- they are fully vaccinated
- they are below the age of 18 years and 6 months
- they have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
- they are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

Instead, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, and informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a [PCR test](#). Everyone is encouraged to take a PCR test if advised to do so.

Schools return for autumn term

All secondary school pupils are undertaking two on-site lateral flow device (LFD) tests three to five days apart, on their return in the autumn term. Pupils and staff are encouraged to continue to test twice weekly at home until the end of September, when a review will take place.

Close contacts will now be identified via NHS Test and Trace (as above) and education settings will no longer be expected to undertake contact tracing.

We have taken the opportunity of the start of the school term to remind education settings to refresh the key messages:

- Ensure good hygiene for everyone
- Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes, using standard products such as detergents
- Keep occupied spaces well ventilated

- Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19
- Asymptomatic testing

We will continue to work closely with schools to provide an accurate picture of positive cases, and to track the development of infection across the county as students and staff return to education settings. Reporting of linked cases of coronavirus within school communities (staff and students) is vital, so that resources and attention can be focused in areas of greatest need in a timely manner.

Supporting our schools and childcare

It's wonderful to see pupils back in school across the county and returning to their learning.

The majority of pupils returned to the classroom in North Yorkshire on Tuesday, September 7, with some schools staggering the start date across the week as secondary pupils tested for coronavirus.

Our priority for this school year is to keep as many children in school as possible, as we know the detrimental impact on their educational attainment from being away from the classroom, as well as the impact on their emotional, physical and mental health.

We have worked with Public Health, head teachers and government guidelines to review all the policies and procedures are in place to ensure a safe return to the classroom.

But we are starting the term with a sense of optimism and hope.

Many schools are looking forward to an exciting year of opportunities ahead and the return of activities such as school productions, school trips and other events which had to be placed on hold.

Schools such as Wensleydale School in Leyburn have found some of the changes made during the pandemic have been beneficial to pupils and will continue with the adjustments. During the pandemic, the school split the lunchtime, which shortened the midday break and allowed the school to reschedule its timetable. This extra time has allowed them to introduce an enrichment programme of more than 50 different activities for students for three to four hours a week.

The programme was created after speaking to students, to provide students with the activities they have thought about the most during the pandemic, as well as provide them with opportunities for socialising and enrichment. The activities include geocaching, knitting, dancing, sailing, walking and photography. There is also a musical production planned and a ski trip in 2022.

Head teacher Julia Polley said: "I feel we are in a really, really good place. The most important thing is we're as covid-safe as we can be. We're monitoring all the time, but planning is pivotal.

"We're delighted to be back and we're trying to make things as normal as possible for everyone."

Keeping in touch

[Keep up to date with Covid-19 news for North Yorkshire.](#)

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