

Sir James Smith's opening in September 2020 – Frequently Asked Questions

Many thanks for your fantastic response to the presentation to all parents recently. Together with the subsequent questions being posed to form tutors during tutor video conferences, the following FAQ has been compiled and will hopefully answer many of the questions you may have about the full reopening of Sir James Smith's to all pupils in September. Should you find your question isn't covered below, please do contact the school through the usual channels.

How will children who require the support of a TA get the support they need whilst maintaining social distancing?

Teaching Assistants and support staff working with children will be timetabled to work with the same bubble as far as possible. Like everybody else they will maintain the highest standards of hand and respiratory hygiene, modelling the behaviour we will expect from pupils. The guidance makes clear that minimising the number of contacts a pupil has during the school day is part of the 'system of controls' necessary to reduce the risk of transmission and is something the school is planning for with the timetables staff are working from.

How will the Covid-19 testing kits being sent to schools be used?

In a section about responding to any infection, the text in the Department for Education guidance says:

"The government will ensure that it is as easy as possible to get a test through a wide range of routes that are locally accessible, fast and convenient. We will release more details on new testing avenues as and when they become available and will work with schools so they understand what the quickest and easiest way is to get a test. By the autumn term, all schools will be provided with a small number of home testing kits that they can give directly to parents/carers collecting a child who has developed symptoms at school...Advice will be provided alongside these kits."

How will practical subjects such as PE, Science and Design Technology keep children safe whilst delivering their curriculum?

All practical curriculum areas such as PE, Catering and Science have been planning on how they will adapt their curriculum in order to keep the risk of transmission as low as possible. Any equipment that has to be used will be organised for each separate bubble and where this isn't possible the curriculum will be adapted so that only one of the bubbles will be using it. There will also be increased, thorough cleaning of all equipment used and where possible pupils will be asked to bring in their own, for example, bringing in coloured pencils and felt-tips for Art will help limit the number of pupils needing to use shared equipment in school. Teachers in those subject areas will make it clear to pupils what they can do and what equipment they can bring in that will be helpful in September.

Would it not be easier to get the children to clean the classroom after each lesson rather than expect teachers to do it? Are the teachers going to have enough time to wipe down tables and chairs and are they going to be using wipes or spray?

Yes in some ways it would and pupils will be asked to do their part. To have confidence that the cleaning necessary has been done effectively, teachers took the decision to take responsibility for this themselves. The staggered start and end time to lessons means that there will always be time for teachers to satisfy themselves that the room is ready. Where teachers may need longer they have made plans for how they will hold a class outside the room (making sure there is no likelihood of the class coming into contact with another bubble whilst waiting). All classrooms will have disinfectant spray and paper towelling, other rooms will have wipes too where this is considered necessary e.g. IT rooms.

How will classrooms be set up?

Pupils will notice that rooms are organised so that they are working alongside each other rather than facing each other and that areas are marked on the floor to help maintain social distancing from staff as far as possible. They may also notice that there is less furniture in some rooms to help create as much space as possible.

Can pupils bring in their own tablet/laptop/Chromebook to do their work?

Yes. Parents will need to complete a Bring Your Own Device form which will accept that responsibility for the device won't be with the school. Once this has been received our IT technician will enable access to the school's Wi-Fi which will have all of the normal filters and protections you would expect to be in place.

How will tutor time for pupils in Year 8 and 9 work in the Sports Hall?

In the Sports Centre each year group will have its half of that large space, divided by netting. Each half will have areas clearly marked out for each tutor group with foldable tables and seating. The acoustics in that space are not brilliant so each tutor group will need to remain quiet, especially when registers are being taken in the morning. To help with this every pupil will be expected to have with them a reading book. These pupils will be the first back on site on Monday 7 September to help them get used to the way things are going to need to be and will be in absolutely no doubt as to what our expectations are. This space will always be supervised by a Year Director and member of SLT supported by other teaching staff.

Will all pupils be back in school from Monday 7 September?

No. Pupils in Year 8 and 9 will be as they haven't been to school since March and will need time to adjust to being back. They will also need time to learn what the new expectations of them are when it comes to getting back and forth to the Sports Hall between lessons for example. The next day, Tuesday 8 September pupils in Year 7 will also be in school. This will mean there are two bubbles on site and this will give everybody the opportunity to appreciate what this will require of them. On Wednesday 9 September we will still only have pupils in Year 7, 8 and 9 on site. All pupils will be in from Thursday 10 September as we welcome pupils in Year 10 and 11 back to school.

How will pupils sanitise their hands between lessons?

Each bubble will have two freestanding, battery operated hand sanitising stations in its designated area delivering a foam sanitiser without the need to touch anything. There will also be one of these outside the canteen area to be used before pupils enter and one in reception for all visitors to the site to use. For pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 (the Green and Blue bubbles) who will return to their designated area between lessons, this will mean they have the opportunity to sanitise. For pupils in Years 10 and 11 who will be moving directly from one lesson to the next without returning to their designated areas there will be bottles of hand sanitiser in every classroom. During the first week in September when pupils return there will be careful and thorough explanation of what pupils are expected to do between lessons and at other key points in the day. The school's premises and finance teams have done a brilliant job of ensuring adequate stocks of sanitiser at a time when this wasn't easy.

Will my child need to be wearing their usual uniform?

Yes. The DfE guidance says: "Uniforms do not need to be cleaned any more often than usual, nor do they need to be cleaned using methods which are different from normal.". The schools governing body and I believe that uniform plays a valuable role in contributing to the ethos of the school and in setting the appropriate tone, things that are going to be essential as everybody learns how to play their part in keeping everybody safe from September.

Because of the limited changing facilities, pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 can come into school in their school PE kit on those days when they have PE. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 will make use of the changing facilities as normal and so will come in their normal full uniform and get changed into PE kit as they always have done.

How will you keep siblings and families safe if they are in different bubbles?

This is an issue that will affect many families at the school. Bubbles are just one of a number of control measures the school will employ to keep everybody safe and keep the risk of Coronavirus transmission as low as possible. We will also be maintaining social distancing as far as possible and ensure excellent hand and respiratory hygiene.

How big are the class sizes, will you maintain social distancing between pupils in the same bubble?

Class sizes will be normal and social distancing will be strongly encouraged and facilitated where possible but not essential within each bubble. Within each bubble pupils will maintain the highest standards of hygiene, work alongside each other rather than in groups facing each other and experience a carefully managed practical curriculum in those subjects where this is necessary. In a section headed 'Minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible' the DfE guidance explains that these two things (minimising contact and maintaining social distancing) are not alternative options and that both measures will help.

Do we have to send our children to school if we're not happy with the plans?

Attendance at school will be mandatory from September. If there are parts of the plan you are not happy with or things you are still confused about please contact the school through the usual channels and together we will find a way to help you and/or your children get the confidence needed to emerge from lock down.

Will it be Week A or Week B when the children come back to school?

The first days of term will be PD Days when children won't be in school, this will be a Week A. Monday 7 September is the week when children come back to school and this will be a Week B.

Is it better to be dropped off by car or travel in on the bus?

From the results of the survey sent out last week I can see that for those families for whom it is going to be possible to drive their children to school and collect them at the end of the day this is an appealing option. The school is putting in place measures to make sure that any increase in parents transporting their children can be managed safely. Parents are asked not to deliver children on site before 8.10am nor collect them until 2.40pm using the Sportsmans entrance to the school rather than Dark Lane (unless by prior arrangement). Parents are not to use the Leisure Centre car park.

What happens about 'Intervention' lessons?

These will continue and will be an important part of the support the school makes available to those pupils who need it.

Do we have to bring our own scissors and glue?

If possible, having personal equipment such as scissors and glue is recommended as this will reduce the need to borrow equipment from the school and is therefore another way of minimising contacts between pupils.

Will teachers be wearing masks?

No. In some areas teachers may use a visor or have a screen but the wearing of face masks is not considered necessary in schools where it will impact on our ability to effectively communicate with pupils.

Will there be hand sanitiser in every room?

Pretty much. Each bubble will have two freestanding, battery operated hand sanitising stations in its designated area delivering a foam sanitiser without the need to touch anything. There will also be one of these outside the canteen area to be used before pupils enter and one in reception for all visitors to the site to use. For pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 (the Green and Blue bubbles) who will return to their designated area between lessons, this will mean they have the opportunity to sanitise. For pupils in Years 10 and 11 who will be moving directly from one lesson to the next without returning to their designated areas there will be bottles of hand sanitiser in every classroom. During the first week in September when pupils return there will be careful and thorough explanation of what pupils are expected to do between lessons and at other key points in the day. The school's premises and finance teams have done a brilliant job of ensuring adequate stocks of sanitiser at a time when this wasn't easy.

How will we know where to sit on the bus?

All parents will receive a letter in the post detailing how school transport will operate. When pupils are being boarded onto buses at the end of the day, those in the Year 10 and 11 will be seated from the back rows, pupils in Year 7 will be seated from the front rows and pupils in Years 8 and 9 will take up the middle seats. We would ask that pupils use the same seats on the way into school.

Can we go to the toilet in lesson time?

No, not really. Clearly if there is an emergency nobody is going to prevent you from going to the toilet but it would need to be in the toilet block designated to your bubble. Because break times are going to be longer for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 there will be plenty of time for pupils to go to the toilet then (and with slightly shorter lessons you will understand that teachers will be reluctant to let you go, especially if it means walking half-way across the school site and back to do so).

If a sibling in another bubble has to isolate, what does that mean for me?

It depends. If your sibling is self isolating because they have symptoms of Covid-19 they will get a test done. Whilst you're waiting for the results of the test you will self isolate too but this might only be for a day or so, tests results are being turned around pretty quickly now. If this test comes back as negative your sibling may still stay away from school as its best to avoid contact with people until they're better, but you won't have to and would be expected to be back in school. If the test comes back positive all members of the household would need to self isolate for 14 days and follow the latest 'stay at home' guidance from the government.

The school will follow the advice and guidance from Public Health England at all times and engage fully with the NHS Test and Trace process, they will provide us with definitive advice to follow when managing any confirmed cases.

Do I have to sit next to the same person every lesson?

Not necessarily, teachers will decide on seating plans just like they always have. It may be the case that you're asked to sit in the same place and use the same equipment every time you're in a particular lesson.

Can I bring in my own hand sanitiser?

Yes. Please limit this to a small container, the sort of thing that could fit easily into a pencil case or pocket. There are going to be adequate supplies here in school and nobody is going to thank you for bringing a 5L pump action tub in.

How will bubbles remain separated in the canteen and where will we be eating?

Each bubble will have their own area to queue in for the canteen before they take their food back to their designated area for break time. Nobody will spending break time or eating in the Main Hall.

Will face masks be needed on buses?

Yes. In keeping with current guidance on the use of public transport you will be expected to wear a facemask when on the bus. You will be shown by a member of staff how to remove it correctly when you arrive at school.

Can we wear face masks in school if we want to?

If wearing a facemask will give you the confidence you need to get back into school then we would rather see you in school wearing one than say that you cannot wear one and not see you in school.

However, we don't recommend that pupils wear face masks when in school.

The current DfE guidance explains that wearing a facemask in school will increase the risk of transmission as their use will encourage you to touch your face more frequently. They also make communication more difficult, therefore they are not recommended to be worn during the school day.

They are something we are all going to be getting used to as we need to use them in small enclosed spaces such as shops and on public transport. However, there are sound reasons why they are not recommended in schools currently. Because of this we would respectfully ask families to be in touch with the school beforehand to let us know that their child is feeling anxious about a return to school and so wants to wear one, we can then make staff aware.

They are not part of our uniform. Their use as fashion accessories, for example, will not be tolerated and staff will have the right to ask that they be removed if they believe they are being used inappropriately, increasing the risk a pupil is posing to themselves and others.

What happens about lockers?

You won't have access to your locker. Getting organised the night before is going to be more important than ever as we ask that you only bring in the equipment and books you need for each day. Partly because it makes sense to limit the number of items from each household on site but also because you are going to need to carry everything you need for the day around with you.

Can we play rugby in PE and after school?

The PE Department will be providing the normal PE curriculum and extra-curricular offer after school (although this will be organised a little differently to make sure that we minimise the contact between bubbles).