

18 December 2020



Dear Parents, Carers and Students

Once again, my apologies for the frequency of my communications. However you will have seen in the news some significant announcements by the government over the past couple of days regarding returning to school in January and I wanted to provide you with as much information as I can at present.

Unfortunately, headteachers get no advance notice of any of these announcements so we are trying to pick our way through the practicalities at the same time as you are. This means this letter will by no means answer all your questions, and may provide frustration more than reassurance. I can only apologise for this and endeavour to get information to you as soon as possible when we receive it.

### **Staggered start to the term in January**

The government has announced a staggered start in January. Our first day of term for students was due to be Wednesday 6 January. However we now have to use this as a 'logistical day' in order to set up our testing processes (see below). Therefore students are not expected in college on Wednesday 6 January. On Thursday 7 and Friday 8 January we are only permitted to open to:

- All of Years 11 and 13;
- Students deemed to be vulnerable children;
- The children of critical workers.

All other students will be expected to access online learning during those two days.

The government has provided a list of which students will be classified as vulnerable children but not yet of critical workers. We will need to work through these and will advise you appropriately as soon as possible. I know this will provide many challenges for parents and carers and I am sorry that this change has come with so little notice. We also feel that further policy changes are likely over the next two weeks.

At the moment I expect that Year 11 and 13 students will return to school as normal on **Thursday 7 January**. Students in other year groups who are deemed to be vulnerable children or the children of critical workers will also be welcome to come into school. All other students will access online learning from home and return to college on Monday 11 January.

Government guidance about this can be found via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-and-childcare-settings-return-in-january-2021/schools-and-childcare-settings-return-in-january-2021>

## **Coronavirus testing to take place in school**

On Tuesday we were told that from 4 January, rapid-result COVID-19 tests (lateral flow tests) will be carried out by the school to try and identify asymptomatic cases. Testing, which is voluntary, will be undertaken for one of two reasons:

- School staff to have weekly testing to help identify those who are carrying the virus without displaying symptoms, reducing the risk of transmission.
- Students and staff to have daily testing if they are identified as a close contact of somebody who has tested positive. This would prevent the need for them to self-isolate.

Yesterday's announcement stated that in addition to the groups above, we will also offer testing to as many students and staff as possible in the week commencing 4 January. We have not yet been given any information regarding the practicalities of the testing so I am afraid I can give you no concrete plans as to how this will be delivered. Again, I will provide you with information as I get it. I have been told this morning that we will not receive this information until late in the Christmas holidays.

As I said above, the Government has recognised the logistical issues that schools will need to work through to set up and run a testing hub. For this reason we have been given an additional staff training day to plan for mass testing. We will take this day on Wednesday 6 January.

There is a huge amount to do before any of this testing will be possible and I will, of course, write to you once we know more. Please be assured that this is a consent-led process and no-one will be testing your child without your consent.

Once I have greater clarity on both of these changes, I will write to you with the finalised plans but I wanted to give you the information I have as early as possible to help you plan for childcare in January.

Thank you in advance for your patience; keep safe and we wish you all the best for the festive period.

With best wishes



**Alex Newton**  
**Principal**