

Dear Parents, Carers and Students

I hope you have had an enjoyable, if quiet, Christmas. Just before we broke up for the holiday, I wrote to outline the latest government plans for a staggered start to term in January. In that letter, I suggested that further changes seemed likely and promised to write with further information as soon as we received it. As I began to write this letter I was watching Gavin Williamson address the House of Commons with changes to government plans for school opening. The purpose of this letter is to explain how those changes will affect you so as to give as much notice as possible.

A staggered start is still proposed but has now been pushed back slightly, as follows:

Week beginning 4 January

- Monday 4 January: final day of Christmas holiday (as per calendar).
- Tuesday 5 January: teacher training day – no students in college (as per calendar).
- Wednesday 6 January: teacher training day – no students in college (this additional training day added to set up testing facility, as per letter on 18 December).
- Thursday 7 and Friday 8 January: college only open to vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Online learning for all other students, including exam groups.

Week beginning 11 January

College reopens to students in Years 11 and 13, as well as vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Online learning for all other students.

Week beginning 18 January

College reopens to all year groups.

We have yet to receive a confirmed list of '**critical workers**'. I will confirm these as soon as possible but it is sensible to assume that you are likely to be eligible for a place if you were deemed a critical worker during the previous period of school closure, and we will honour those criteria.

The current guidance defines '**vulnerable children**' as:

- children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an education, health and care plan (EHCP)
- have been identified as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who could therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance, this might include:

- children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services or in the process of being referred to children's services
- adopted children or children on a special guardianship order
- those at risk of becoming NEET ('not in employment, education or training')
- those living in temporary accommodation
- those who are young carers
- those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example, due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
- care leavers
- other children and young people at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health

We will contact you on Tuesday 5 January if we believe your child is eligible for a place under the above criteria. To request a place as a critical or key worker, or because your child is eligible as above, please email keyworkers@thespirescollege.com (other email addresses and means of contact, including SchoolComms are not monitored during the holiday). Please note that places will be full time only, i.e. students will attend every day. Students will be expected to wear full uniform. They will access the same online teaching as students learning from home but otherwise, all usual routines and expectations will apply. We will send out more information about on-line learning on Tuesday, too.

There are no further updates to our position on testing on-site since my letter of 18 December. I hope to be in a position to write with more information on testing next week.

The government briefing also announced that Torbay, along with the rest of Devon, will move into Tier 3 from midnight on 30 December. This means that those from different households cannot mix indoors, in private gardens or in most outdoor venues. People can meet in groups of up to six in other outdoors spaces such as parks and the countryside. Please can I urge you all to restrict social contacts as much as possible, maintain social distancing and follow routines of regular handwashing and wearing face coverings in order that we can all work together to keep everyone safe.

I wish you all a very happy, but Covid-safe, New Year. I will write again with further information as soon as I have it.

With best wishes



Alex Newton
Principal

**We must
keep on protecting
each other.**

