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31st December 2020

Re-Opening in January 2021 and Covid-19 Testing in Schools

Dear Parents and Carers

I sincerely hope you have had an enjoyable Christmas with your families despite the pandemic and increase in restrictions. I am writing to you with changes that were announced yesterday by Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education. These changes bring with it challenges which we will continue to overcome together, ensuring that the education, health and well-being of our community remains our overarching priority.

All information included in this letter is subject to change given the nature of how the pandemic continues to evolve and the ever-changing nature of the information we receive from Government.

Changes for the return to school in January 2021

The Government announced that there would be a further delay to the return to school for all secondary students as below:

Monday 4th January:

- The Primary phase is open as normal.
- Secondary students should **NOT** attend.

Tuesday 5th January – Friday 8th January

- Face to face provision in school for secondary vulnerable children and those children whose parents/carers are classed as a keyworker.
- Year 11: Live / pre-recorded lessons for students where practical. Please follow usual timetable.
- Years 7 -10: Remote learning uploaded to Microsoft Teams. Therefore, we will set work on-line to be completed in students' books. This can be completed at any time during the day.

Monday 11th January – Friday 15th January

- Face to face provision in school for **Year 11**.
- Face to face provision in school for secondary vulnerable children and those children whose parents/carers are classed as a keyworker.
- Years 7 -10: Remote learning uploaded to Microsoft Teams. This will be a combination of live, pre-recorded and uploaded learning. Please follow the normal school timetable.

Monday 18th January onwards

- Return to school planned for all children to re-start face to face teaching

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Key worker places

Due to the changes, places will now also be available for Year 11 students eligible for a key worker place. Vulnerable and key worker students coming into school will be allocated a remote learning station from which they can follow their timetabled lessons on Teams to ensure that all children receive the same offer. The below link can be used to inform us if you wish to take up a place.

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=kGSC6rbgAk2BMLvfMAKGDDXePGSeYmtAksnwy_zHLKBUOTZNTzIOQjExMUxQQIBSVlpZMzZaMzFNTS4u

Laptops

We are aware many students were going to receive devices for home learning as a Christmas present; however, we are also aware some students do not have access to a laptop. Therefore, please can you complete the survey using the link below to indicate if a laptop is required. If you cannot access the link then please contact the main office. Following this we will be in touch to ensure we can provide devices where possible.

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=kGSC6rbgAk2BMLvfMAKGDDXePGSeYmtAksnwy_zHLKBUOVE2V1RWUjiJVk1PTVNQVzNOMU1OWVIRMC4u

Mass testing programme update

The purpose of the further delay is to give schools more time to set up and roll out the mass testing programme which we still have very limited information on. We are yet to receive the training packages and lateral flow tests so we certainly could not have been ready for January 4th as the Government had planned. We are hoping for more clarity over the next few days so that we can use Monday 4th January to intensively plan and train up a workforce to subsequently set up and roll out the programme.

The intention is to provide mass lateral flow testing for secondary age students with a view to this expanding to the primary sector later in the spring. Nothing is more important than ensuring the health and safety of our students, families, staff and the wider community, so this is something we welcome as a positive step forward.

However, schools are still awaiting specific details and guidance from the government, in particular around logistical issues. Schools have been given very little notice to prepare and implement such a large-scale event in time for the first day back in January but we wanted to give you notice of what we currently do know and our initial thoughts.

In summary, there are two phases of testing from the information we have:

The initial phase is to attempt to test as many staff and students as possible on return to school in January known as 'Mass testing.'

We will aim to test as many staff and students within our available capacity but this will be based on the resources that the school is provided with and the workforce that is available to undertake such a specialist task.

It may be that we can only test a small number of students initially until more time has been provided to set up appropriate resources and attain the required workforce to support the school. It will also take time to set up and implement this testing strategy.

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The next phase, known as 'serial testing.'

This is where we can offer tests to children who have been named as 'close contacts' but are asymptomatic. Students who are identified as 'close contacts' would normally have to isolate at home for 10 days but serial testing means that students can stay in school and not have to isolate at home unless they have a positive test result. This is very useful to schools and I very much welcome its introduction as it will significantly reduce the need for students to needlessly isolate at home along with managing the upset that is caused by being named as a contact and losing face to face learning time. I also see serial testing as much more manageable than mass testing in schools which of course is a huge undertaking without any additional support, such as that of the armed forces.

All testing will require your consent before your child is tested.

More information will hopefully be provided to parents and carers at the start of the new term in January but a key point to take away at the moment is that testing will eventually be available in our school. However, there are many levels of planning and arrangements needed to be resolved first before we can successfully do this as a school community given the time and resources constraints that have been placed before us.

As I previously outlined, all information included in this letter is subject to change. I will of course keep you updated. Please follow our social media pages and website for further updates.

With my very best wishes for 2021

Mr I Critchley
Principal