

18<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Many of you will have seen the news and heard the intention by the Government for a delay to school return in January for some students. This is to allow schools time to introduce mass testing using what are known as 'lateral flow tests'. These are Covid tests that will provide rapid results to members of our community.

At this time there is only a limited amount of information published about what is to be done in the New Year. What seems likely is that staff in schools will be offered a lateral flow test weekly and pupils who are 'contacts' of a positive case will be offered daily testing for a number of consecutive days to prevent the need for contacts to self-isolate. No-one will be obliged to have a test in school and we will need to have consent from parents/carers for tests to be undertaken.

Schools and colleges are being asked to appoint and train staff, establish testing sites and procedures and administer these tests in schools. Since we are on the start of the Christmas break and that schools will be closed for the next two weeks, it will not be possible to fully prepare for these tests to be administered for the start of term on 4th Jan 2021. Consequently the Government have announced the intention for secondary age students other than those with exams this year to receive remote learning at home for the first week of the new term, to allow schools time to plan for the delivery of lateral flow tests in week commencing 11th Jan 2020. It is expected that this is the date that all pupils will be able to return to school. Pupils in Year 11 and 13 should return to school on 4th Jan 2020 (as long as they are not self-isolating nor displaying Covid symptoms). We will also be asking Year 10s to come to school from Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> Jan since they have an early-entry English exam later on in this academic year

In addition, we are making provision for pupils who are considered 'vulnerable' and those whose parents are key workers. There is no obligation for such pupils to attend but they are welcome to do so. We will be making computers available for these children to complete the same remote working as their peers are doing at home. On this occasion, this provision will be extended to those children who do not have access to a computer and/or the internet at home as we do not now have time to arrange for the loans of laptops and modems which we were able to do back in March.

A survey link will be sent out alongside this letter, so that we can capture information about how many vulnerable children from Y7-10/Y12 are likely to be in on Monday 4th Jan and we can plan access to computer rooms while preserving bubbles. Depending on numbers, we may need to 'rotate' children with staggered start and finish times but I hope it will not come to this.

The survey will also allow you to provide us with your initial consent for lateral testing of your child when this is introduced. I strongly urge every parent/carer to provide this consent for the benefit of their own children and our wider school community.

I am sorry to rather spring this on you on the last day of term and I realise that these arrangements for the first week back may present difficulties for some families. We will, however, ensure that there is meaningful learning for all pupils for this period of time and we will be doing all we can to have all children back in school as soon as possible.

One final point to note is that we are going to need to find ways to staff the testing of children and we do not, by definition, have lots of spare capacity in school. It has been suggested that some of this work could be done by volunteers. These volunteers would be provided with training, PPE and (one assumes) access to regular testing themselves. I know that this is not something many of you will be able to do and nor is it something that you may want to do. That said, there may be some parents/carers who have the capacity and would be prepared to volunteer to support in this work. Ideally those volunteering would have a health care background or experience. Should you wish to put your name forward you can do so within the previously mentioned survey that I have asked everyone to complete.

In summary then:

- Years 11 and 13 should return to school as planned on 4th Jan 2021
- Year 10s will receive online learning on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Jan but return on 6<sup>th</sup> Jan.
- Year 7, Year 8, Year 9 and Year 12 will receive online learning for the all that first week. This online provision will move away from the remote model adopted in the last two weeks of Term 2, reverting to the pupils' in school timetable (Week B).
- Anyone who wishes their child to attend school because they are key workers, because you do not have a suitable device at home or because your son/daughter is 'vulnerable' should alert us through the survey. I will communicate with you again in the New Year with further information about the lateral flow testing arrangements when we have them.

We may separately be in touch to ask students to come and be tested at a designated time prior to their return to school. However, please await further instruction regarding this.

Finally, thank you for your patience, understanding and support relating to this matter and to the other challenges we have faced over recent weeks and months. In spite of everything, our pupils have continued to attend school, learn well and enjoy themselves and I am immensely proud of them and of my colleagues who have enabled this to happen.

I wish you all a peaceful and very merry Christmas.



Dr Rowland Speller  
Headteacher