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small community **thinking big**

23rd February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Yesterday the Prime Minister announced the Government plans in relation to easing the current lockdown restrictions. This was followed up yesterday evening by a letter to schools from the Secretary of State for Education and updated DfE guidance. I am now able to confirm the arrangements to get all our students back into school from the week commencing the 8th March.

Some flexibility is being given to secondary provision to 'phase' the return of all students over the week of the 8th March to allow schools to establish the COVID-19 testing for everyone as they return. I'm sure you appreciate that we are unable to test all 150 students on one day. I propose therefore to stagger the return of our students over just two days - Mon 8th & Tues 9th March.

Y7, Y10 & Y11 + Pluto & Jupiter will return on Monday 8th March (to be tested every Monday & Thursday)

Y8 & Y9 + Mars & Saturn will return on Tuesday 9th March (to be tested every Tuesday & Friday)

Please note that those students in years 8, 9, Mars and Saturn who have been in school during lockdown will still come in on Monday 8th March as usual.

Your child will return to exactly the same routines as we implemented so successfully in the Autumn term. They will be back in their familiar bubble and return to enjoying a full curriculum in school with their friends and teaching staff. Please note, your child will continue to finish their week at 1pm on Fridays to allow staff time for planning, preparation and assessment.

If your child is deemed 'critically extremely vulnerable' and will not be returning on the 8th or 9th March, please contact the school to confirm. They will, of course, still have access to our remote education offer.

The usual rules and duties around school attendance are in place from 8th March therefore **your child's attendance in school is mandatory from their start date above.**

Testing

As an essential element of the plans to ease restrictions, the Government is quite clear that they expect schools to make arrangements for all secondary aged pupils to be tested twice a week.

Rapid (lateral flow) testing will continue to remain a vital part of the Government's plan to suppress this virus, in all education settings and across society. This sort of testing means that asymptomatic people who might otherwise continue to attend educational settings are identified and self-isolate. The Government has suggested that, after taking 3 tests in school, pupils in mainstream secondary schools will be expected to take twice weekly tests at home. We will not be asking our students to do this but will support them to take their tests in school.

Over 90% of the students who have continued to attend school during this lockdown have been tested successfully each week. After some initial fears and uncertainty, I am incredibly proud of how confidently and maturely they have accepted testing as part of the normal school routine and they have been brilliantly and sensitively supported by our staff.

We are aware that students returning to school in the near future will need a bit of time and support to get used to the test until they are familiar with the process. All teachers are now beginning to prepare students for testing on their return using a wide range of resources that will help them feel really prepared.

You will be contacted separately in the near future with more details about our testing in school and to seek your consent. Whilst it is our expectation that every student is tested, please be assured that your child will not be tested without your consent nor will any student be 'forced' to take a test if they refuse.

As now, if a student has a positive test result they will be immediately isolated until they are collected to go home. They will then be required to self-isolate for 10 days before returning to school and will resume remote education at home. They are no longer required to take another COVID-19 test as the test taken in school is accepted as sufficient evidence that they are indeed infected. However, all other students and staff in their bubble will now not need to isolate at home, providing they continue to receive negative test results in school. Obviously, if your child is not being tested then they will also be required to isolate at home as they will have been in close contact with an infected individual and may well be infected themselves. Unless they are tested, we just don't know, so I would urge you to give your consent and do everything you can to reassure your child and encourage them to take part in the testing. It is a very brief and painless procedure and there is no reason for your child to be anxious or distressed in any way. We are confident that with successful testing in our school we can avoid the need for whole bubble groups to be isolated and students having to spend even more time out of school.

All staff are also tested twice a week and many have now received their first vaccine, reducing the risk of them becoming infected themselves and, it is now becoming clear, also reducing the risk of them infecting others.

Masks / Face Coverings

The revised guidance recommends that all students who are Y7 & above wear face coverings in classrooms, as well as when they are moving around the school. This guidance applies to all school settings.

However, if staff feel confident that they can strictly maintain 2m social distancing within the bubble classroom, I have given them permission to exercise their discretion around the wearing of face coverings in class (perhaps deciding students are not required to wear a face covering all of the time). Please note, the request to implement this new advice is for a 'limited period' only. I know it's not what we any of us want to do but it is part of the revised control measures the Government are recommending that will enable the staged lifting of restrictions.

As now, if your child is 'medically exempt' from needing to wear a mask, they will not be required to.

In line with the revised guidance, we will update our risk assessment and control measures in time for the return of all students and publish this on our website.

We are absolutely delighted that we have now been given the 'green light' to get all our students back in school! I remain confident we can do this really safely and that our revised control measures help to mitigate all the risks.

If you have any questions about any of the information above please do not hesitate to contact me directly. Together we are 'getting through' this difficult time and there is more than a glimmer of hope of a return to something more like normality on the horizon.

Kind regards and stay safe,

Tim

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