

Friday 15 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope and trust you and your family are well.

I am writing today to keep you updated on a range of matters. In doing so I will hopefully, again, provide some clarity and address some concerns, questions, or queries that you may have, but should I fail to do so, and should you still require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us. I also provide again for your convenience, within the body of this letter, links ([in blue](#)) to sources of information, guidance, regulations, and advice, should you wish to consult them.

I summarise below the contents for each section. If you are reading this electronically, clicking or tapping on the respective section will take you directly to it.

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Attendance of Vulnerable Children and Children of Critical Workers

As you know, during the period of national lockdown, we remain open to [vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers](#) only, with all other students receiving remote education. During this period, we are required to continue to record attendance and must follow up on absences of the students we expect to be in school. (Please note, however, that where a parent or carer wishes for their child to be absent, all absences during this period of national lockdown will be authorised).

Whilst we will not limit attendance of eligible students, it is important to note that the proportion of our students currently attending our provision for vulnerable children and children of critical workers is above the national proportion for secondary schools, according to [statistics](#) published this week.

Moreover, with ‘the threat of transmissibility from the new mutation being much greater than the strain faced in the first wave’, as [stated](#) by the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, and given that it is ‘becoming increasingly clear that the national lockdown restrictions in place now and the public’s adherence towards them are weaker they were in the spring’, it is important that we also emphasise the Government’s recently [revised advice](#) that ‘Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can’.

Moreover, given the fact that there has been some misunderstanding in some instances about what occupations constitute critical worker status (see [here](#)), I hope and trust that any parent or carer who did not request that their child attend our provision as the child of a critical worker via the survey we provided, but who subsequently do so, will understand that we may require ‘simple evidence that [they are] critical worker, such as their work ID badge or pay slip’.

I must also remind you that if your child is attending our provision for vulnerable children and children of critical workers, you must continue to adhere to [self-isolation rules](#). If any student exhibits any [symptom](#) of coronavirus — a new and persistent cough, or a high temperature, or a loss of or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell — they must not attend school, and they and anyone they live with must follow the Stay at Home [guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#), with a [test being arranged](#) for them as soon as possible (tests can be booked [here](#)). Equally, if any member of a student’s household is showing symptoms of coronavirus or has tested positive for COVID-19, the student must self-isolate and not attend school.

Keeping in Touch (December 2020 Update) Survey

Thank you very much to the 650 parents and carers that completed our last ‘Keeping in Touch Survey’ just before Christmas. As always, we greatly value your feedback and genuinely use such to inform our actions. I note here the summary feedback from our analysis and confirm for you that we have read each response, and have genuinely taken on board any individual concerns that were raised.

- 97% of parents and carers were satisfied with the general communication we provided last term, and 54% were very satisfied.
 - Our analysis of responses — using high frequency words and phrases — indicates that parents and carers typically welcome the fact that our communication is informative, regular, clear, timely, comprehensive, positive, and reassuring.
 - Whilst it is difficult to extract common themes from the small number of parents and carers who were not satisfied with our general communication, of the responses we did have, several referred to specific issues around isolation guidance and a lack of response (or immediacy in response) to queries.
- 96% of parents and carers were satisfied with our response to the positive cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) that occurred last term, and indeed with the communication we provided in response to such, and 59% were very satisfied.

- Our analysis of your responses — again using high frequency words and phrases — indicates that parents and carers typically welcomed the fact that our response was quick, clear and efficient, and that our communication was quick, helpful, informative and caring.
 - Again, whilst it is difficult to extract common themes from the small number of parents and carers who were not satisfied with our response to — and communication of — the positive cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) that occurred last term, of the responses we did have, several queried the identification of contacts and the sharing of other information about confirmed cases, such as what year group students who had tested positive for COVID-19 were in.
- 96% of parents and carers were satisfied with the protective arrangements we have put in place (as outlined in our Return to School plan and Risk Assessment), and 43% were very satisfied.
 - Our analysis of your responses — again using high frequency words and phrases — indicates that parents and carers appreciate that we are doing our best in difficult circumstances, particularly welcoming the introduction of the use of face coverings in corridors and communal areas, and appreciating the focus we put on ensuring the safety of our students.
 - And again, whilst it is difficult to extract common themes from the small number of parents and carers who were not satisfied with the protective arrangements we have put in place, of the responses we did have, some queried social distancing at break and lunch times, and whether students are wearing face coverings in corridors and communal areas (it is important to note that some students in the school are exempt).

Device and Data provision

We have loaned over 150 laptops to families and provided support for many families with the provision of data, and there are 20 more devices that are awaiting collection or that we are distributing in the coming days. We have contacted every family that has requested support through our 'Home Remote Access Audit' surveys or otherwise, and will continue to ensure that we support families as comprehensively as we can to ensure that none of our students are digitally disadvantaged. Again, should you have any issues or require any support, please contact us via datacheck@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk. Similarly, please use this address if you require the loan of a device but have not yet told us, or if you think we will be able to support you with internet access.

Free School Meals provision

After issues with the quality of the first Morrison's food parcels delivered this week, as affected families are aware, our Trust immediately raised concerns with Morrison's and have been working hard to rectify the situation since. In the short term, in recognition of the poor standards of the food parcels delivered, we also quickly secured vouchers worth £15 redeemable at local supermarkets and have provided such to families (or have otherwise contacted families to arrange collection or delivery).

Please note also that HM Government confirmed on [13 January](#) that the national voucher scheme that was provided by Devon County Council over Christmas through [HM Government's £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme](#), and which we were initially informed would not be available for the period of the National Lockdown, will now re-open and 'be in place from next week'. We have been advised that we will receive more communication about this 'over the coming days', but will ensure that all families of students eligible for free school meals receive their entitlement until we receive further detail. We will be in touch with eligible families as soon as we have confirmed arrangements for next week, but please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or require further information in the meantime.

May I also reiterate again here that if your child is currently not eligible for free school meals, but because of any change in your circumstances may now be, that you please check and apply online through the [Devon Citizen's Portal](#) as soon as possible, or call the education helpline (0345 155 1019).

Summer 2021 Exams

I wrote to all families of Y11 and Y13 students with [this update on Wednesday](#), outlining the key points made in the recent [correspondence](#) between the Secretary of State for Education and Chief Regulator for Ofqual, and in the Secretary of State for Education's appearance at the [Education Select Committee](#). As of writing, the consultation document and information we were expecting by the end of this week has not yet been published, but we will write to all families with further detail once it is available — to afford everyone the opportunity of responding.

Rapid Results Testing Programme

Further to my [letter of 8 January](#), I can confirm that our asymptomatic testing programme is fully underway. All students attending our provision for vulnerable children and children of critical workers, have been tested at least once this week, with consent of course, and all staff on-site have been tested each week. And we are fully prepared to begin any necessary daily 'contact' testing, i.e. students and staff will be tested daily for seven days, if consent has been provided, if they are identified as a close contact of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 — thereby removing the need to self-isolate if the daily tests are negative.

You may be aware from reports in the Guardian today, along with reports from other sources, that the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has allegedly 'refused to approve daily (i.e. contact) testing in schools'. We have spoken with various teams at the DfE today and the MHRA directly, and have written to the MHRA to request urgent clarification. The DfE Rapid Testing team informed us that "the MHRA has not, repeat not, refused to approve rapid testing in schools" and recommended that we "continue with the testing programme".

The report relates to the concern that people who test negative may 'presume' that means that they are 'safe' and thus alter their behaviour accordingly. To this end, and to reiterate the information I provided in my [letter of 8 January](#), it is important to note again that these tests do not eliminate risk, and that LFD testing is a risk reduction intervention only — that aims to identify asymptomatic cases. It is recognised that a negative test result does not remove the risk of transmission, and that there may be some 'false negative' results, as [emphasised by the DfE](#), where 'in some cases, someone who has tested negative may

still have the undetected disease and be infectious'. As such, it remains essential for everyone — whether they have been tested or not — to continue to use the measures that we have in place to reduce viral spread, including hand hygiene and wearing face coverings. We will, as ever, proceed with caution and continue to seek the advice and guidance of the appropriate Government departments. And we will, of course, keep you fully informed.

Remote Learning

Firstly, may I thank families sincerely for your support with remote learning at home. We are genuinely very grateful for it, for the encouragement you are giving your child, and understand how difficult it can be juggling so many conflicting obligations. To this end we want to ensure that we are supporting you and your child through this period as best we can, and genuinely appreciate any feedback you give us, whether to reinforce aspects of our provision that are working well, or to point out aspects of our provision that we could think about again or do better. To this end, we will be asking you to complete another brief 'Keeping in Touch' survey next week with a specific focus on the remote learning your child has been engaging with for the first two weeks of this term. We will also be surveying students for their feedback.

Further to the summary of our Remote Learning provision provided on the second page of my letter of [4 January](#), we are in the process of reviewing our Remote Learning policy in light of:

- New expectations and duties recently set out by HM Government in their [guidance](#) (pp46-50).
- Further evidence provided through research (including this [synthesis of research evidence](#) from the Education Endowment Foundation).
- The further feedback on remote learning provision during periods of self-isolation that parents and carers provided through our 'Keeping in Touch (December 2020) update' survey.

We will share our full, amended policy with you later next week and, as always, will keep it under regular review — particularly after feedback we receive from families and students through our 'Keeping in Touch' surveys, the next of which, to reiterate, we will distribute next week.

In the meantime, for your information, Ofsted have published this very [useful guide](#) on what works well in remote education, that draws on findings from Ofsted's [interim visits to schools](#) in the autumn term, as well as from wider sources. It sets out and counters some 'common myths' about remote learning that we were particularly cognisant of when developing our initial policy last year; myths that we have endeavoured to not fall foul of, including, for example, thinking that 'remote education is a different curriculum to the content that would be delivered normally', or that 'the best way to deliver remote education is always through live lessons'. We have always ensured — and will continue to ensure — that our practice is informed by evidence. You may also find [this blog](#) useful, produced by the DfE, to help parents and carers understand what remote education should look like.

Could I also ask that you please inform us if your child is unwell and unable to complete their remote learning on any particular day. We will then be able to inform teachers. I would also be grateful if you could please continue to inform us if your child is isolating at home because they have symptoms or because of a positive case in your household.

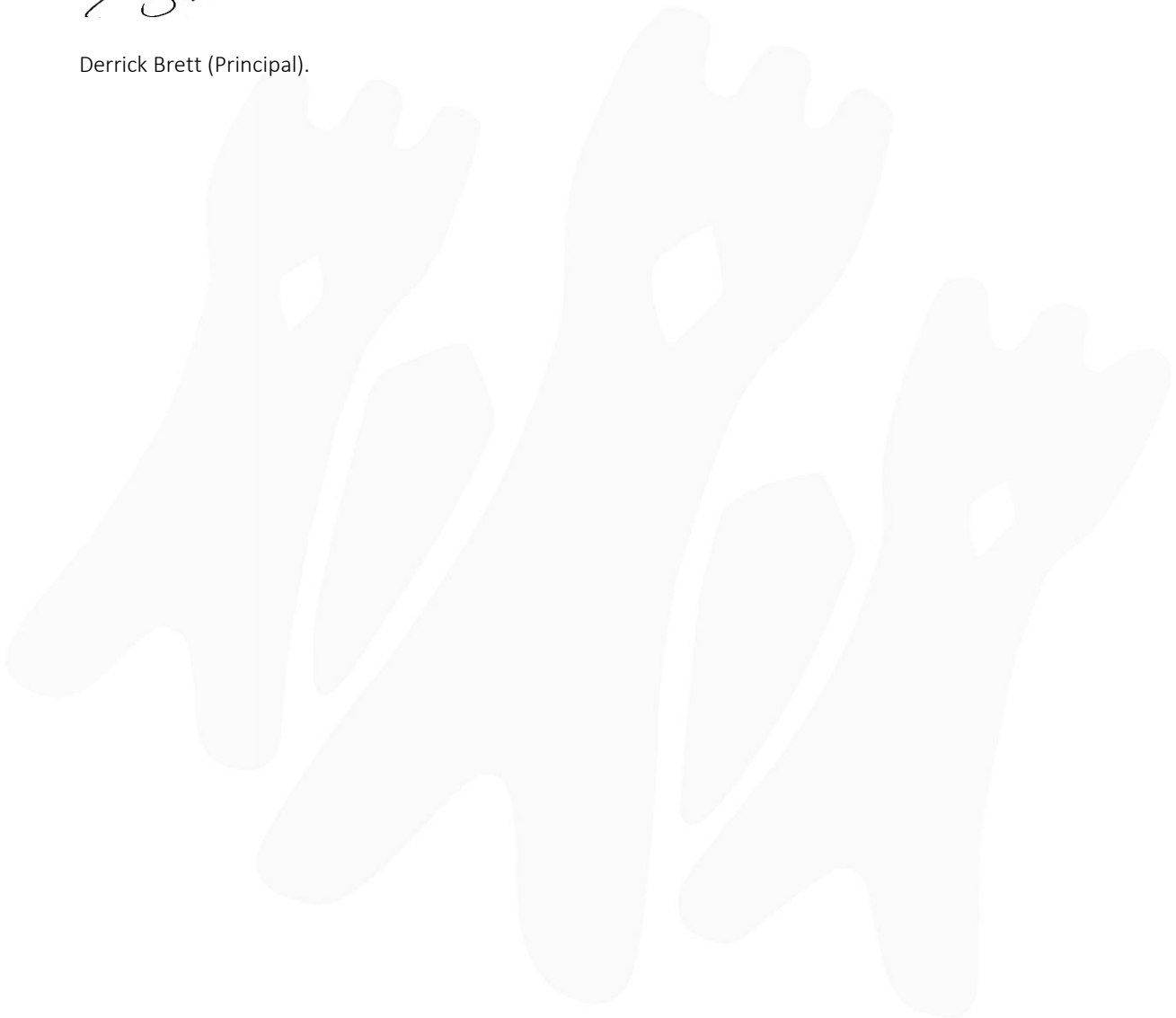
Thank you very much once again for your ongoing support. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information.

As ever, keep safe, and keep looking after yourself and each other.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Brett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Derrick Brett (Principal).



Important

Advice for schools

CORONAVIRUS SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

A CHILD WHO DEVELOPS ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A POTENTIAL CORONAVIRUS CASE:



NEW CONTINUOUS COUGH

This means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if the child usually has a cough, it may be worse than usual)



FEVER (TEMPERATURE OF 37.8°C OR HIGHER)

The child will also feel hot to touch on their chest or back



A LOSS OR CHANGE TO SENSE OF SMELL OR TASTE

this means the child has noticed they cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

MOST CHILDREN WITH CORONAVIRUS HAVE AT LEAST ONE OF THESE SYMPTOMS.



If a child is unwell with one or more of these specific symptoms they should be told not to come into school or sent home as soon as possible and advised to get a coronavirus test. **ONLY** those children with one or more of these symptoms or those advised by their clinician or Local Authority should get a test.



Children reporting other symptoms such as a headache, sore throat, runny or sniffly nose, earache, itchy eyes, lethargy or tiredness **WITHOUT** a fever should **NOT** be treated as potential coronavirus cases or advised to take a test.

If the national guidance on symptoms of coronavirus in children changes, updated information will be provided at a local level as soon as possible. This information about coronavirus symptoms in children can be shared with all school teaching and administration staff as well as parents and carers where necessary.

For further guidance on coronavirus testing for schools, please read the letter from PHE and NHS Test and Trace to school and college leaders at: bit.ly/phe-schools

ENGLAND LOCKDOWN

STAY AT HOME

**THE NEW VARIANT OF CORONAVIRUS IS SPREADING FAST.
WE ALL NEED TO PLAY OUR PART TO STOP THE SPREAD.**

▶ LEAVING HOME

You must not leave, or be outside of your home or garden, except for a very limited set of exemptions e.g. to shop for basic necessities, exercise, go to work if you cannot do so from home, or to escape risk of harm.

▶ MEETING OTHERS

You cannot leave your home to meet socially with anyone, except with your household or support bubble (if eligible to form one). Stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household or support bubble.

▶ EXERCISE

You may exercise on your own, with your household or support bubble, or with one person from another household (when on your own). Stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household or support bubble.

▶ BARS, PUBS AND RESTAURANTS

Hospitality closed aside from sales by takeaway (until 11pm), click-and-collect, drive-through or delivery. Alcohol cannot be purchased through takeaway or click-and-collect from hospitality venues.

▶ RETAIL

Essential shops can open. Non-essential retail must close and can only run click-and-collect and delivery.

▶ WORK AND BUSINESS

Everyone must work from home unless they are unable to do so.

▶ EDUCATION

Early years settings open. Primary and secondary schools and colleges move to remote provision except for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Most university students to move to remote learning.

▶ LEISURE AND SPORTING FACILITIES

Closed, with limited exceptions.

▶ ACCOMMODATION

Closed, with limited exceptions.

▶ PERSONAL CARE

Closed.

▶ ENTERTAINMENT

Closed.

▶ OVERNIGHT STAYS

You must not stay overnight away from home. Limited exceptions apply e.g. to stay with your support bubble.

▶ WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

Funerals of up to 30 people permitted. Weddings up to 6 people permitted in exceptional circumstances. Wakes and other linked ceremonial events of up to 6 permitted.

▶ PLACES OF WORSHIP

Places of worship can remain open and communal worship is permitted, but you must not mix with those outside your household or support bubble.

▶ TRAVELLING

You must stay at home. If you do leave home for a very limited set of exemptions, you should stay local in the village, town, or part of the city where you live where possible. Do not travel abroad unless an exemption applies.

▶ CLINICALLY EXTREMELY VULNERABLE

Shielding reintroduced across England. You should not travel to work, school, college or university and should limit the time you spend outside the home. You should only go out for medical appointments, exercise or if it is essential.

▶ CARE HOME VISITS

Visits can take place with arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, or behind windows. Close-contact indoor visits are not allowed. No visits will be permitted in the event of an outbreak but end of life visits are permitted in all circumstances.