



Mill Road • Okehampton  
Devon • EX20 1PW



admin@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk  
www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk  
@OkehamptonCollege  
@OkehamptonCC



+44 (0)1837 650910

Friday 17 December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

We write — in the pages that follow — to provide you with important information and detail about our return to College in January, and further to our [letter of 10 December](#) and the Prime Minister's [address to the Nation](#) on 12 December, where he confirmed the national move to [COVID-19 Alert level 4](#) in light of the rapid increase in Omicron cases of the coronavirus.

We must start, however, by thanking you. The pandemic has placed extraordinary and sustained pressures on us all over the last two years and this term has, without question, been the most challenging period in the College's recent history. Your support over this time in helping us protect our students' and your children's learning has been invaluable and, as always, greatly appreciated. Whilst the number of positive cases of COVID-19 are currently in single figures, over 450 of our students have tested positive for COVID-19 since September, as have many staff, including one-third of our teachers. Our staff have again gone the extra mile to ensure that despite what at times has felt like almost insurmountable pressure, we have remained fully open. We have also been able to re-establish a range of activities to enhance our students' curriculum experiences, including the reintroduction of after school clubs and sporting fixtures, musical events, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, and of course our annual ten-mile Dartmoor walk.

Throughout this pandemic we have always acted in the best interests of our students, their families, and our wider community. As you know from our letters and communications throughout this term, we are in regular contact with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to ensure that our ongoing assessment of risk — and associated actions to mitigate such risk — have been made with the counsel and guidance of public health experts. And there is no doubt that with the emergence of what the Health and Social Care Secretary described to [parliament earlier this week](#) as the 'grave threat' of the Omicron variant, we will continue to face pressures in the coming weeks and months. But we want to reassure you that there is as equally no doubt that we will continue to do our utmost to protect our students' learning, and to work alongside you in doing so.

With our warmest wishes for a safe, peaceful, and joyous Christmas and New Year.

Yours Sincerely,

Craig Griffiths and Rebecca Mullins  
(Associate Principals).

## Testing for COVID-19 over the Christmas holidays

All staff and students should continue to test over the holidays in line with national guidance, meaning that they should test in situations where they are more likely to catch or spread COVID-19. This includes spending time in crowded and enclosed spaces and before visiting people who are at higher risk of severe illness if they get COVID-19. In addition, we ask all staff and students to take one LFD test at home either in the evening or morning before they return in January. We also ask you to please continue to report positive cases to us, by [completing this brief form](#).

## Arrangements for return to College in January

All staff return to College on Tuesday 4 January, for a staff development day. Our students return to school on the dates below, according to the phased schedule provided and described in the section that follows.

- Wednesday 5 January: Students in years 11, 12 and 13.
- Thursday 6 January: Students in years 7 and 10.
- Friday 7 January: All students in years 8 and 9.

For your information, the focus of our staff development day will be curriculum development. We will be revisiting our core curriculum principles, the underlying knowledge base for subject curricula, and addressing the problem of cumulative dysfluency — where gaps in students' knowledge accumulate as they become layered on top of one another in a curriculum sequence. This accumulation of gaps is a particular risk to students' learning at this time, given the disruption caused by the pandemic, and has the potential to limit a student's ability to acquire the complex skills that depend on them. Work will be undertaken collaboratively over the course of the day by subject teams across the three secondary schools in our Trust.






## Phased return to school and asymptomatic testing arrangements

On their return in January students will take one lateral flow device (LFD) test at our asymptomatic testing site in school, followed by one LFD self-test at home 3-4 days after later. (This is the case in all schools across the country.) Identifying positive cases and isolating those that are the most contagious as soon as is practical will help reduce the risk of transmission and support the continuation of face-to-face education.

Consent must be provided for any student who has not previously had consent given to participate in the testing, but **you do not have to give consent again if you have previously done so and do not wish to change your decision**. If you have not yet given consent, or if you wish to change your previous decision, please do so by 23:45 on Sunday 2 January 2022, by [completing this brief form](#). Should you require it, you can also view the Terms of Consent and associated Privacy Notices on the '[Coronavirus Information](#)' page on our website.

To facilitate this asymptomatic testing on site, and welcome everyone back to school safely whilst ensuring a return as disruption free for families and students as we can make it, we must phase the return to school for students, as outlined overleaf.

	Mon 03/01	Tues 04/01	Weds 05/01	Thurs 06/01	Fri 07/01
Year 7	Not open to students or staff.	Staff training day. Students do not attend.	Students do not attend and receive remote home learning.	Students attend school as normal. Students have COVID-19 LFD test on-site.	Students attend school as normal.
Year 8	Not open to students or staff.	Staff training day. Students do not attend.	Students do not attend and receive remote home learning.	Students do not attend and receive remote home learning.	Students attend school as normal. Students have COVID-19 LFD test on-site.
Year 9	Not open to students or staff.	Staff training day. Students do not attend.	Students do not attend and receive remote home learning.	Students do not attend and receive remote home learning.	Students attend school as normal. Students have COVID-19 LFD test on-site.
Year 10	Not open to students or staff.	Staff training day. Students do not attend.	Students do not attend and receive remote home learning.	Students attend school as normal. Students have COVID-19 LFD test on-site.	Students attend school as normal.
Year 11	Not open to students or staff.	Staff training day. Students do not attend.	Students attend school as normal. Students have COVID-19 LFD test on-site.	Students attend school as normal.	Students attend school as normal.
Year 12	Not open to students or staff.	Staff training day. Students do not attend.	Students attend school as normal. Students have COVID-19 LFD test on-site.	Students attend school as normal.	Students attend school as normal.
Year 13	Not open to students or staff.	Staff training day. Students do not attend.	Students attend school as normal. Students have COVID-19 LFD test on-site.	Students attend school as normal.	Students attend school as normal.

-  Not open to students or staff.
-  Staff training day. Students do not attend.
-  Students do not attend and receive remote home learning.
-  Students attend school as normal.
-  Students have COVID-19 LFD test on-site.

- **Testing Group 1: Students in years 11, 12 and 13** will return to school and have their on-site LFD test on Wednesday 5 January. All students in years 7, 8, 9 and 10 will receive remote education on Wednesday 5 January.
- **Testing Group 2: All students in years 7 and 10** will return to school and have their on-site LFD test on Thursday 6 January. All students in years 8 and 9 will receive remote education on Thursday 6 January. All students in years 11, 12 and 13 will attend lessons as normal.
- **Testing Group 3: All students in years 8 and 9** will return to school and have their on-site LFD test on Friday 7 January. All students in all other year groups will attend lessons as normal.
- Students will be 'allowed to resume face to face learning if they test negative' after their LFD test. If a student's LFD test result on-site is positive, they will be isolated in school immediately and collected by a member of their family or household to isolate at home, in line with current [guidance](#). A standard lab-based Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test must then be [arranged](#) and taken to confirm the result. (Whilst awaiting PCR results, a student should continue isolating.) If the PCR test is taken within 2 days of the positive LFD test, and is negative, it overrides the LFD test and the student can return to school, as long as the student doesn't have COVID-19 symptoms. The student is then advised to take LFD tests daily for 7 days. If the PCR test is positive, the student must isolate for the required period, i.e., for 10 days from the date of the test.
- Students should then continue to test twice weekly at home, 3-4 days apart, as outlined in our [recent letters](#), with their results being reported to us via [this form](#). If any student tests positive via PCR, we would be grateful if you could report such to us so that we may assist with any contact tracing, by [completing this brief form](#)

## Daily Testing of Close Contacts of COVID-19

In response to the emergence and spread of the Omicron variant, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) [now advise](#) that people who are fully vaccinated and all children and young people aged between 5 and 18 years and 6 months and identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 — whether Omicron or not — should take a LFD test every day for 7 days to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Where this is the case on return to school in January, students should continue to attend their setting as normal, unless they have a positive test result.

The DfE has also confirmed that even if someone has tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 90 days, if they are identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19 and are exempt from isolation, they are strongly advised to take part in daily testing. If the LFD test is positive, they should also take a confirmatory PCR *even if it is within the 90 days*. This is a change to the previous position because it is known that people can be infected with the Omicron variant of the coronavirus even when they have had previous COVID infection.

This is now being referred to as Daily Testing of Contacts of Covid (DTCC). Whilst the process for identifying contacts has not changed and will continue to be managed by NHS Test and Trace, we will also continue to advise families if they have been a contact of a positive case in school.

## Vaccinations

Despite some challenges beyond our control, we were able to ensure that all eligible students were offered their first COVID-19 vaccine this term. [The UKHSA have also confirmed](#) that following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) all healthy school-aged children aged 12 to 17 will be able to receive a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccination next term, either in school or at a vaccination centre, at a minimum of 12 weeks from the first dose. We will of course keep you fully and promptly updated with details and dates as soon as we have them confirmed with us.

## Further information

Detailed guidance from the DfE regarding what parents and carers need to know about schools can be [viewed here](#). Current HM Government guidance on how to stay safe and help prevent the spread of coronavirus can be [viewed here](#). Our Coronavirus Response Risk Assessment can be [viewed here](#). Our COVID-19 Outbreak Management Plan can be [viewed here](#). An archive of all the latest letters we have sent to families can be [accessed here](#).