

Thursday 10 December

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope and trust you and your family are well.

I am writing today, at some necessary length, to update you regarding a range of matters. In doing so I will hopefully 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 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.

Given the length of this communication, 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

As you know, as the [national restrictions](#) that came into effect from 5 November ceased on Wednesday 2 December, and [Devon](#) has been placed in [Tier 2 'high alert' restrictions](#). HM Government has thus reiterated, in their [COVID-19 Winter Plan](#), that 'parents should continue to send their children to school during term time and students should continue to attend college right up until the end of term' (paragraph 73) — including those clinically extremely vulnerable students who were previously advised not to attend school during the period of national restrictions (paragraph 76).

We recognise and appreciate the anxieties of some parents and carers, given their specific personal circumstances, about sending their children to school during the pandemic, and we make every effort to support, reassure and advise families in this regard. And it is in this spirit that I write here today — further to my letter to all parents and carers of 4 November, and to my letter to some families on 2 December — to ensure that you are fully informed and aware of the expectations regarding attendance, and the guidance we are duty bound to follow.

In summary:

- 1) School attendance is mandatory.
- 2) A new category of non-attendance because of 'circumstances related to coronavirus (COVID-19)' was introduced for the 2020-21 academic year through changes made by HM Government to regulations governing school attendance, namely ['The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) \(Coronavirus\) \(Amendment\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2020'](#). To ensure that no parent or carer will be penalised for following official public health advice for their child not to attend a given session, this new category of non-attendance will not count as an absence (authorised or unauthorised) for statistical purposes.
- 3) Schools must only use this category, however, where a student does not attend because their travel to, or attendance at, school would be either contrary to guidance relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) from Public Health England (PHE) and/or the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), or otherwise prohibited by any legislation (or instruments such as statutory directions) relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- 4) The addendum to the Department for Education (DfE) guidance ['recording attendance in relation to coronavirus \(COVID-19\) during the 2020 to 2021 academic year'](#) outlines such 'circumstances related to coronavirus (COVID-19)' and provides detail pertaining to each:
 - Students who are required to self-isolate as they, or a member of their household, has symptoms of or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19).
 - Students who are required to self-isolate because they are a close contact of someone who has symptoms of or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19).
 - Students who are required by legislation to self-isolate as part of a period of quarantine.
 - Students who are clinically extremely vulnerable *in a future local lockdown scenario only*. [Updated guidance](#) states that 'in the future, the government will only reintroduce formal shielding advice in the very worst affected local areas and for a limited period of time. This will only apply to some, but not all, Tier 3 areas.' The government will write to those affected separately in such circumstances to inform them if they are advised to shield.
- 5) Children absent from school for the reasons above will be provided with remote education as per [the Coronavirus Act 2020 Provision of Remote Education \(England\) Temporary Continuity Direction](#).
- 6) DHSC and PHE have updated their [guidance for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people to come into effect on 2 December](#), such that from 3 December, 'all pupils and students should continue to attend education settings at [all] local tiers unless they are one of the very small number of pupils or students under paediatric or other NHS care *and* [my emphasis] have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend an education setting'. This is the only other circumstance outside of those listed in paragraph 4 above where an absence from school can be 'authorised' as 'related to coronavirus'. And to be clear, this replaces the guidance that was in effect for the period of national restrictions in England between 5 November and 2 December, where 'children whose doctors confirmed they [were] still clinically extremely vulnerable [were] advised not to attend school' (parents of clinically extremely vulnerable children have received a letter confirming this advice).

- The key point is that outside of those reasons outlined in paragraph 4 above, schools are only able to 'authorise' a student's absence as 'related to coronavirus' if the student is under paediatric or other specialist NHS care *and* has been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend. Without both conditions being met we cannot consider such an absence to be 'related to coronavirus' and thus 'authorise' it as such. So, to be clear, if a student does not attend school because of a clinically extreme vulnerability, unless they are under paediatric or other specialist NHS care *and* have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend, the absence will not be authorised. To 'authorise' such an absence as 'related to coronavirus', we would need evidence that the student is under paediatric or other specialist NHS care *and* that they have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend. Recommendations from Doctors for schools to apply discretion are not sufficient, as the law does not permit such discretion. We have also had this confirmed by the DfE.
- In addition, [DHSC and PHE guidance](#) states that 'children and young people whose parents or carers [or siblings or other household members] are clinically extremely vulnerable should also continue to go to school.' In other words, we must not 'authorise' an absence from school to be 'related to coronavirus' if that absence is because a household member is clinically extremely vulnerable.

Response to confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19)

I would like to reassure you that we have strong procedures in place that permits us to respond with rigour and speed in the event of any confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in our community. Let me leave you in no doubt that we take this responsibility seriously, and as such endeavour to ensure that we respond as swiftly as possible to identify contacts and isolate — and, of course, to consistently communicate with all our families.

Because of the safety measures and system of controls we implemented on our return to school in September — which we shared with all families through our [Return to School Plan](#) and accompanying [Risk Assessment](#) — and because of our robust response procedures, we have dealt with the confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) that we have faced in recent weeks efficiently, identifying and isolating all contacts quickly. And I can assure you that we continue to work relentlessly to make sure that the safety measures and system of controls we have in place are working as effectively as they can.

We are constantly monitoring the situation and, as you know, are in regular contact with PHE and the DfE, and have liaised with Public Health Devon and Devon County Council (DCC) Education department to ensure that all agencies are involved and fully informed. There has been no public health or operational reason to isolate entire year groups, or consider partial closures, as other schools in the region have, because of the measures we have in place and the response protocols we have established. Indeed, it is important that families understand that as a result of HM Government's recently published '[Contingency framework](#)' for schools, decisions about if and when a school should close — either fully or partially — in response to a high rate of COVID-19 infections will now be made by government, i.e. the DfE, based on local and national circumstances, and in liaison with local authorities and public health officials.

Contact tracing over Christmas

Further to Nick Gibb, the Minister of State for Education's announcement in the Commons [Education Select Committee](#) on the afternoon of 8 December, all schools have been informed that 'Public Health England has agreed a 6 day window after the final day of teaching [this term] in which schools... are asked to remain contactable so they can assist with contact tracing where necessary'.

It was also announced — and more widely reported — that schools may make Friday 18 December a non-teaching 'INSET' day, with 'teaching time [being] made up at another point in the academic year'. After due consideration, however, alongside all other schools within the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust family, we do not feel that this course of action at such late notice is helpful and as such, I can confirm that the College will remain open to all students on 18 December, as planned.

If your child tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) over the Christmas period, you should notify the College using the dedicated COVID@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk email address only. Whilst, to emphasise, we will only assist PHE with the identification of close contacts and issuance of self-isolation advice up to and including 24 December, given that we keep meticulous records to assist PHE trace transmission within the community, I would be grateful if you would inform us if your child tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) irrespective of the date.

In summary:

- If your child tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), parents and carers should notify the College via the dedicated email address COVID@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk, which will be checked between 08:00 and 09:00 each day. (Please note that notification by any other means may not be picked up.)
- If your child tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), having developed symptoms (or otherwise taken the test) more than 48 hours since last being in school, parents and carers should follow the contact tracing instructions that will be provided by NHS Test and Trace.
- For the first 6 days after teaching ends, i.e. from Saturday 19 December to Thursday 24 December, if your child tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), having developed symptoms (or otherwise taken the test) within 48 hours of the last day they attended school, the school will identify close student and staff contacts and advise self-isolation (as your child in these circumstances may have been infectious whilst in school).
 - **If you do need to notify us, please use COVID@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk and complete this brief [survey](#) to provide necessary detail.**
 - I repeat overleaf, for your convenience, the definitions of 'contact' that we must adhere to (full source detail can be accessed [here](#)). In short, a 'contact' is a person who has been close to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 anytime from 2 days before the person was symptomatic (or date of test if the person was asymptomatic) up to 10 days from onset of symptoms (or date of test) — i.e. when they are infectious to others. Being in 'contact' with a person who has tested positive means:

- ⇒ Face-to-face contact within 1m.
 - ⇒ Contact within 1m without face-to-face contact for 1 minute or longer.
 - ⇒ Contact within 2m for longer than 15 minutes.
 - ⇒ Travel with the person who has tested positive in a small vehicle.
 - ⇒ Travel in a large vehicle near the person who has tested positive.
- NHS Test and Trace will conduct all contact tracing from Friday 25 December until our return to school on Monday 4 January (please note students return on Tuesday 5 January).

Device provision

To ensure that all our students can access work being set to complete remotely when necessary, we have already loaned around 100 laptops to students and supported several families with data provision. We are in the process of checking this provision and are endeavouring to loan further laptops and provide support with internet access where possible for as many other students who may need them.

Thank you very much if you have already completed our [Home Remote Access Audit \(update\)](#) survey; we have had around 650 responses so far and are in the process of following up where we can with families who require additional support. If you have not yet completed the survey, we would be grateful if you could do so by via the link provided here — we have extended the deadline and the survey will now close on Saturday 12 December 2020 at 23:59.

Free School Meal Provision and other support over Christmas

Although HM Government decided not to extend the provision of free school meals into the autumn half-term, thanks to the commitment of our Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust family, we were able to be true to our values and did so. We therefore very much welcome the Government's subsequent decision to provide a [£170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme](#) to support children, families and the most vulnerable over winter (to the end of March 2021) 'with food and bills'. Local councils will distribute the funds, rather than schools, 'to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals, as well as provide food for children who need it over the holidays.'

As a result, DCC have confirmed with us this week that they have put in place [arrangements](#) to provide supermarket vouchers over Christmas to families of students currently eligible for free school meals (one voucher per eligible child). Letters to affected families have been — or otherwise are being — distributed by DCC this week, and these letters will include a unique code per child to respective families.

Each code can be used once on a website called [Hawk Select](#) to redeem vouchers to the value of £30 per child (£15 per week for the two weeks of school holidays) for Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrison's, Asda, M&S Food and Waitrose. The website requires families to provide an email address for the vouchers to be sent to once they have chosen their preferred supermarket. When received, families can save the vouchers to their phone or tablet to use online (depending on the supermarket) or show at the checkout in store. Alternatively, families can print the vouchers off to give to the cashier.

To this end, may I please urge any family that has any difficulty or issue accessing the [Hawk Select](#) website to contact us, and we will assist you in completing the process. Our administrative support team are ready to help any parent or carer who requires such assistance. (Note that in such cases, parents and carers will need to provide us with their unique code for us to redeem the voucher on their behalf.) Families may also contact the DCC education helpline (0345 155 1019) with any questions or queries.

If your child is currently not eligible for free school meals, but you think that because of a recent change in your circumstances they may now be, may I also urge you to please check and apply online through the [Devon Citizen's Portal](#) as soon as possible, or call the education helpline provided above (by Friday 18 December 2020 to ensure that you can access the Christmas holiday voucher support).

Additionally, if you are worrying about money and are struggling to pay for basic household essentials, you can also apply for help via the [£170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme](#) through funding that DCC have made available via District Council hardship funds. You can access information about the support available [here](#).

Summer 2021 examinations

Further to my letter of 13 November to all families of Y11 and Y13 students, despite speculation in the media over recent weeks about examinations for Y11 and Y13 students this coming summer, in England the Government have [stated](#) their 'commitment to ensuring that GCSE, AS and A level exams go ahead' — because 'they are the fairest and most accurate way to measure a pupil's attainment'.

As such, last week, the Secretary of State for Education [announced](#) a range of measures to 'support students ahead of next summer's exams'. You can read the Secretary of State's letter to the Chief Regulator of Ofqual [here](#), and the Chief Regulator's response [here](#). Ofqual and the Chief Regulator have also published an [article](#) about how they 'will set standards for exams and assessments to be fair to students', and whilst there remain some arrangements still to be confirmed, the DfE have published [guidance to support the summer 2021 exams](#) outlining those that are confirmed to be in place. We will of course continue to keep you fully informed with any updates, but in short, to summarise the key decisions and confirmed arrangements as they stand now:

- Exams in the summer 2021 will go ahead but have been [moved back for 3 weeks](#). The first date for both GCE A Level and GCSE examinations is 26 May, whereas the last date for GCE A Level is 30 June, and for GCSE is 2 July. (Note there is also to be a contingency series running between 28 June and 16 July.) GCSE results will be released to students on Tuesday 24 August, and GCE A Level results will be released to students on Friday 27 August.
 - You can access the detailed timetables from respective awarding organisations here:
 - ⇒ [AQA GCSE and Level 2 equivalent awards](#)
 - ⇒ [AQA GCE and Level 3 equivalent awards](#)
 - ⇒ [Pearson Edexcel GCSE awards](#)
 - ⇒ [Pearson Edexcel GCE awards](#)
 - ⇒ [All other Pearson Edexcel awards](#)
 - ⇒ [OCR GCSE and Cambridge National awards](#)
 - ⇒ [OCR GCE awards](#)
 - ⇒ [All WJEC awards](#)

- Grading will carry forward the overall generosity of 2020 (i.e. to ensure comparability with the inflation evident in grades ultimately awarded in 2020).
- Students will be given advance notice of some of the topic areas that will be covered in exams in some subjects, [stating](#) that ‘to make exams in 2021 less daunting for GCSE, AS and A level students, for many subjects they will be told in advance some of the topics that will or won’t be on the papers, helping them to manage their revision’.
 - Ofqual have [published their research](#) into this decision, i.e. to opt for greater predictability in exams over increased optionality, and have today opened their [consultation](#) into this arrangement, which you may respond to here (by 23:45 on 20 December).
 - Ofqual have confirmed that ‘exam boards will decide what information will be provided to teachers and students before the exams, and they will publish this advance information at the end of January.’
- Students will be given support material in exams, such as formulae and equations, for ‘subjects where they would normally have to memorise them’. The exact approach will vary by subject and will be provided on the day of the respective examination.
- Should a student miss some, or all, of the papers in a subject (because of sickness or the requirement to self-isolate) but have completed sufficient non-examined assessment (NEA), they can still achieve a grade through the special consideration process.
- If a student misses all GCSE or A level assessments in a subject due to sickness related to coronavirus (COVID-19), or the requirement to self-isolate, and is unable to access the special consideration process, they will be eligible to sit a single contingency paper in the contingency paper exam series that will run between 28 June and 16 July.
- If a student misses all their GCSE or A level papers in a subject during both the summer and contingency series, with legitimate reason, and does not have the required NEA elements required to access the special considerations process, a validated teacher assessment may be used to award a grade. Further detail regarding these teacher assessments is to be published.
- Students who have been considered and approved by their school or college to take their exams at home (e.g. any Clinically Extremely Vulnerable students that may have to shield, depending on the situation at the time), will sit their exams under normal exam conditions specified by the awarding organisation if parents and students agree.

For your further information, as a result of the [decisions](#) published by Ofqual regarding changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021, Ofqual have also recently confirmed the detail of the changes to the usual curricula for certain subjects, along with changes to the assessment arrangements in some. Our subject leads and teachers are of course aware of these changes and our practice has been adapted accordingly, but should you wish to see these changes for yourself you can access them here:

- [GCSE subject-level conditions in subjects with changes for 2021](#)
- [GCE \(AS and A-Level\) subject-level conditions in subjects with changes for 2021](#)
- [Conditions and requirements for the assessment of MFL GCSEs in 2021.](#)

End of Autumn term and start of Spring term

I confirm that the last day of the Autumn term is Friday 18 December, and all students are expected to attend. Students will be dismissed from the College at the end of the day, as normal, at the normal times. Students return to school after Christmas for the start of the Spring term on Tuesday 5 January, with Monday 4 January being a non-teaching day as has always been planned.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any further information or advice. I thank you again very much for your continued support.

As ever, keep looking after yourselves 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

TIER 2

HIGH ALERT

FROM 2 DEC

MEETING FRIENDS AND FAMILY  <p>No mixing of households indoors, apart from support bubbles. Maximum of six outdoors.</p>	BARS, PUBS AND RESTAURANTS  <p>Pubs and bars must close, unless operating as restaurants. Hospitality venues can only serve alcohol with substantial meals. Venues must stop taking orders at 10pm and must close by 11pm.</p>	RETAIL  <p>Open.</p>	WORK AND BUSINESS  <p>Everyone who can work from home should do so.</p>
EDUCATION  <p>Early years settings, schools, colleges and universities open. Childcare, other supervised activities for children, and childcare bubbles permitted.</p>	INDOOR LEISURE  <p>Open.</p>	ACCOMMODATION  <p>Open.</p>	PERSONAL CARE  <p>Open.</p>
OVERNIGHT STAYS  <p>Permitted with household or support bubble.</p>	WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS  <p>15 guests for weddings, civil partnerships, wedding receptions and wakes; 30 for funerals.</p>	ENTERTAINMENT  <p>Open.</p>	PLACES OF WORSHIP  <p>Open, but cannot interact with anyone outside household or support bubble.</p>
TRAVELLING  <p>Reduce the number of journeys you make and walk or cycle if possible. Avoid busy times and routes on public transport. Avoid car sharing with those outside of your household or support bubble. Avoid entering a Tier 3 area, other than where necessary such as for work or education. Further exemptions apply.</p>	EXERCISE  <p>Classes and organised adult sport can take place outdoors, but cannot take place indoors if there is any interaction between people from different households. Organised activities for elite athletes, under-18s and disabled people can continue.</p>	RESIDENTIAL CARE  <p>COVID-secure arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, and window visits. Outdoor/airtight visits only (rollout of rapid testing will enable indoor visits including contact).</p>	LARGE EVENTS  <p>Sport, live performances and business meetings limited to 50% capacity or 2000 people outdoors (whichever is lower) and 50% capacity or 1000 people indoors (whichever is lower)</p>

Find out what support you can get

For example, if you're out of work, need to get food, or want to take care of your mental health.

[gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

If you have any coronavirus symptoms:

A high temperature • A new, continuous cough
A loss of, or change to, your sense of smell or taste.

Get a test and stay at home

For more information and detailed guidance visit:
[gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

