

Thursday 31 December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you are well and that you have enjoyed a peaceful Christmas.

Forgive my intrusion into your New Year celebrations, but I am writing to hopefully provide you with some clarity further to my communication on [18 December](#), and further to the various announcements made by HM Government yesterday regarding the increasing spread of the coronavirus nationally, the subsequent changes made to local restriction tiers, and the implications for schools. Whilst there has, again, been much speculation and commentary in the media, I would like to reassure you that we remain focused on getting the job done, on providing you with clarity, providing effective remote education for our students when they need it, ensuring that the College is as COVID-secure as we can make it, and that our preparations to roll out mass testing of staff and students as outlined in my last letter are uncompromisingly careful and thorough.

As you are no doubt aware, from today more than three-quarters of the country has moved into the [Tier 4](#) 'Stay at Home' [restrictions](#), while Devon has moved into [Tier 3](#), i.e. 'Very High Alert' restrictions (please see the [poster](#) provided at the end of this letter). These changes have been made in response 'to rapidly rising case rates due to the new, more transmissible variant of coronavirus', i.e. variant [VUI – 202012/01](#), which is between [67% and 75% more transmissible](#) than other variants.

Whilst the number of confirmed cases of coronavirus in [West Devon](#) remains below the [national](#) average, the number recorded in the last two weeks amounts to more than double the total amount of positive cases recorded from March 2020 to September 2020. And as a result of such rapidly rising infection rates, the [Department for Education \(DfE\) and Secretary of State for Education](#) have triggered the [education contingency framework](#), pushing back the staggered return for secondary schools and colleges by one week — 'to help with breaking chains of transmission and to assist with keeping all of our children and all of our education settings as safe as we can'.

This means that whilst most primary schools (all in Devon) will open as planned on 4 January, because the 'COVID infection rate is particularly high' among secondary students, and to 'allow more time [for secondary schools and colleges] to fully roll out mass testing' to help find asymptomatic cases, the staggered return to school in January that was announced on 18 December — and that we communicated to you in my [last letter](#) — has been extended. As such, and in short, the return to school for our students in January will be as outlined overleaf. (Please note that, as specified by the DfE through the [education contingency framework](#), restrictions 'will be lifted as soon as the public health and scientific advice says it is appropriate to do so', and as confirmed by the Secretary of State for Education in parliament yesterday will be reviewed by HM Government in two weeks.)

Staggered return to school in January

- Monday 4 January.
 - Staff Training day. No students attend.

- Tuesday 5 January to Friday 8 January.
 - Vulnerable students and children of critical workers attend.
 - All other students will be provided with remote education (according to students' timetables, following planned curricula).

(Please note that whilst the Secretary of State for Education has [stated](#) that only students in exam year groups, i.e. Y11 and Y13, are expected to be provided with remote education for this week, we intend on providing all students in all year groups with such.)

- Monday 11 January to Friday 15 January.
 - Students in Y11 and Y13 attend.
 - Vulnerable students and children of critical workers attend.
 - Students in Y7, Y8, Y9, Y10 and Y12 will be provided with remote education (according to students' timetables, following planned curricula).

- Monday 18 January.
 - All students attend.

Vulnerable children and children of critical workers

Thank you very much to the families who completed the survey allow us to update the information we have and confirm whether you are a critical worker. Apologies, but I must ask all parents/carers who are critical workers to **please complete this survey again** — i.e. even if you have completed it already — to indicate via an additional question whether you wish for your child to attend for the applicable period. We need this information as soon as you can provide it, to allow us to arrange appropriate provision from 5 January (please note that the survey closes at 23:59 on 3 January). We have (or will) contact families of vulnerable children directly to confirm their attendance. Please note that vulnerable children and children of critical workers attending school will be accessing remote education lessons via computer and will be supervised by respective staff. Depending on confirmed numbers, we may need to ask students to bring their laptops to school.

Device Provision

Thank you to those families who recently completed our 'Home Remote Access Audit (December 2020 update)' survey. As a result of this, in addition to the 100 laptops or so we have already loaned to students and data provision we have supported several families with, we are providing support to a further 40 families. If you are one of these families and have not yet received the loan of the device, or support with the provision of data, we will contact you as soon as possible to arrange such.

Free School Meals

All students eligible for free school meals will be provided with a food parcel for the weeks they are not in school. We will contact respective families in due course to arrange collection or delivery.

Rapid-result, asymptomatic testing in schools from January

We are preparing to roll out the rapid-result mass-testing that I described in my last letter as soon as it is practicable and safe to do so, with the intention that this will begin in the week beginning 11 January. Whilst we welcome the introduction of mass testing in schools — in order to help detect asymptomatic cases, break chains of transmission, reduce absence and avoid the need for self-isolation when students and/or staff are identified as a contact of a person confirmed to have tested positive for coronavirus — I want to reassure you that we will not compromise on safety, and will only roll out the testing once we are satisfied that everything is in place to do so safely, including the requisite resources.

Testing is 'optional but strongly encouraged', participation is thus voluntary and 'active consent is required'. To this end, thank you to those families who have completed the [Rapid-Result Coronavirus Testing Consent form](#) to indicate consent or not for their children to be tested. As I am sure you will appreciate, this information is fundamental to our planning for the efficient implementation of the testing. If you have not yet done so, may I please ask you again to complete [the consent form](#) by 23:59 on 3 January 2021. We will not be able to test any child without parental consent. Please also find attached for your information a Privacy Notice explaining how the personal data we will collect through the testing is to be used in the event of both positive and negative tests, and the rights that individuals have.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter, and, once again, for your continued support. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require further information.

May I also wish you and your family a very Happy New Year.

Yours sincerely,



Derrick Brett (Principal).