

18th December 2020

Dear Parent and Carer

I had hoped that yesterday's end of term letter would be my last of 2020! However, you may already be aware that yesterday afternoon brought some news that has significant implications for the first week of term in January 2021. The government has decided that secondary schools will have a staggered start to the new term. I am writing now to give you the earliest possible notification about this. In summary:

- Students in exam year groups (Years 11 and 13), will all attend school as usual from the start of term. Vocational exams scheduled for the week of 4th January will go ahead as planned.
- Vulnerable students and the children of critical workers will also be able to come to school for face-to-face learning from 4th January. This will take place in year group 'bubbles'. To enable us to plan for this, I would ask that the following Google Form is completed please: [Vulnerable students and the children of critical workers form](#)
- Students in all other year groups, Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12, will start the term on 4th January with **online learning at home**. The government's current position is that by **no later than 11th January**, all students will be fully back in school receiving face-to-face education. Work will be set via Google Classroom.

Testing

We understand that the staggered start is to allow schools to set up testing systems for all students and staff on their return to face-to-face education. We are still awaiting details of exactly how these testing systems will operate. The aim is to minimise disruption during the Spring Term by helping identify positive cases when students return to face-to-face education following the Christmas break. We currently believe that those students attending face-to-face education in the first week of term will be offered the first testing dates. Testing will be optional, but strongly encouraged. Consent will be required from the student or parent as appropriate. We will provide full details as soon as possible after we receive more clarification on this from the government.

Blended Learning

We very much hope when all students return on 11th January that it will mark the end of any significant disruption. However, the Trust has this week agreed to a new 'Blended Learning Policy' which now permits 'virtual' teaching to take place in both a recorded video format and, in some circumstances where it is appropriate and feasible, by livestream. To support this, some 300 Chromebook and laptop devices were ordered in July 2020, but a worldwide shortage means they are still not available. Therefore, the majority of learning tasks in the first week for Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 will be in the same format as during the lockdown between March-July 2020 and be available on Google Classroom. However, there may be some classes who receive a link to join a live or recorded lesson. Where this is the case, strict ground rules will be in place to help keep everyone safe. If students have any difficulty accessing their online learning in January, please contact their Head of School in the first instance.

Keeping in touch

We will use SIMS InTouch to inform you of any other updates or changes as more information becomes available, so please keep an eye on your Inbox (and junk folders) in the run up to the 4th January.

Thank you for your patience about the developing situation and, once again, I wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Yours sincerely



David Herbert