



25th February 2021

Dear Parent/Guardian/Carer,

As promised, I am writing to you as we have now received further guidance from the government. I hope that you managed to have an enjoyable half term break with your family. We are delighted to inform you that we will be able to begin to welcome all our pupils back from 8th March 2021.

For our primary pupils this will mean a return to class from Monday 8th March. Whilst there are very limited changes to the guidance at Primary, it is important to note that school staff will continue to take two rapid COVID-19 tests each week at home to identify positive cases more quickly and break the chains of transmission, which will help us to maximise our safety precautions and keep children safe.

For our secondary students, return to school will be as soon as practically possible, based on the detail behind the government guidance, which I will try to explain through the extract below:

*'All secondary school students will take COVID-19 tests as they return to the classroom from Monday 8 March. **Schools will have discretion on how to phase the return of their students over the week beginning 8 March** to allow them to be tested on return. After an initial programme of 3 tests in school, students will be provided with two rapid tests to use each week at home. Secondary school staff will also continue to be provided with two tests to use each week at home. **Staff and students in secondary schools and colleges are advised to wear face coverings in all areas, including classrooms, where social distancing cannot be maintained as a temporary extra measure.***

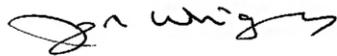
*(Schools) have the flexibility to consider how best to deliver testing on a phased basis from Monday 8 March, depending on your circumstances and local arrangements, but should **prioritise vulnerable children and children of critical workers, and year groups 10 to 13.** Pupils should **return to face-to-face education following their first negative test result.** Pupils not undergoing testing should attend school in line with your phased return arrangements. Testing is voluntary; however, **we would encourage everyone to participate in the asymptomatic testing programme** to help break transmission links by identifying those who may be carrying the virus unknowingly.'*



We are working really hard to make this happen as soon as practically possible, but the continually changing guidance lacks clarity on potential testing in advance of 8th March, due to lockdown restrictions and the need for a second test within 3-5 days. We have encouraged our secondary schools where possible to test vulnerable and critical worker students and staff in advance and then roll out additional testing from the 8th March. With very large student numbers, this still poses a massive logistical challenge. We are concerned that the long-awaited return to school does not become dominated by testing, rather than learning, and we must manage the process carefully, whilst adhering to the DfE guidance. School leaders will decide a programme for return, based on how many tests they can run in a day and availability. Our current testing centres will need to change considerably to manage the sheer scale of tests from accommodating the much smaller numbers currently attending school. This planning is happening now and you will receive more specific information from your individual school as soon as possible and next week you should receive advice about how and when your child will be called for testing to facilitate their return to school. There may inevitably be some disruption to live lessons through this transition process but rest assured work will still be set.

I recognise that this situation is not ideal for any of us and in the meantime, I would like to thank you for your continued support and patience. We are really looking forward to welcoming your children back into our schools and we hope they too are excited at the prospect of returning to school.

Yours faithfully,

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

Jon Wright,
Chief Executive Officer,
Omega Multi-Academy Trust.