



7<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear Parents and Students,

## Latest updates

We hope that this update finds you and your families well, particularly in these difficult times, as we all grapple with the ongoing demands of the pandemic in our work, school and family life. In this letter there is a lot of information but we wanted to give you as much detail as possible to make sure you were made fully aware. These include updates on:

- Managing Covid in school
- Staying safe over Christmas
- Track and trace through the holidays
- Absence management

### Managing Covid in school

This remains an area of significant challenge, particularly with ongoing, unavoidable staff absence which is Covid related.

Whilst not in any way ideal, the rota system for Year 8, 9 and 10 does help to alleviate some of these issues in school. We know this puts additional pressure on in the home but without it we simply couldn't staff our school safely.

We will continue to review this system in terms of staffing and the local and national picture and will notify you as soon as we can about the potential for change in January. As soon as we have any confirmed plans we will communicate this with you.

School will be open until Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December and, with the exception of our Year 8 who will be on their remote learning rota week, we are looking forward to accommodating as many students as possible in school. We know that this is where they learn best and where they are safest during the school day, especially if parents are at work. We would therefore like to see as many students in school as possible during the next two weeks.

That said, can we remind parents that it is crucial that you do not send students to school who are showing the slightest symptoms of the virus? If you are not sure, please err on the side of caution and keep them at home and get a test. Likewise, if any of the family who live with you show symptoms, all the family should stay at home until a test confirms the situation. Please stay at home and get a test at the first available opportunity.

### Staying safe over Christmas

We cannot stress enough the need to reduce ANY possibility of the virus coming into school in the next two weeks.



Hopefully, we are all going to be able to spend some much-deserved quality time with our loved ones over the Christmas period. We know that families are having to make difficult decisions in order to safeguard elderly and vulnerable family members over the festive time.

With this in mind, we believe it is our duty to ensure you are fully aware of the current situation in terms of timings and the regulations.

In school we will be doing all we can to keep staff and students safe, but please be aware, it is simply not possible for students to maintain 2 metre distances in school.

When we have a confirmed case, the first thing we have to do is establish 'close contacts'. These are those students sat within 2 metres in class, or sat nearby on school buses, or those in a close friendship circle within 48 hours of symptoms presenting.

Once we have identified 'close contacts', these students MUST stay home and self-isolate for 14 days, just in case they have picked up the virus.

This means that if we contact you to notify a 'close contact' situation on/after 11<sup>th</sup> December, your son/daughter will not be able to mix outside of the family bubble of those who currently live with you. This will mean they will not be allowed to leave the house, nor will you be able to receive any visitors, no matter what prior arrangements have been made. This is also the case if your son/daughter tests positive themselves.

Please bear this in mind when planning for Christmas as you will not be allowed to mix with others outside of your current household within 14 days if a 'self-isolation' or positive case is identified.

## **Track and trace over the holidays**

Please be aware that we are expected to notify all 'close contacts' who have been nearby to anyone with a confirmed case of Covid within 48 hours of symptoms. This COULD mean that where another student displays symptoms on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> or Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December, and subsequently tests positive, we may be contacting you in the first week of the holidays to let you know that your son/daughter was a 'close contact' on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup>/Friday 18<sup>th</sup> and will need to self-isolate.

This will involve senior staff at the school examining seating plans in classes and on buses and talking to the student with the confirmed case about friendship groups, to contact through the week beginning 21<sup>st</sup> December, as and when test results are confirmed.

The Department for Education is absolutely adamant that students should attend school regardless to the end of term and we cannot be seen to be promoting absences. The DfE have also been clear in their expectations of school staff to carry out the 'track and trace' of close contacts into the Christmas holidays.



## Absence Management

We have a legal responsibility to identify the whereabouts of our students on a daily basis, so please don't be offended if we ring on a daily basis, to check they are where we think they are.

We also have a legal responsibility to get students into school, so please don't take it personally if you have a relative at home who is clinically extremely vulnerable. We are also expected to ensure students from these households are in school, despite us completely understanding how anxious this situation can be. We have staff in similar situations and the whole thing is unsatisfactory.

We are doing everything we can to keep students and staff safe and Covid aware, in the hope they do not bring the virus home.

Any absence which is Covid related is marked as an 'X' in the register and although the student is not in school, this does not technically count as an absence from school on their records. This includes absence through self-isolating, or when a student has symptoms or the virus, or if they live with somebody with symptoms or who has the virus, or who is at home on the rota system.

In anticipation of Covid related absence we will continue to ensure all lessons are available via remote learning until the end of term.

## And finally

Thank you all again for your support and understanding as we move towards the Christmas break.

The students are working really well at the moment and have adapted well to the changes we have already made in school.

For our Year 8 students, we will be holding assemblies at the end of this week as we wish them well in their remote learning 14<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> December and into their Christmas break. These students may be subject to 'track and trace' 14-day self-isolation as a close contact, from being in school on 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>. They may therefore be notified in the subsequent week, but not after this.

Please be aware that as is usual, school will be finishing early on the last day of term, **Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December at 12:30pm**. Buses have been arranged for this time and all students can order a grab lunch to take with them, including all students in receipt of Free School Meals.

## Yours sincerely

Mr J Lewis  
Head of School

Mr B Dunne  
Executive Secondary Lead