



18 December 2020

Dear Students, Parents and Carers,

I had hoped to have written the last update of the term to you but the DfE clearly had different ideas.

Executive summary: Term will start onsite for all students on Monday 4 January 2021 following our two-thirds model. We will not have an operational testing facility in place by then.

As you may be aware, there were two announcements in the last day or so that need addressing. Firstly, around mass testing at schools and colleges and secondly, around a delayed start to the term.

I welcome the introduction of mass testing, but to expect us to accommodate, set-up, staff and run a site by the 4 January with no working days in between now and then (and not enough detail to implement it at this point in time) is simply not realistic. We will take our time to do this in order to get it right and, in the meantime, will liaise with the council, public health team and other educational providers on this.

We have thought hard about the Government's request to delay the start of onsite teaching for Yr 12s and have decided not to follow this guidance. I want to share with you our reasons why.

From a learning perspective, we believe there will be a loss of momentum for students if another week of remote learning occurs. In some areas like the sciences it will be hugely disruptive because of planned practical work. Many courses also have substantive coursework submissions after Christmas so need to see students in lessons onsite. BTEC students also have exams in January that they need to be fully prepared for. I could go on.

From the perspective of virus transmission, we believe our mitigation measures are working and the fact there has been no onward transmission onsite (that we are aware of) is evidence of this. As far as I can see the Yr12/13 separation is arbitrary and it should actually be about site density. Under the guidance we could have 100% of Yr 13 back along with those in Yr 12 who are in exam classes, vulnerable students and key worker children. Although not precise, this equates to around 2/3rds of our students. In which case, for the sake of stability, let's carry on as we have been.

Finally, from a wellbeing perspective, staff and students have had enough upheaval, and to cope with yet more sudden change would be very demanding, particularly as there are no working days to plan for this. It is as much for your and our own wellbeing that we have decided on this course of action.

Can I again ask that over the holiday period you keep mixing at a minimum. As further mitigation on our return, we will reduce the capacity of our social areas at the start of term, and urge students to be onsite only for lessons (or when they are in between lessons).

We will keep an eye on virus rates and if there is a strong argument for remote learning to occur at the start of term, then my view is it should apply to all students and not just one year group. We will update you if we do decide to do this.

Despite last minute announcements and stresses that these cause, I do hope that you are able to have a relaxing and peaceful break.

Best wishes,

William Baldwin
Principal