

18 December 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

As you will be aware, the government announced yesterday afternoon that there should be a staggered return to learning in schools across England after the Christmas holidays. The purpose of this is to allow schools to plan and implement mass testing for secondary aged pupils, starting with cohorts sitting exams in the summer.

The lateness of the information from the DfE has left us in the enormously difficult position of having to change our plans for the start of next term after we have already finished and teaching staff are not in school.

This morning, I met with the majority of secondary headteachers across Somerset. The feelings expressed in that meeting were very strong, with various degrees of anger and frustration at the lack of thinking that seems to have gone into these latest plans. There appears to be little appreciation of the planning needed to run a school effectively and the issues that parents have in organising care for their children.

I feel that the most important thing I can do for you at this point is to try to give you some certainty so that you can plan for the beginning of January. As with previous government announcements, I am fully expecting that more information will come out in the next two weeks. However, that will be too late to alter the way in which we approach the start of term.

Two issues are being mixed together in the government plans: testing of students for the virus in school; and a staggered start to the school year to break the possible transmission from Christmas activities. I will deal with each of those separately.

Testing inside schools

The initial statements from the government talk about testing pupils in school once they become contacts of a positive case. To achieve this would require the setting up and staffing of a medical testing facility inside school.

I have significant concerns about a number of issues that relate to this suggestion: space, safeguarding, training, transport, administering medical procedures, clinical waste disposal and resourcing. The guidance is clear that this testing is **not mandatory**, it is an offer. Therefore, until all these questions have been answered, you have my assurance that we will not be commencing testing inside school.

We will not be able to resolve those complex issues before the start of January, so there will be no school based testing at the outset of next term. Secondary schools across Somerset have agreed to take the same approach and the local authority is supportive of this position.

Our greatest defence against the virus this term has been keeping it out of school. This is much more effective than any measure that we can take inside school. Your tremendous efforts in that regard and the way in which pupils have conducted themselves whilst in school have kept the school open to almost all of our pupils for the whole term. It is important though to reiterate that at the start of next term:

Huish Episcopi Academy

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Principal: Mr C J Wade BSc Registered in England and Wales: 7341553 Registered Office as above.

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- Pupils should stay at home if they have any of the three key COVID symptoms – a high temperature, a persistent cough, or a loss of smell or taste – and request a test;
- Pupils should stay at home if any member of their household has any of these symptoms and await the outcome of the test result of that household member;
- Pupils should stay at home and isolate for 10 days if they have been a close contact of a positive case.

I appreciate that these judgements are not always easy to make. **If you are unsure, please keep your child at home and phone the school.** We will then advise you of the most appropriate course of action to take.

Start of the spring term

We will start term as previously set out on Tuesday 5th January 2021, but only for pupils in Years 11 and 13, and for those pupils who qualify as children of critical workers or as vulnerable pupils. Pupils in these cohorts will come to school as normal, will follow their normal timetable and will attend their normal lessons in school. Any examinations that are timetabled for that week (including other year groups) will continue to go ahead – further information will be provided for pupils in Years 10 and 12 as appropriate.

The list of pupils who qualify as vulnerable are listed in the government guidance (follow the link below). We will use our list of known vulnerable pupils to identify those we expect in school along with Year 11 and 13 on the 5th January. If you are a key worker parent and intend to send your child to school during the period 5-8 January, please complete the form below by 3pm on Tuesday 22 December to aid with our planning.

<https://form.iotform.com/200791991409361>

From 5th January, for all other pupils in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 remote learning will be available as previously advertised. Work will be loaded on to google classroom and where possible live teaching will take place for some classes via Microsoft Teams.

The start of school-based teaching for all pupils will commence on **11th January 2021**. It is important to emphasise that pupils **do not** need to have had a test before returning to school.

School transport will run as usual during the period 5 – 8 January to ensure those pupils attending are able to get here.

If you require a school meal please use our current system of online ordering

<https://www.huishepiscopi.net/page/?title=Catering&pid=139>

I do appreciate that this is very late notice, indeed the DfE guidance didn't arrive until this morning, and that it adds more pressure to families at an already very difficult time. Rest assured that as a school we will strive to do our very best for every pupil as we transition back to a full timetable in January. Your support as always is much appreciated.

Government guidance is available on this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-and-childcare-settings-return-in-january-2021/schools-and-childcare-settings-return-in-january-2021>

Key worker information can be found in this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision#critical-workers>

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In the meantime, I wish you all a restful and enjoyable holiday.

Yours sincerely



Chris Wade
Principal



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