

Dear Parents/Carers,

We hope you are all safe and well.

We would like to start by thanking you all for the support that you have provided over the last 7 weeks. As an academy, we have received numerous well wishes, and messages of support and appreciation for all that that staff have done during this time: these messages of support have made a real difference.

### Testing and Return Date

Last week, the announcement was made that all students would be able return to school from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March. Since this announcement, we have been working hard to assess the testing procedures and logistics associated with them, and to plan their implementation. The DfE has given schools the flexibility to delay starts until testing has been completed and prioritise learning remotely; an approach we believe will provide a smoother return.

We are now able to confirm the plan as follows:

- During the week commencing Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March, the period of testing will commence.
- Testing will take two full weeks to complete, and that is with testing taking place all day every day from Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March until Friday 12<sup>th</sup> March.
- Through these two week-long periods of testing, we will continue with remote learning for all students.
- **We will return to face-to-face learning from Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March.**

We are conscious that everyone is keen to return to face-to-face learning as quickly as possible, and so we are also very conscious that it is important for you to understand the rationale for this approach:

- Whilst we are pleased to report that the vast majority of our school population are consenting for a COVID-19 test in school, this return to school is not as straight forward as previous returns because this time students must receive 3 tests that are conducted within 3-5 days of each other.
- The logistics of planning for testing and face-to-face learning are also problematic due to the location of the testing site, which would involve the crossing of year group bubbles, something we are not prepared to entertain as we feel it would put the safety of students at risk.
- We also feel that a return to school should focus on wellbeing, socialisation, and a quality-first education, rather than testing. It is our belief that all students in a year group, regardless of whether or not they have consented to 3 tests and received their negative results, should return at the same time.
- Due to the level of reliability of the tests, we believe it is important that a student returns 3 negative tests prior to returning to school, rather than just the 1 that is stipulated in the DfE documentation. We will also have provided students with the guidance and testing experience, prior to them receiving their home testing home kits.
- We feel that keeping students at home, accessing remote learning whilst we complete the testing, will provide less disruption to learning than if we returned on a staggered start, with students having to leave lessons to be tested and wait for results.

We are resolute in our belief that this approach will provide the safest return to school possible for our students, and will ensure that when they return, we can focus on education and wellbeing, not testing.

A copy of our Frequently Asked Questions document has been updated and will be placed on our website by Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March, but we want to draw your attention to further information and key changes:

On Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March, students will start at the usual time of 8.45am and they will have an extended tutor period to provide them with reminders about the academy day and also to give them time to share some of their experiences from the last half term and to reconnect with their peers and staff.

#### **Home Testing Kits & Face Coverings**

Once students return, they will be provided with home testing kits which they must complete twice a week, the results of which must be shared with NHS Test and Trace and the school. Further details will be provided to all parents/carers ahead of the test kits being sent home.

Staff and students are now being advised to wear face coverings in classrooms, as well as in corridors and other indoor spaces, and this is something that we are insisting upon. As per DfE guidance, the face covering policy will be reviewed after Easter. Please make sure that your child has a sufficient supply of face coverings and has one with them at all times. For children who are exempt from wearing a face covering, please make sure your child's House Leader is aware.

#### **Year Group Bubbles & Other Protective Measures**

We will continue to use year group bubbles to keep students safe whilst delivering the normal timetables. This means students will continue to access the site in the same way they did in the Autumn Term, and they should maintain a 2m distance from other students at all times. Hand sanitiser will be provided at the entrance to the academy and inside each classroom and in social areas around the academy. As was the case in the Autumn Term, we will insist that hand sanitiser is used on entry to the building and all classrooms, exiting the building and all classrooms, and before eating.

#### **Uniform**

From Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March the academy uniform policy will be expected of all students. As in the Autumn Term, on the days that students have PE, they should wear their PE Kit instead of the normal uniform.

#### **Bus Travel**

Again, the same arrangements will be in place as per the Autumn Term. Students must wear a face covering and will be loaded onto the bus at the end of the day in year groups. We will continue to provide hand sanitiser in the bus queue, to be used prior to getting on the bus.

#### **Visitors to the Academy**

As you would expect, we will continue to limit visitors to the academy. If you need to speak to a member of staff, please contact the academy via telephone or email.

#### **Key Worker and Vulnerable Provision**

We will continue to offer on-site provision to children of key workers and vulnerable students during the period of Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March to Friday 12<sup>th</sup> March.

#### **Free School Meals**

If your child is entitled to a free school meal, we will provide a food parcel during the week beginning the 8<sup>th</sup> March: a collection date and time will be communicated to you during the next week.

Once again, thank you for your on-going support. We are very much looking forward to welcoming all our students back to the academy on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March.

Yours faithfully,



Mr J Henshaw - Executive Principal



Mrs J Hingley - Associate Principal