



Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I apologise for having to disturb you during the school closure period for Christmas.

As you will likely have seen in the news, there has been yet more, last minute direction from the government and the Department for Education regarding schools.

To say I was shocked by yesterday's news regarding extended school closure and mass testing would be an understatement. Neither the school nor KCC were aware of any details of these plans until it was leaked in the news and announced on Twitter yesterday afternoon. We did not receive any official notification or guidance until 7 p.m. last night and were taken aback by the huge changes schools are expected to undertake and implement for January 2021.

After a week of fighting schools to stay open and threatening legal action, the DFE has now announced, at the very last minute, that schools will not fully open to students in the first week of January and we have been asked to prepare for mass testing units to be set up and run by the school as soon as possible in January. As you will imagine, this came as a huge and unwelcome shock to schools and school leaders across the country on the eve of the Christmas holidays.

The plans are quite complex and were generally reported inaccurately in the press so to make sure these complex plans are clear and simple I have summarized what this will mean to you and your child, below.

Further to this, for those of you who wish to read further, I have included additional information and references to how this will work and more detail about our plans.

I need to be clear that this was not the decision of myself or the school and that these changes have been directed by central government. I understand fully how disruptive another week of online learning will be for your child and your family, but please don't shoot the messenger.



## SUMMARY

### What this will mean for you and your child:

#### Changes to start of Term 3 in January 2021

- School will start on Monday, **4/1/2021** for year 11 and 13 students only.
- All other year groups will now start back at school on Monday, **11/1/2021**.
- In all year groups - Children of key workers (as defined [here](#)) will also be welcome to attend school from **4/1/2021** to undertake online learning whilst supervised in school.
- In all year groups - Children with EHCP's or those who are otherwise vulnerable (as defined [here](#)) are also welcome to attend school from **4/1/2021** to join the supervised group to form a temporary bubble.
- All lessons for year groups not in school from the 4<sup>th</sup> will have their full timetable and lessons online as they have been for the last few weeks.
- All students will return to school in full on **11/1/2021**

#### Covid-19 Testing in School

- During this staggered start to the year the school will attempt to set up a mass Covid-19 testing facility in school. If this is possible and feasible, we will be able to offer testing as an alternative to isolation at some point in January.
- Once this is set-up we will be looking to test as many students as is possible in order to keep students safe and isolate any positive cases with minimum disruption to others. This will involve a series of lateral flow tests and more information will be provided as well as requests for consent from **4/1/2020**.
- As you will imagine this is a huge undertaking and I cannot guarantee if and when this will be up and running.
- Students **will not** be required to be tested before they return to school.
- Any testing will be **optional** and parental consent **will** be required before any test can be administered.
- No one will be excluded from attending school if they do not take a test.
- Testing **will not** be up and running in the first week back due to the considerable planning and training required.
- Our high levels of safety and hygiene procedures will remain in place alongside the strict bubbles and other precautionary measures to keep the school as safe as possible.

- Due to the large number of people required to undertake training and delivery of mass testing in schools we are asking for volunteers from our school community and will be asking anyone who is willing and able to help us do this to contact us in the first week back to discuss further. It is already clear that we will not be able to do this without this support as teaching staff will be teaching fully from day one, we simply won't have capacity without voluntary help. If you are able to help with this please email me: [Tanya.kelvie@aylesford.kent.sch.uk](mailto:Tanya.kelvie@aylesford.kent.sch.uk)

### Other important information:

- As before, please **do not** send your child to school if they are ill or if they are showing, even mild symptoms of Covid-19. This is particularly important with very high increases in infection rates locally. It is now understood that symptoms in children can include general sickness and nausea.
- Please continue to report any positive cases of Covid-19 in your family and isolate as required.
- We continue to support the online learning of students who are isolating to protect vulnerable family members.
- In the government advice released yesterday they have urged parents to ensure that children stay safe over Christmas by ensuring that Tier 3 rules are strictly followed and that children limit their contacts prior to returning to school.
- As mentioned in my previous letter you can now get your child tested at ANY time, with or without symptoms by booking through the standard NHS testing page.

We will not be providing any more information over Christmas and will look to resume communications with parents on 4/1/2020. However, we know that things are subject to rapid and unexpected change and if anything changes these plans then I will be in contact again as needed.

I do feel I need to repeat that these announcements and changes are not the decision of the school, they are direct instructions and guidance from central government.

On a personal and professional level I am concerned at the rushed nature of these plans and the disruption and uncertainty this last-minute announcement causes. Please be assured we will do all we can to implement these changes, but I foresee significant logistical issues in managing this in all schools. We will as always look to serve our community in the best way we can.

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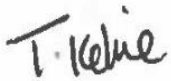


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I have provided more information below for those who wish to know more.

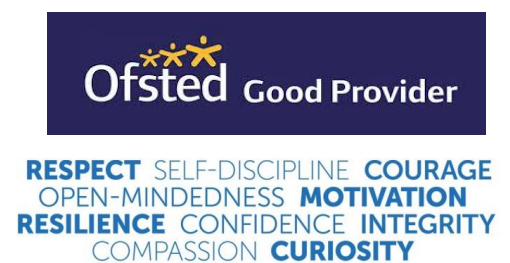
Again, I wish you a happy and safe Christmas.

Kind regards,



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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND REFERENCE

For those of you who wish to know more about what was announced yesterday, I have provided some additional information below.

Yesterday at 19:00 schools were contacted by the Department for Education with the following information:

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

This information announces the staggered start of term 3 in January with Year 11 and 13 starting **4/1/2021** and all other year groups starting **11/1/2021** a week later.

It also outlines the expectation that all year groups not in school are expected to be taught online in the week before returning in full.

The plan for secondary schools is to encourage schools to set up mass, rapid testing facilities on school site to test students before or when they return. The logistics of setting this up is huge and requires significant staffing, detailed planning to be undertaken alongside controls and measures to get this to work safely. We would be looking to test over 900 individuals at least once, possibly twice, in a weekly period, depending on infection rates. As you will understand, as a school we are not medically trained, nor staffed to manage this volume of work. Even if we were, this would still be a significant challenge.

At the time of writing no information regarding delivery of rapid tests has been given to either the school or KCC. The scale of this project will mean a potential 5 million tests needing to be delivered in schools each week across the country. At this current time I am struggling to see how this will be delivered and in operation by the 11/1/2020, let alone the 4/1/2020.

This is the only guidance we have received so far and demonstrates how big the planning, resources and training is:

<https://paas-s3-broker-prod-lon-ae79ddf0-b8b2-4eb4-a891-fbd1df9e587d.s3.amazonaws.com/Schools-Colleges-Testing-Handbook-version-3.7.pdf>

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We will require up to 9 dedicated staff members / volunteers to undertake this work and all will need to be fully trained in advance with high levels of hygiene, tracking and administration in place. The government has mentioned the support of the armed forces in the planning of these test facilities, but this will not mean the armed forces delivering this nor can I imagine that they will be available to support all 3500 secondary schools in England.

As previously mentioned, tests will not be mandatory, and consent will be sought at all times prior to testing.

Having discussed this situation with our governing body, we have agreed to do all we can to set this up but have unanimously agreed that this is simply not possible by 4/1/2021 and possibly not even by the 11/1/2021. Our robust safety measures will continue to keep students as safe as we can in school until these tests are running.

The government have made clear, that whilst we are encouraged to set this up, it remains the choice of the school to participate. The school has already started work on recruiting for the staffing of these testing facilities but due to the lack of current information on the legal issues surrounding delivery and training, of what is ultimately a medical procedure by non-qualified volunteers, I can reassure you that we will not be finalising anything until we are 100% sure that what we are doing is fully compliant with the highest standards of safety and hygiene. This is very important to us and I am sure you will share my desire for a cautious approach.

The press has reported on this issue in a very speculative and at times inaccurate way. This is likely due to the complexity of the guidance and the problem with the information being leaked by civil servants and speculated upon before it is released, announced or shared with schools. I always like to share a balance of press information in regards to these changes but would recommend caution when reading misleading headlines, some of them are exaggerated and others deeply inaccurate.

Here are a range of reports in the press for you to read as required.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-55348886>

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/dec/17/england-secondary-schools-pupils-staggered-return-christmas-covid>

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<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-secondary-schools-in-england-told-to-stagger-return-in-january-12165329>

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/non-exam-year-secondary-pupils-to-switch-to-online-learning-for-first-week-back-in-january/>

**A few things I can give absolute reassurance of are:**

- Teachers will be working from 4/1/2021 providing in school lesson and online “live” lessons. This is not an extra break for staff. Quite the opposite for many of us this will now dominate the Christmas break.
- The work set by the school online will be exactly the same curriculum that is/ would be delivered in school.
- No one will be forced to take a mandatory Covid-19 test before returning to school.
- Schools are not required to have the testing in place by 4/1/2021, they are encouraged to get this up and running from 4/1/2020 as soon as is possible and if it is feasible.
- The school’s protective measures are significantly above and beyond government guidelines and will continue to be in place to minimise the spread of Covid-19 within bubbles of year groups at the school. This has shown strong success in doing this throughout terms 1 and 2 despite our recent cases.

**END**

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