**December 2020**

**Coronavirus (Covid-19) - Update for Parents/Carers**

Dear Parents/Carers,

I hope the first week of the holiday has gone well and, following the latest government guidance, that you are able to spend some time together as a family over the Christmas period. Unfortunately, the government’s latest set of announcements have 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 staff are not in school. This is compounded by a lack of information regarding testing in schools and how this is to be carried out.

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 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 outline statements from the government talk about testing students in school once they become contacts of a positive case. They also talk about testing all students on their return to school. 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. Therefore, until all these questions have been answered, we will not be commencing testing inside school. To date all we have been told is that we need to test, not how, when or indeed when the testing kits will actually arrive.

It is likely that we will not be able to resolve these complex issues before the start of January, so there will be no school based testing at the outset of next term. Further guidance is due but that is unlikely to be before 31st December. Secondary schools across Somerset have agreed to take the same approach and the local authority is supportive of this position. Once I am satisfied that we can carry out tests safely then I will write to you again to seek your permission to test you son, which will be optional.

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 have kept the school open to all boys for the whole of last term. It is therefore important to reiterate that at the start of next term:

* Boys 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;
* Boys 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;
* Boys should stay at home and isolate for 10 days if they have been a close contact of a positive case.

As I have said before, I appreciate that these judgements are not always easy to make. **If you are unsure, please keep your son 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: Year 11**

We will start term as previously set out on 5th January 2021 for outboarders with boarders expected back on the 4th January 2021 after 6pm. Boys will have their normal lessons in school.

**Start of the spring term: Years 7, 8, 9 and 10**

From 5th January, the boys will be working remotely at home using Microsoft Teams following the timetable that has been sent out previously. The start of school-based teaching will commence on **11th January 2021**.

In order to facilitate the last-minute nature of this change of plans, we will run as follows:

**Monday 4th January**: This is an INSET day in school where staff will be preparing to deliver lessons remotely. Should you have any issues with connectivity, access or setting up Microsoft Teams, then please use this day to contact the school and we will try to resolve them with you.

**Tuesday 5th – Friday 8th January**: Staff will run lessons using Microsoft Teams following the timetable that has been sent home previously.

Boys in these groups, provided that they are well, will be able to return to school on Monday 11th January for outboarders or Sunday 10th January for boarders, after 6pm.

**Critical workers and vulnerable children in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10**

Parents who are critical workers can send their son into school from the 5th January. It is clearly important that staff who work for the NHS and emergency services can still undertake their work at this important time. There is no requirement that you do so and you may have alternative childcare arrangements that you can use. If this is the case then we would ask that **you do not send your son into school unless it is absolutely necessary.** This will help to reduce the risk of transmission in that week.

If you are one of these key workers and believe that you will need to send your child into school, please would you e-mail Luke.Winter@Brymoreacademy.co.uk. If you could do so by Monday 28th December 2020, that will significantly help our planning. Please do not expect a reply to this e-mail, it is simply a means of letting us know if you are intending on sending your son into school. Boys who do attend school will be supervised in IT classrooms undertaking the same work online as the rest of their year group.

**Next steps**

As I am sure you can appreciate this has left us in a difficult position with no real time to plan as a school. That has happened a number of times this year and we have always worked through all those difficult times together. I am certain that the Brymore family will come together and do the same again with this challenge. Yet again I thank you for your continued support as we try and do what is best for the boys at Brymore.

Inevitably there will be changes or additions to government advice over the coming weeks and it maybe we will able to welcome the boys back sooner which we will of course always try to do, however I hope this letter does at least allow you to plan with the certainty that you need. I will write again should there be any significant changes to our plans.

Unfortunately, this has coincided with the upgrading of our IT systems over the Christmas period and all staff e-mail addresses are changing. They can still be contacted on their old e-mail address however, over the Christmas period if there is anything urgent then please contact me on Mark.Thomas@Brymoreacademy.co.uk, Mrs Davis on Vicky.Davis@Brymoreacademy.co.uk or if it is a boarding issue Mr Watts on Robert.Watts@Brymoreacademy.co.uk. In addition, the school office is now closed for the duration of the school holiday, so again all urgent concerns need to be raised with the named staff above please.

You will appreciate that there may well be a delay in replying over Christmas and if it is not urgent you may not receive a reply until 4th January 2021.

I hope that you and your family are able to enjoy this Christmas break and thanks again for your understanding and continued support.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Thomas

Headteacher