

31 December 2020

Dear Parents/ Carers,

I hope you've been able to enjoy something of a Christmas break. I'm sure that for most of us it has been the strangest Christmas ever. Our thoughts and best wishes go out to those in our community who have had the virus recently and those who have had to isolate over Christmas. As far as I am aware, those who have been ill have all made good recoveries.

I continue to look for the silver linings in the current situation. Despite some things to do, I've been fortunate to have a good, quiet but refreshing break. The advantages of having teenagers in my experience is that lie-ins are not a problem; getting up and out of the house is another matter. I've always blamed my tendency to over-indulge over Christmas on the peer pressure of lots of other people around but I have to confess that I've still managed to put at least a couple of kilograms on despite a very quiet household.

You will be aware already I'm sure of the recent announcements concerning schools. As far as we at TCS Exeter Road are concerned, the following is the current plan for this term:

- W/c Mon 4 Jan (so from Tue 5 Jan onwards for us as Monday was always a training day): Only the children of critical workers and vulnerable children in (see more detail below and the government definitions [here](#)); all other pupils to be educated remotely.
- W/c Mon 11 Jan: Exam years back in school. For us, we will have years 11, 12 and 13 in for face-to-face teaching; years 7-10 educated remotely for this week.
- W/c Mon 18 Jan: All years back in. (This is what the government state at the moment. This could change depending upon the situation).

During this time we as a school have been asked to set up lateral flow testing for all staff and pupils. More detail is included below.

#### **4 – 18 January: Face to face provision for the children of critical workers and vulnerable students**

We will be running a training day on Monday 4 January so no pupils will be in school that day, as per our calendar and as always planned. We will then enable vulnerable children and the children of critical workers to be in school during this first week of term.

Vulnerable children are being invited into school through a telephone call. If you think that your child is vulnerable and needs our direct support, and you haven't already been contacted, please ring School Reception in school hours or email Assistant Head and SENCo, [justine.housecroft@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk](mailto:justine.housecroft@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk).

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If you are a critical worker and absolutely need for your son/daughter to be in school, please book them in by the end of the day on Monday 5 January on the Microsoft Form [here](#). If this is the case, your child will be supervised but will follow the same remote learning lessons and work as we will be asking pupils to follow at home. We aim to run one activity session each afternoon. Students attending school will need to do so in full uniform and will follow the normal school rules, which include wearing a mask in corridors and all of our current protocols for the pandemic. They should bring trainers suitable for indoor and outdoor activities with them and they may bring PE kit to safely change into, although changing will not be compulsory. Students will be kept in year group bubbles and at least 2 metres apart from pupils in other year groups.

We plan to have pupils in years 11, 12 and 13 back in for face-to-face lessons as normal from Monday 11 January and all years (under the current guidance) are planned to be back in school from Monday 18 January.

### **Asymptomatic (Lateral Flow) Testing**

The Department for Education are continuing to send us guidance on the rollout of mass-testing for staff and pupils in secondary schools. They have scheduled nationwide webinars which a group of our staff will be watching next Monday and Tuesday. We hope to then send out further details concerning arrangements but no pupils will be tested without written consent from their parents/carers and these tests will not be compulsory, although I would encourage you to allow your children to participate in this. This process has the potential to be a 'game changer' in that it could enable us to regularly test everyone and therefore ensure that we can prevent the spread of the virus. This could in turn lead to both greater safety and increased normalisation in school, which we crave. However, there are considerable logistic challenges with this aim. We need at least nine extra staff to set up and run this testing under the current guidance in order to be able to test all staff and pupils weekly.

If there is anyone willing and able amongst you (or who you might pass this request onto), we are seeking volunteers to help run the testing programme here at TCS Exeter Road. There may also be opportunities for a small number of paid roles on a temporary basis to facilitate this testing. Applicants do not need any medical expertise (although this would be a significant bonus) but would need to be able to offer their services for at least a half day a week, if possible. If you are interested, please could you send a preliminary expression of interest outlining what you might be able to commit to, to: [joab.forte@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk](mailto:joab.forte@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk)

### **Remote Learning**

As already mentioned, all years will be learning remotely for the first week of term and, under the current plans, years 7-10 will be learning remotely until Monday 18 January.

Our basic provision regarding remote learning was contained in my last letter but we have come a long way on this since last March when we first started teaching in this way. What I would like to emphasise is that the work and lessons should not be regarded as optional for your children. I really do appreciate the challenges that this situation poses for you as parents and I am very aware of the difficulties that this raises for many of you trying to work at home, or away from home, whilst also trying to ensure that your son or daughter engages in their learning. The basic fact is that for young people in secondary school, it is their responsibility to step up to and engage with the lessons and work which

we will provide. We will maintain contact with all pupils through an initial assembly from me next Tuesday at 8.50, and then through head of year assemblies each week and through your child's tutor. We will also track all pupils' engagement. We want all of our pupils to basically follow their normal timetable from home and to try and work on each subject for an hour as if they were in their lessons. More details will follow but years 11-13 will have all of their lessons live or pre-recorded for the first week and all years will have some live or filmed lessons in every subject each week, as per our protocol. As a minimum, there will be work for all pupils to engage with during the school day.

We are again applying for more laptops from the government but I have to confess that I can't imagine that we will receive these next week. If your son/daughter is struggling to access the remote learning due to software or hardware issues, please could you email our Deputy Head, [samantha.atkinson@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk](mailto:samantha.atkinson@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk). I wish that we could provide more to all to enable digital access for all but we will continue to allocate what we have as fairly as we can.

### **Free School Meals**

Our canteen will still be open and pupils entitled to a free school meal are encouraged to take this. If you would like a food box to be available for you to pick up from the school from Tuesday 5 January, please either send an email to [joab.forte@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk](mailto:joab.forte@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk) or ring Student Services in school hours.

### **Exams**

A number of pupils have public exams to be sat this January. In most cases, these are BTEC assessments. These **will** still run. We were due to run Year 10 exams from Monday 18 January. In light of the current situation, these will be postponed. We will run these in due course and will ensure that year 10 pupils have at least three weeks' notice prior to their start. I am sorry for the disruption and to those who have been working hard to revise. This work will not be wasted as the knowledge committed to memory will still be time well-spent.

Amongst the many questions continuing to dominate education is the critical one about public exams this summer. We hope very much to learn in the next few weeks whether GCSE, A Level, BTEC and other public exams will still be held this summer. In the meantime we will continue to work as if they are going ahead. Whatever happens, the learning will not be wasted and we will ensure that our pupils have every opportunity to get the grades they deserve.

### **Year 7 Parents' Evening**

The Year 7 Parents' Evening scheduled for Thursday 14 January will still go ahead. Year 7 parents will shortly receive details of how to book online appointments.

### **Paul Dell Remembered**

Finally, we are extremely sad to inform all of our community that we lost a friend and colleague shortly before we broke up for Christmas. Science teacher Paul Dell lost his battle with terminal cancer shortly before Christmas 2020. Paul was a passionate and committed science teacher who worked at Teignmouth Community School between 2014 and 2020. He worked in various schools around the country prior to joining us and spent

several years abroad with his family teaching in Australia before returning to Devon and joining TCS. Paul was first and foremost a chemist, thoroughly knowledgeable and never lost interest in his subject and the joy of teaching it to our pupils. Despite being diagnosed with cancer in 2015, Paul continued to work and teach at TCS and never gave up fighting his diagnosis to support, educate and enlighten his students. He will be fondly remembered and deeply missed. He was a much valued, caring, committed and exceptionally brave man. Our thoughts and condolences go to his family and many close friends and colleagues.

Despite this sad news, I hope that we can all look forward to much brighter and more hopeful 2021.

Happy new year and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'James O'Connell'.

James O'Connell  
Principal