

29 October 2021

Dear Parents/ Carers,

I hope that you have been able to enjoy something of the half term week. As we look ahead to the second half of the Autumn term, I hope it is useful to highlight some key events coming up and also to clarify our planning and considerations in light of the ongoing pandemic.

Covid Measures

I hate having to again dwell on Covid measures but unfortunately the pandemic is not going away. You will be aware that we took the drastic measure to keep a year group home each day during the last six days of the first half of term. We don't take this decision lightly and did so due to a combination of factors: twelve or more staff were unable to come to school due to Covid, Covid-related or other issues; our internal team of cover teachers were all unavailable; and externally there were no further supply teachers available. I hope very much that we don't have to do this in coming months but it is possible that we will have to repeat this. If we do come to this position again, we will endeavour to give you as much notice as we can and we will rotate the year groups working from home, whilst favouring key exam year groups in school for obvious reasons.

While we haven't had as many pupils off with Covid as some other schools, we have continued to have a steady number, continuously. We follow the Public Health England, local and NHS advice and guidelines and will continue to do so. I have re-evaluated our risk assessment again this half term and we are going to increase our expectations regarding mask wearing in corridors and public areas outside of classrooms. We won't move to requesting masks in classrooms at this stage but it is possible that we will have to return to this if the coronavirus rates continue to rise. I'm aware that a minority of people take exception to mask wearing but I would suggest that even if this only slightly reduces the chances of spread, it is worth doing if it increases the chances of us keeping people safe and keeping school open as normally as possible. **Please can you ensure that your child has at least two clean masks with them when they come into school each day unless they have a valid reason why they can't wear one.**

We are now advising that if someone in your household has a positive test or has been in close contact with someone who has, all of your household should LFD test daily for at least a week. The LFD testing is now one of the most important measures we have in preventing the spread of the virus. **Please ensure that your children take a test before they come back to school following half term and continue to do so at least twice weekly.** The other significant defence which the government is encouraging is the vaccine. Again, you will have your own views, which we respect, but the vaccine will now be available to 12-to-15-year-olds in public vaccination centres. The previous plan of these being available to secondary pupils through the school vaccination teams by half term was unrealistically ambitious as we saw when the team came to our school, but they may be back to at least offer flu vaccines to those who were unable to receive them before the break. I am afraid that this is out of our hands but we will keep you posted on this. An open letter to all secondary pupils from the Education Secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, on this subject is included at the end of this letter.

Principal: Mr James O'Connell

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Exams and Assessments

For lower school years, we will be coming to the end of our first learning cycle set of assessments four weeks after the end of half term, from Monday 29th November. This means pupils in years 7-10 will receive a range of assessments in almost all subjects over a fortnight. These won't necessarily be full exams and will cover practical topics as well as theoretical in some subjects. There will be similar assessment fortnights each term as we help pupils to get better at working independently and recalling information. It will be helpful if you can prompt your children and ask them about what they need to be revising and preparing. For Year 11, these assessments will be their Pre-Public Exams (PPEs, or mocks) and are therefore particularly important. For Sixth Form, the assessment week is the last week of this term, from Monday 13th December, and this is when A level mock exams will take place.

Just to remind you, as previously sent out, every faculty runs a drop in that pupils can attend if they need more help and guidance in breaktimes or after school sessions. These can be used to complete regular home learning tasks but also to seek support with revision. The timetable of these sessions is [HERE](#) and there is also advice for parents about how to support your children to revise [HERE](#).

Year 11, 12 and 13

We are very much planning for full public exams to take place in summer 2022, although there will be contingency plans in place if these are again disrupted, which will be similar to what we did in summer 2021. We are very conscious that the current Year 11 and 13 have had a challenging time through their public exam years and have seen the previous two years above them not go through the exam process and usual rites of passage normally.

GCSEs and A-levels students will sit adapted exams next summer and receive grades that are a "midway" point between last year and pre-pandemic 2019 results in terms of the grade boundaries and the numbers receiving each grade. As the last two years have seen higher numbers of top grades, this means that this year's Year 11 and 13 can expect to still have a very good chance of achieving these top grades. More of them will be able to get A*s and As at A level or Grade 7+ at GCSE than was the case back in 2019. In English and History GCSEs we now know of some units that won't be included in the exams (there will be no assessment of the anthology poetry in the English Literature GCSE, for example). In other subjects, advance information will be provided to help students target their revision closer to the time. There will also be support materials provided in some subjects, like formulae sheets in maths. Advanced information will be released by 7th February, before the Spring half term, but the timing will be kept "under review subject to the course of the pandemic" and can be brought forward. If you are the parent/carer of a son/daughter in these exam years, please do reassure them, as we are, that we do expect things to be relatively normal this year and they should be gearing up and organising their revision materials already. The plan is to still cover as much of the full curriculum as possible, but they will ultimately be assessed on a slightly reduced amount to make allowances for their lost learning time and disruption. They still very much have everything to play for, and this is the key message!

Parent Feedback

As per my previous update, I would be grateful if you could take five minutes to complete a brief [ONLINE SURVEY](#) providing us with some feedback if you haven't done so already. We are hosting our parent forum this coming Wednesday 3rd November at 6pm. This is an opportunity to meet with me and some other senior leaders in our school and discuss key issues and our school. If you would like to attend, please could you sign up [HERE](#) and arrive at Reception for 6pm this coming Wednesday.

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Safety and Behaviour

Please could you remind your children of the importance of being careful, road-safety aware and also mindful of our community when coming to and from school. We have had a number of communications recently from drivers and members of the public about some of our pupils walking in the road, obstructing traffic or behaving anti-socially in streets neighbouring our school. This is always disappointing when the vast majority of our pupils represent us well.

Key Dates

Finally, as previously sent out, please see some key dates to be aware of for the next half of term. Please note that when we run the parents' appointments for Years 7-11, we finish period 5 early (at 2.45) which gives teachers enough time to prepare and start appointments from 3.30, allowing as much time as possible to ensure that we can offer as many appointments as we can. We will continue to run these online as the vast majority of parents/carers preferred this format.

Mon 8 Nov	Year 9 Parents' Evening (Remote), 3.30-6.30pm
Tue 16 Nov	Post-16 Options Evening (for Year 11, in school), 5.30-7.30pm
Mon 29 Nov-Fri 10 Dec	Assessment weeks for years 7-11
Mon 6 Dec	Key Stage 4 Options Evening (for Year 9, in school), 5.30-7.30pm
Mon 13 -Thu 16 Dec	Assessment week for Sixth Form
Thu 16 Dec	Christmas Concert
Fri 17 Dec	Non-uniform half-day and end of term

Best wishes



James O'Connell
Principal

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi has written an open letter to parents, carers and guardians about the importance of children aged 12 to 15 getting the vaccine and how they can do so. Please read overleaf.

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Dear parents, carers and guardians,

It remains my top priority as Education Secretary to protect education and make sure children are spending as much time as possible in the classroom.

Last month, the UK Chief Medical Officers recommended that the government extends the offer of a single dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to all 12-to-15-year-olds. This has been approved as safe and effective for this age group by the UK medicines regulator, the MHRA.

It is estimated that this country's world leading vaccination programme has saved more than 120,000 lives. Vaccinations are building a wall of defence across the country and it is important that as many young people as possible take up the offer so we can continue to keep these defences strong.

Young people aged 12 to 15 can now book an appointment using the [NHS book a vaccination service](#). Where possible, appointments should be booked outside of school hours to avoid missing school.

Getting the vaccine is one of the best things young people can do to protect themselves and those around them – and I want to encourage you to consider the new option for them to have their jab at a vaccination centre locally, as well as the option to have it in school.

Having the vaccine makes us all less likely to catch the virus and less likely to pass it on and so will be important in ensuring children can do the things they love like seeing their grandparents during the Christmas holiday. Young people who get COVID-19 will miss school, and may spread it to others. That is why we are encouraging you all to support your children to get vaccinated.

The school-based COVID-19 vaccination programme has already vaccinated nearly half a million young people and visited thousands of schools. If your child is 12 or older on the day the vaccinations are taking place in school, they will be able to access a vaccine.

Further information about vaccinations for 12-15-year-olds can be found at the NHS website [here](#).

It is also particularly important that young people take a COVID-19 test and report the result before returning to school after the half-term break, helping make sure we keep the virus out of education.

Together, we'll beat this virus and protect the education of our children.

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