

22 December 2021

Dear Parents/Carers:

We are writing to you, following the announcements at the end of last week, to provide some information regarding the return to school after the Christmas break and the arrangements that we will be working hard to put into place.

Due to the increase in COVID-19 infection rates across the country, the Government has decided that three actions are necessary in secondary schools:

- Schools will be supported to set up a regular testing programme to test staff and the 'close contacts' of staff and students who test positive for the virus.
- The number of children in secondary schools and colleges will be reduced for the first full week of January (the week commencing 4 Jan. '21), with vulnerable children, the children of critical workers and exam cohorts (years 11 and 13) receiving on site face-to-face education, while others learn remotely.
- Schools will be offered support to test as many students as possible, as they resume on site face-to-face teaching, especially where the prevalence of the virus is high.

The Government acknowledge that the timing of the announcement has created operational challenges for schools, but argue that it was the most responsible course of action. The expectation, at present, is that all educational settings will be open fully from 11 January. They consider that primary school children can, and should, return to school from 4 January, as infection and transmission rates are significantly lower for primary age students. Given the additional pressures and the short time-scale in which arrangements will need to be made, the Government have also suggested that secondary schools may wish to make use of an additional INSET day on Monday 4 January.

Testing is voluntary, but is strongly encouraged, as it plays an important role in reducing infection and transmission. We are told that the testing programme that is put in place on site will be supported through the provision of test kits, PPE and training, but the detail has not yet been forthcoming. Apparently, this will include some planning support from armed forces personnel. Before the announcements were made last week, we had already made some arrangements, through liaison with Staffordshire County Council, for a programme of lateral flow testing, commencing on 11 January, but these plans have now been superseded by the Government programme. We will need a team of trained staff to administer the lateral flow tests, which take around 90 seconds to complete and approximately 30 minutes to deliver a result. It is important to note that a negative test result does not remove the risk of transmission and that, in some cases, someone who has tested negative may still have the undetected disease and be infectious. It therefore remains essential that good hygiene and social distancing is observed. Where someone tests positive, they will be required to self-isolate, take a laboratory-based PCR test, await the result and then act accordingly.

At present, then, our understanding of what will happen at Chase Terrace Academy is as follows:

Monday 4 January will, as suggested, be an **additional INSET day**, which will provide us with some time to support arrangements for testing and the various programmes for the remainder of the first week back. As the year 13 mock exams are scheduled to take place from 4 January, in order to avoid disruption to these arrangements, these exams will go ahead as planned and so year 13 students who have an exam on that day will be the only students in school on Mon. 4 Jan.

We will collect information regarding provision for students in years 7, 8, 9 and 10, who are the **children of key workers, or who meet the criteria to be classed as vulnerable. Please complete the Microsoft form via the link below** if your child meets the criteria and you would like to reserve a place:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=seMRsYRHckiS5GZWrpBBYZJ_4K4GeKdHlRobmPxz3QdUODVPVlk5RkJWjdXVVFFR1YwQUcyV05BRi4u

We will appreciate prompt responses in submitting the form to allow us to plan provision effectively. These students will follow the online programme that other students in their year groups will follow. **They will form their own 'bubble' for the duration of the arrangements - from Tuesday 5 Jan. through to, and including, Fri. 8 Jan.** They will arrive at, and leave from, the main school entrance. and their break/lunch periods will be 'staggered' from the other students on site.

Other students in years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 will follow an online programme throughout the week - from **Tues. 5 Jan. through to, and including, Fri. 8 Jan.** - following their timetable structure. This will be scheduled/set on SMHW and will include lessons delivered through MS Teams. They will return to on-site lessons from Mon. 11 Jan.

Students in years 11 will arrive at school on Tuesday 5 January, at 8.30 am, for their usual timetabled lessons. As mentioned above, year 13 students should note that the mock exam programme will go ahead as planned (including exams scheduled for Mon. 4 Jan.).

School transport will run, as usual, from Tues. 5 Jan. (and in subsequent weeks) and so will be available for the key worker/vulnerable students, and the students in years 11 and 13, during the first week back. We will make specific transport arrangements, as required, for the small number of year 13 students who have mock exams on Mon. 4 Jan. and who would usually use school transport.

From 11 Jan. '21, the school day for students in KS4 and in the sixth form will start from 8.30 am, whereas the start time will be 8.40 am for KS3 students.

As far as testing is concerned, we are likely to use the Stephen Sutton Multi-Academy Trust training/meeting room, adjacent to the main car park, for this purpose. As suggested, in the week commencing 4 Jan., we will aim to get as many lateral flow tests completed as possible, with priority given to staff, vulnerable children, the children of key workers and students in years 11 and 13, i.e. those on site. We will, of course, need to manage parental permissions and will circulate details when we know more. Our understanding is that the testing programme will then continue to include other students, as soon as there is capacity to do so.

Thank you for your support and understanding at this exceptionally challenging time. We are really proud of the way that the local community has rallied together throughout the pandemic and we are strongly committed to doing all that we can to play our part in this collective effort. Equally, we hope that you appreciate that we are having to 'twist and turn' in relation to Government announcements in a way that does not always lend itself to effective and timely communication, but we are doing our best to keep you well-informed and continue to appreciate your constructive feedback.

Wishing you a lovely Christmas and a much better 2021.

**Stuart Jones
Executive Headteacher**

**Nicola Mason
Head of School**