

CWA/MBE

18 December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: The Start to the New Term and Proposed Mass Testing in Schools

After some further totally unexpected and very last minute high-level communications yesterday afternoon from the Department for Education (DfE), they have stated there should be a staggered start to the spring term for secondary school students. Their proposal is that only Year 11 and Year 13 return from the week beginning Monday 4 January 2021, with the other five year groups engaging in a remote learning programme. They also stated that all year groups should then return in full from Monday 11 January 2021. There is a caveat to this, however, and that is secondary schools should also remain fully open to and encourage the in person return from the first week back for the children of key workers, numerous separate identified cohorts, including students with SENDs, and students who either cannot access remote learning, or cannot find a quiet space from which to work in their home environment.

After collating these numbers, from a Plume Academy perspective, if we followed this last minute input from the DfE (whilst remembering that up until Wednesday evening, they were actively pursuing legal action against both individual schools and local authorities who were trying to move to remote learning primarily for safeguarding purposes), four things would happen:

- It would actually see us closing the academy's doors in the first week back to a *minority* of our students as the DfE highlighted lists are actually most extensive. This we feel would not be right. In addition, our Year 11 and Year 13 numbers alone total some 400 students.
- The time it would take to ensure we put in place a high quality provision of both in class and remote learning would be significant, especially when our teaching staff have already prepared their lesson plans for the first week back. It is also important to note that whilst we have remained fully prepared to move to remote learning should we have had to with regards the Government's rota system at any stage last term, what has been proposed for the first week back is very different. Therefore, and again, to try and do this with what is in essence no notice whatsoever, will not, in our opinion, lead to a provision that is to our usual standard.
- Directly following on from the previous point, as I genuinely believe you will agree, it is also most unfair to those teaching and support staff who have worked so incredibly hard throughout the past 10 months, including most holiday periods, to give up a fair chunk of time in their very well-deserved holiday to prepare for what has now been proposed. In my opinion, it would, I feel, also impact on many of them from a wellbeing perspective if they were asked to do this. They would of course do what was requested of them and as they always do as they are such a supportive and committed team of staff, however, to what detrimental effect? Also, this should be a period of rest and recuperation for them as I hope it will be for many of you, therefore, I also feel it is of paramount importance that our staff are afforded this so as to ensure they are fresh and raring to go come the start of next term; a term I feel will also be a very challenging one from a COVID-19 perspective.
- It would also see many of you have to change your own already established plans from a childcare and work-related perspective.

Therefore, after discussions as a full Senior Leadership Team (SLT), further discussions between our Professional Association Representatives (PARs) and I, as well as speaking with our Chair of the Board of Trustees about this specific matter, himself, like me, a fellow Year 11 parent, **as from Tuesday 5 January 2021, as previously planned, we will be looking to bring ALL of our students back into the academy at the usual time of 8:25am.** It is also very important to note that **for this first week, I will also keep in place the option for this decision to still lie with you, our parents and carers.**

Therefore, if you were to opt to keep your child out of the academy during the first week back, please call in by 8:30am each day stipulating the reason as to why. This again, will ensure we meet our statutory safeguarding responsibilities.

Proposed mass testing

As you will have seen via a whole variety of media channels from yesterday afternoon, the Government are also stating that as from Monday 4 January 2021, there will be a programme of mass testing of students and staff alike in secondary schools. Late yesterday evening, we did actually receive some initial documentation relating to this, however, after reading it a number of times, honestly, in its current format and with such little logistical detail, I have no idea as to how this could work. To be brutally honest, I'm not even sure that what is proposed is feasible, and in the opinion of the SLT and I, as well as our PARs and our Chair, we are struggling to see as to how something of this nature and on the proposed scale can be adequately, effectively and most importantly, safely set up and managed in a school setting. You will not have heard me say anything like this over the last 10 months either despite many other high-level last minute announcements and associated required actions coming through and needing to be put in place.

Nevertheless, we shall see as to what other documentation and proposed support arrives between now and 4 January 2021 and, as will always be the case, view it in a solution-focused manner. However, and again, on this occasion and with regards this particular matter, I have some very serious concerns with regards what has been initially proposed.

Contact over the first six days of Christmas

Further to my letter dated 9 December 2020, please find the following link that endeavours to further clarify as to what to do should your child develop any COVID-19 symptoms or, and I hope this proves not to be the case, returns a positive test between now and Christmas Eve:

[Handling confirmed cases over Christmas](#)

From 25 December 2020 onwards, you would need to go through the NHS website - www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test - or by dialling 119.

I will also write to you again on **Wednesday 30 December 2020** to provide a further update with regards the proposed mass testing as well as to clarify as to what to do from an academy perspective if your child (or a member of your household) develops symptoms just before they are due to return to school. I genuinely hope, however, I don't have to write to you prior to the 30 December 2020.

My penultimate point is to once again, thank you, our fantastic parents and carers, for your tremendous ongoing support as we endeavour to navigate our way together through these ongoing very challenging times. In my opinion, we would not have got to this point today without it and I know this opinion is also shared by my colleagues.

Finally, on behalf of the academy's team of staff and I, may I take this opportunity to wish you and your respective families a peaceful, pleasant, happy and ultimately, safe and healthy Christmas.

Yours sincerely



Mr C A Wakefield
Executive Principal