

18th December 2020

Dear Parent

You are probably aware that the government made an announcement yesterday that secondary schools should stagger the start of next term for different year groups. I strongly disagree with the decision because I believe students have missed enough face to face teaching already. However, I must also recognise the trust's responsibilities in terms of preventing the spread of coronavirus and our trustees agreed with my reluctant recommendation to follow the advice. This means that students in years 7 to 10 (and year 12 if applicable) will be taught remotely during the week beginning Monday 4th (or Tuesday 5th January 2021). The Department for Education have categorically stated that all pupils will return to face to face education from 11th January onwards.

The full guidance for schools can be found here:

[Schools and childcare settings: return in January 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/schools-and-childcare-settings-return-in-january-2021)

I am sorry for the inconvenience this will cause. I, along with many other trust leaders, have voiced my anger at the lack of planning that has gone into the decision. We want to keep our schools open and understand the challenges you may face as a result of these decisions.

The government has advised us to distribute food parcels to families eligible for free school meals. We cannot do this because our staff will be delivering lessons, supporting pupils or undertaking their normal duties. However, we will issue free school meal vouchers for that week for pupils in years 7 to 10 (and year 12 if applicable). We will use the same system we used for the Christmas holiday vouchers.

The other reason the government gave for the staggered start is to allow us to test all secondary pupils for COVID in that week. We already know this will be virtually impossible. Firstly, the government only started to discuss distribution with the Royal Mail yesterday, secondly, they will not issue detailed guidance until the middle of next week and, finally, we need to collect consent forms before we test. I am far from confident the test kits will have arrived by the time we return. We will use the first days back after the break to train staff and then start the testing process.

I also need to share the practical challenges we face when administering the tests. We have calculated we can test around 45 people per hour, if we have three booths and five staff working on them. Given our year groups range from 180 to nearly 380, I am sure you can appreciate how long it will take to get through everybody even once. We are not prepared to use volunteers who have not undertaken the proper safeguarding checks, teachers will be delivering lessons and support staff will be undertaking the roles they



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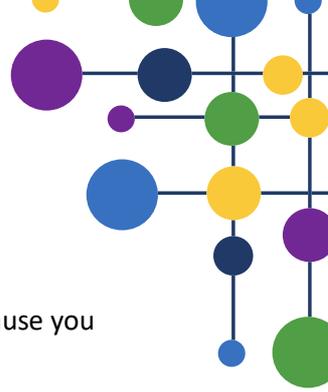


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are paid for. However, we will do our best to get the staff together. I share this information because you need to know it could take a few weeks before your child is tested. Please be patient with us.

Headteachers will issue more detailed guidance about the tests, remote learning arrangements and plans for different year groups to return to school. Please look out for further information from each school.

This is not the way I wanted to end the term but we will make the most of it. In the meantime, I hope you have a very happy Christmas and a healthy and successful New Year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J McNally'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John McNally
CEO