



Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Parents,

**Re: National Lockdown – school provision**

I am certain that a large majority of you will have watched, live, the Prime Minister's televised broadcast yesterday evening in which he announced new national lockdown measures, taking place immediately. Those measures are predicated around three national priorities:

- Stay at Home
- Protect the NHS
- Save Lives

Within his broadcast, the Prime Minister announced the closure of schools for most children and young people in the country from today, with special exemptions in law for children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response and for children who fall under the government's definition of being vulnerable.

To help parents, I have attached to this letter the government's current definitions for those two categories. In respect of 'vulnerable' children, the definition is broader than that prescribed by the government during the first national lockdown which began in March last year. I understand this is due to legal challenges experienced by the government during last summer's lockdown, in which in many cases children with EHCPs had no access through their remote learning to key elements of their therapeutic provision. This problem did not exist at More House School where pupils continued to access Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Literacy intervention through our remote provision. These definitions were last updated on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 and have not been reviewed in the light of yesterday evening's announcement. It is possible there will be future clarification.

Having just concluded a meeting with all school staff, it is evident that many employees share with many of our parents the very real concerns about the rates of infection in schools and particularly in this local area, influenced by the vastly increased rates of transmission caused by a particular variant of the virus. The government's new instructions of last night speak very clearly – that wherever it is possible for school children and young people to remain at home, they must do so for the sake of themselves, their families, and everyone. There is genuine concern across the region about the reducing ability of the National Health Service to meet the demands of the population.

As required by the government, from tomorrow morning, the school's provision for our pupils will transfer to a remote provision. We expect this to consist of pupils' normal timetables of classes and therapeutic interventions, all delivered through our online learning platform, Microsoft Teams. Pupils will meet with their classmates, teachers and therapists online for learning, therapy and pastoral support, following their usual timetables. As before, we will work to ensure screen-time is carefully balanced with offline activities so that our pupils are well-supported to access an engaging, comprehensive and challenging curriculum that includes their therapeutic programme.

We are planning arrangements for on-site access for those few children whose circumstances make it vital for them to use their legal exemption from the closure of schools. As with last summer's lockdown, this on-site provision will be extremely restricted as we ensure the quality of delivery for the remote provision and work to minimise the risks of virus

**MORE HOUSE SCHOOL**

Moons Hill, Frensham, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 3AP

T: 01252 792 303 E: [schooloffice@morehouseschool.co.uk](mailto:schooloffice@morehouseschool.co.uk) W: [www.morehouseschool.co.uk](http://www.morehouseschool.co.uk)

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transmission between pupils, and for the skeleton-staff, in accordance with yesterday evening's new framework of national effort.

As parents, I ask you to consider very carefully options available to you for avoiding the need for your son to attend the school site during this national lockdown. I ask, please, that you recognise the national effort to reduce transmission, especially amongst asymptomatic people, and in response to this very transmissible variant.

If you are certain that you have no alternative but to exercise your son's legal exemption from the national lockdown, please submit a return of the online attendance-application form, as early as possible. Your immediate attention to this is essential in order to support our planning so that we can ensure there is sufficient resource in place to ensure children's safety on-site tomorrow morning and beyond.

You can confirm your legal exemption and your application for on-site access using the following link: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=2uswjIFrrEmJhijmj0JRvnAMXL5vwrpOsvlAp7wq299UMENJQzIITEQxU0VEUE9RWDRJN1AzNUdMUS4u>

If you are requesting on-site provision and your son is a boarder, I ask, please, that if it is at all possible, you delay your son's return to school until Wednesday, rather than his returning this evening. You will, I hope, appreciate that the announcement yesterday evening has resulted in an enormous planning exercise for the school's staff. If, in the unlikely event you find it essential to exercise a legal exemption from the school closure rules, and it is impossible for you to delay your son's return to our residential provision until tomorrow, please telephone the school office as soon as possible today, leaving a message for Mr Pennell, Head of Boarding, so that he is aware and can prepare for accommodating a pupil in school overnight. The school office telephone number is 01252 792303. After 4pm, please telephone the Boarding mobile number.

All students accessing the school site will be expected to wear school uniform, please.

I apologise for the extremely short notice we are all afforded in these arrangements, and I recognise the difficulties this new situation presents for parents and for our pupils. Our pupils will, in almost all cases, find it extremely disappointing that they are now not permitted to attend school in person; I share that bitter disappointment and long for a return to normality. Our staff are unanimous in wanting to find creative ways to foster the same, essential relationships amongst pupils, and between pupils and their teachers, therapists and residential staff. This commitment we will pursue through video lessons, virtual tutor times and assemblies, as well as one-to-one communications wherever beneficial and possible.

A very few senior students are scheduled to sit public examinations relating to their BTec studies during January, with the first commencing this Friday. At the current time of writing, the Department for Education has issued a statement indicating these examinations should proceed as planned. However, this seems surprising, and it is possible the situation may change. We are monitoring it closely. We are also examining the obvious difficulties relating to the safe discharge of our duties to provide pupils' allocated access arrangements – the heightened COVID-19 risks and associated restrictions make this even more of a challenge to overcome than before. For the time being we recommend that students scheduled to sit their exam this coming Friday, who feel they wish to do so, should attend school on Friday for that examination only. It is worth noting that pupils in Year Ten may prefer to defer their sitting of the examination until a later time in the course. For specific queries relating to this examination, please contact the school's Examinations Officer, Mrs Youl, directly at [dyoul@morehouseschool.co.uk](mailto:dyoul@morehouseschool.co.uk). Students attending should wear school uniform, please.

Last night's announcement has turned all of our planning, and expectations upside down. The setting up of our on-site rapid-testing station has been hugely complex, and I do not currently know what its role will be under these new restrictions. I hope that we will be able to use the facility for increasing the safety of those few adults and pupils who will be accessing the site, but there is much change to the planning we had put in place required to make that workable.

As ever, the strength of the school lies in its community; in the incredible, strong support the school's staff experiences from the parent-body, and in the understanding of the teachers and therapists in developing our pupils to build their self-esteem and independence, as learners, truly aspirational for their futures. These central tenets remain at the core of our operations, despite the transference to remote provision.

I expect to provide further communications in the coming hours or days in order to provide you with further information as it is realised. This will include instructions for pupils' logging into the school's remote provision. Please note that we anticipate some disruption in our ability to deliver remote learning first-thing tomorrow morning. We expect to have all arrangements in place by lunchtime at the latest. We also expect our arrangements to develop over the coming days as we gain an improved understanding of the breadth over which we must stretch our resources.

Thank you for your understanding, and for your continued support.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. C. Hetherington', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mr Jonathan C. Hetherington BA (Hons) MSc (Ed) QTS Headmaster

Enclosed: Government published definitions