



Tuesday, 23rd February 2021

Dear Parents and Pupils,

Re: wider reopening of schools from 8th March

Yesterday afternoon, the Prime Minister made a statement in the House of Commons outlining his 'road-map' out of lockdown. His plans include the return to school for all pupils, and were repeated in his statement from Downing Street yesterday evening.

The press-headline was, of course, that all pupils will return to attending school on-site from the 8th March. This news was hugely welcomed by the vast majority of school leaders and education professionals and my staff share with me excitement at the prospect of welcoming back our pupils in the very near future.

Also released yesterday afternoon were several guidance documents with details for schools to attend to in their planning. These details are many in number, and cover a wide range of school operations. Probably the most important, though, in planning pupils' return is the government direction that schools should not permit secondary-age pupils to return to classroom face-to-face teaching until they have received a negative test-result from an in-school Lateral Flow Test.

This testing of pupils and staff is identified by the government as being a crucial factor in the safe return of pupils to school. From the 8th of March, all school staff will receive home-testing kits, enabling them to test themselves twice-weekly. That programme of twice-weekly home-testing is to be rolled out to all secondary-age pupils across the country, but only after such pupils have received three on-site Lateral Flow Tests, three to five days apart. It is therefore an expectation of all schools that this mass asymptomatic testing of all secondary-aged pupils, three times per pupil, is delivered, commencing on the 8th March.

This, of course, presents incredible logistical challenge for all senior schools. The government guidance issued yesterday provides that schools will need to design a phased return of pupils over that first week in order to manage the on-site mass testing whilst adhering to the COVID-19 safety procedures.

I have already begun working closely with the school's staff and governors to plan how we can fulfil these duties, and return all our pupils to the classroom as quickly as possible from the 8th March. The guidance issued currently does not afford any mass-testing to begin before the 8th March, and does not permit pupils to return to the classroom until after the first of their three Lateral Flow Tests returns a negative result.

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At the moment, there is very little I am able to offer you in terms of precise detail, but I am keen to provide you with as much notice as possible of our planning. Currently I expect that all Junior Years pupils will return to school, full-time, from Monday, 8th March. I also expect that one or two other year-groups will be able to return that morning. Whilst the Junior Years boys will commence their normal timetable immediately, the older pupils invited to attend on that day will be processed through our on-site testing station as efficiently as possible, and be supervised on-site in a COVID-19 secure manner until they receive their test results, before resuming their normal lesson timetable from mid-morning. All pupils not yet permitted to be in school will continue to access remote-learning in the current usual manner until they do return to school. Through the course of that first week, each year-group in the senior school (Year Seven to Eleven) and Sixth Form will return to site according to a timetable of phased return, enabling us to complete their initial Lateral Flow Test and reintegrate them to normal, full-time on-site school attendance. During the first two weeks from the 8th March we expect to complete all three Lateral Flow Tests for pupils in years Seven to Thirteen inclusive, but we expect all pupils to be in school full-time from Friday, 12th March at the latest.

I hope that this initial overview is useful to you and supports your own planning. I expect to provide all pupils and their parents with a detailed timetable for pupils' return to the school site, communicated on Monday, 1st March, or earlier. In the meantime, I am grateful for your understanding and patience as the school's leadership and governors work through the logistical and Health & Safety challenges, ensuring adherence to the published guidance from HM Government and from Public Health England.

Children of critical workers and vulnerable children currently accessing the school-site

During this period of lockdown, approximately 10% of our pupils have attended the school site under the legal exemption on the nationwide ban on attending school. Managing these pupils on-site at the same time as managing the phased return of all other pupils and delivering mass asymptomatic rapid-testing presents increased challenge for the school's staff. I ask the parents of pupils in years Seven or above who are currently accessing on-site provision to consider whether it is possible at all for their sons to remain at home during the week commencing 8th March until the date for their year-group's return to school that week. I recognise that remaining at home will simply be impossible for some pupils' families – especially those where both parents are critical workers on duty during the school day. However, by reducing the number of those pupils requiring on-site supervision when their peers are working from home, we expect to be able to speed up the phased return programme for all pupils.

We will therefore be contacting parents of all pupils currently accessing on-site provision, other than in the Junior Years, to examine what arrangements might be possible in support of the overall aim to return all pupils to school as swiftly as possible. I am hugely appreciative of individual families' support in this respect.

Can you help us?

Before Christmas, we believed we were setting up mass testing in school ready for the start of the January term. Then, with less than forty-eight hours' notice, the lockdown was announced and, with it, the demand on our on-site testing station reduced considerably. Nevertheless, our plans for January were only feasible because of the incredible response from parents and others, volunteering to staff our on-site testing station.

We now find ourselves in a similar position to that of just before Christmas, and we know that, in order to realise the return of all our secondary-age and Sixth Form pupils within that first week from the 8th March, we are utterly reliant on the goodwill of volunteers, willing to complete the online NHS training, and to devote time to manning our testing station on-site during those first two weeks.

We hope those who previously volunteered will again be in a position to help us, since very many completed the online training and even have first-hand experience of managing the testing-station at More House School. However, it is possible that despite the generosity of those volunteers, we may still be in want of additional help.

If you would like to offer your time, whether previously having volunteered or newly volunteering, please use the link immediately below to register your interest. Thank you to all who are able to support us in this return-to-school testing programme.

[Test-station volunteering form](#)

Thank you to all pupils and parents for your continued support of the school. I look forward to welcoming back to school all of our pupils as soon as possible, and to sharing with you, early next week, definitive details. That next communication will also include all other COVID-19 safety measures relevant to pupils and their parents.

Yours sincerely,

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

Jonathan Hetherington BA (Hons) MSc (Ed) QTS
Headmaster