



Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear parents, pupils, staff and governors,

### **Re: School update for January return**

Following the very significant government announcements over the past couple of days, and as promised through my Twitter account post, this letter is designed to provide you with some initial information about preparations for the start of the new school term in January.

Firstly, you are likely to have seen that alongside other home counties, all of Surrey, with the exception of Waverley, will enter Tier 3 lockdown from tomorrow. Frensham is within Waverley and so More House School will remain in Tier 2 for the time being.

Chiefly, though, this letter addresses the very recent announcements by the Department for Education (DfE) that from the start of the January term there will be mass testing in secondary schools, and that only pupils in the examination years (Eleven and Upper Sixth) will be permitted to return to school in the first week of term; the rationale is to provide schools with the time to set up on-site COVID-19 testing stations and teach all other age groups remotely in the first week.

### **Staggered Return**

The announcement by the DfE in the last day or so that most secondary-aged pupils will not be permitted to return to school physically in the first week of January came as a surprise to school leaders nationally. Yesterday evening the DfE published detail surrounding this new rule. I have studied that detail and can confirm that, as a specialist setting, I am permitted to welcome all of our pupils, in every year group, back into school on our scheduled first day of term. Thus, teaching on-site will commence, for every age-group, on Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021, and our boarders will be able to arrive back at school during the evening before, as originally planned.

### **Rapid, on-site COVID-19 testing**

In line with a newly announced government programme, from the start of term in January, More House School will conduct weekly COVID-19 testing, on-site, for all employees who give their consent (hopefully all). These tests are called Lateral Flow tests. They are processed on-site and the results are available in thirty minutes. We intend to divide the staff of approximately 160 personnel into five groups, allocating each group one morning a week for testing, commencing at 8am.

In addition, any pupil or staff-member who is identified as being in close-contact with a confirmed positive case will no longer have to isolate at home as a precaution. Instead, they will be able to attend school as normal, but will have to complete an on-site COVID-19 test each morning on arrival for seven consecutive school days after the most recent close-contact. This is exciting, as it will mean far fewer instances of pupils being sent home to isolate and missing on-site provision, and will reduce greatly the impact on staff-absence.

## **MORE HOUSE SCHOOL**

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Furthermore, all pupils in years Seven to Upper Sixth inclusive, will receive two Lateral Flow COVID-19 tests within the first five days of term. This is designed to combat the risk of asymptomatic positive cases, which are estimated to account for up to a third of all COVID-19 infections. Our current planning – still in the early stages as we are awaiting many further details to be published by the government – suggests that all pupils in years Seven to Thirteen, whose parents have granted consent, will receive a COVID-19 test in school during the day on Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> January, and a second one on Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> January.

If a pupil or staff-member realises a positive test result in school they will need to return home to isolate immediately, and will need to arrange a standard PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) test through NHS Test & Trace in order to confirm the positive result.

Primary school pupils are, at the current time, ineligible for these government-provided tests.

Staff-members who do not consent for on-site testing, and pupils whose parents do not provide consent for on-site testing, should return to school for the start of term as normal. However, if any such person is identified as potentially being in close contact with a confirmed positive case they are required to go home and isolate in accordance with the NHS Test & Trace instructions.

#### **Next steps**

I hope that this preliminary information is useful to you, and offers some reassurance about the start of term in January, in spite of the noise in the national press.

I expect to contact you next week with a further update. We are waiting for the government-prescribed consent forms to be published, so that we can then issue them to staff and to parents in good time for these to be returned and processed, ready for Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> January.

Although our COVID-19 testing station on-site will be supervised at all times by one of our clinically-trained registered nurses, we need to seek the support of More House School parents to volunteer for staffing our testing station. Apart from on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> and Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January when we are operating at much greater capacity, these volunteer duties will enable us to operate our testing station between 8am and approximately 9.30am each school morning. We are developing an online sign-up form for parents to be able to indicate their willingness to undergo a very short online training activity provided by NHS Test & Trace (not yet available) and then to be part of our testing-support team. On most days we will require five volunteers for that period of time in the morning, and I hope that sufficient support from parents in signing up for a regular weekly stint or two will make it possible for the school to manage the demands of the testing station alongside the school's normal daily activities.

I will share further information, consent forms and more information regarding the volunteering opportunities for parents as soon as they are available, and hopefully before Christmas. In the meantime, I thank you for taking the time to read this update, and for the enormous wealth of support the school, and its staff and pupils, continue to enjoy from our parent-body.

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