



18<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

### **Coronavirus (Covid-19) update for Parents/Carers**

The government's latest set of announcements, made yesterday afternoon, have left us in the enormously difficult position of having to change our plans for the start of next term after we have already finished and staff are not in school.

This morning, I have spoken with the majority of secondary Headteachers across Somerset. The feelings expressed in that meeting were very strong, with various degrees of anger and frustration at the lack of thinking that seems to have gone into these latest plans. There appears to be little appreciation of the planning needed to run a school effectively and the issues that parents have in organising care for their children.

I feel that the most important thing I can do for you at this point is to try to give you some certainty so that you can plan for the beginning of January. As with previous government announcements, I am fully expecting that more information will come out in the next two weeks. However, that will be too late to alter the way in which we approach the start of term.

Two issues are being mixed together in the government plans: testing of students for the virus in school; and a staggered start to the school year to break the possible transmission from Christmas activities. I will deal with each of those separately.

#### **Testing inside schools**

The outline statements from the government talk about testing students in school once they become contacts of a positive case. To achieve this would require the setting up and staffing of a medical testing facility inside school.

I have significant concerns about a number of issues that relate to this suggestion: space, safeguarding, training, transport, administering medical procedures, clinical waste disposal and resourcing. The guidance is clear that this testing is not mandatory. Therefore, until all these questions have been answered, you have my reassurance that we will not be commencing testing inside school.

We will not be able to resolve those complex issues before the start of January, so there will be no school based testing at the outset of next term. Secondary schools

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across Somerset have agreed to take the same approach and the local authority is supportive of this position.

Our greatest defence against the virus this term has been keeping it out of school. This is much more effective than any measure that we can take inside school. Your tremendous efforts in that regard have kept the school open to most students for the greatest amount of time. It is therefore important to reiterate that at the start of next term:

- Students should stay at home if they have any of the three key COVID symptoms – a high temperature, a persistent cough, or a loss of smell or taste – and request a test;
- Students should stay at home if any member of their household has any of these symptoms and await the outcome of the test result of that household member;
- Students should stay at home and isolate for 10 days if they have been a close contact of a positive case.

As I have said before, I appreciate that these judgements are not always easy to make. **If you are unsure, please keep your child at home and phone the school.** We will then advise you of the most appropriate course of action to take.

It is also absolutely vital that students do attend school with a face mask each and every day. Towards the end of term far too many students had to be provided with face masks in school which creates additional difficulties.

### **Start of the Spring term: Year 11**

We will start term as previously set out on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Students will have their normal lessons in school. The examinations that are timetabled for that week will continue to go ahead.

### **Start of the Spring term: Years 7, 8, 9, 10**

From 5<sup>th</sup> January, the students will be working remotely at home using TEAMS. The start of school-based teaching will commence on **11<sup>th</sup> January 2021**.

In order to facilitate the last-minute nature of this change of plans, we will run as follows:

**Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January:** staff will set work for every lesson that a student should have on that day on Classcharts. There will not be TEAMS lessons on this day. Should there be issues with connectivity or access, then please use this day to contact the school and we will try to resolve them with you.

**Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> – Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January:** staff will run TEAMS lessons following the timetable that your child currently has. This will work on an adjusted timetable to coordinate all of our work, and to give them a break from extended screen time, as follows:

Lesson 1	08.50 – 9:40am
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Lesson 2	9.50 – 10:40am
Break	
Lesson 3	11:10 – 12:00pm
Lesson 4	12:10 – 1:00pm
Lunch	
Lesson 5	2pm – 2:50pm

A copy of how to access TEAMS and the expectations for this will be sent out again on January 4<sup>th</sup>.

Students in these groups, provided that they are well, will be able to return to school on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January.

### **Critical workers and vulnerable children in Years 7, 8, 9, 10**

Students whose parents are critical workers can send their children into school in the week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> January. It is clearly important that staff who work for the NHS and emergency services can still undertake their work at this important time. However, there is no requirement that you do so and you may have alternative childcare arrangements that you can use. This will help to reduce the risk of transmission in that week.

If you are one of these key workers and believe that you will need to send your child into school, please would you complete the electronic form by clicking on this link:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=98dpE9VpuU6Nd7H6cDltv3hu6eqhXhJGg2Dr88qsacpUM1IFSzZQWkJFSFBDOTgyMTVaWDRSTFlaSC4u>

If you could do so by Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> December 2020, that will significantly help our planning. As we did in the summer, these students will be supervised in IT classrooms undertaking the same work online as the rest of their year group.

### **Way forward**

You will probably detect from the nature of this letter that we find ourselves in a position that we do not wish to be. That has happened a number of times this year and we have worked through all those difficult times with the solidarity of our community. I am certain that this community will come together and do the same again with this challenge. The messages of gratitude that I received this week on behalf of our staff tell me that you appreciate the work that staff are doing. Thank you.

Despite the potential changes or additions to government advice that may come next week, we will aim to stick with these plans to give you the certainty that you need.

If there are urgent messages that you need to get through to school during the holiday, please use my personal email [jeddy@thetauntonacademy.com](mailto:jeddy@thetauntonacademy.com) or for issues

relating to the critical worker or vulnerable student survey then please email [forourke@thetauntonacademy.com](mailto:forourke@thetauntonacademy.com) . You will appreciate that there may well be a delay in replying over Christmas.

I hope that you and your families and friends are able to enjoy this Christmas break.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Eddy', written in a cursive style.

Mr J Eddy  
Head Teacher