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26 February 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

We are writing to you following the flurry of announcements this week regarding the national roadmap out of lockdown and plans for schools over the next few months.

### **Safe wider opening**

As you will be aware, the Prime Minister has announced that young people will start to return to school from 8 March. We are delighted that our pupils and students will be returning and look forward to seeing them soon.

For primary schools, that means all pupils will start back on Monday 8 March. In the case of secondary schools, we are required to ensure that every student (where parents have provided consent) has completed a negative lateral flow test, administered on the school site, before starting back in lessons. We are planning and putting huge resources into delivering this as quickly as possible but - given the huge numbers of secondary-aged students we need to have tested - not all secondary students will be able to start back on school site on 8 March. The exact re-start date for particular year groups is determined by how quickly we can process tests. Our secondary schools are currently working out the logistics of this; they will write to you in the near future with details of when your son/daughter can have their first test and when each year will start back with face-to-face teaching.

In the autumn term, we put a wide range of safety measures in place, including changes to school days, bubbles, changes to school sites and additional sanitisation and cleaning. These measures will be put back in place and our risk assessments will be updated in line with latest government guidance. These risk assessments will be available to view on our website <https://theeducationalliance.org.uk/coronavirus-information/>

### **Lateral flow testing**

A significant part of the government's strategy for fully opening schools and keeping them open, is the regular testing of school staff and secondary-aged students using lateral flow tests. Schools have been asked to conduct the first three tests onsite and, following this, students will receive test kits to conduct tests at home. Once all students have returned to class after their first test, we will endeavour to conduct the next two tests before the Easter break, while remaining mindful of the fact that what young people need most is to be back in classrooms, learning and experiencing all of the other positive benefits of being back. Home testing will commence after the Easter break. Students cannot be issued with home testing kits until they have participated in on-site testing, as we must be assured that students are competent at the testing process (as detailed in the government guidance).

As we have made clear since the issue of testing in schools was first raised, students will only have tests in school if a parent or carer has given active consent. While we recognise there is some benefit



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in as many young people as possible having regular tests, we also respect the personal choices individuals and families make. You will have received a letter with more details on testing and a consent form. If you have not yet had chance to return the form, we would be grateful if you could do so as soon as possible.

We understand that some people who have given consent for their child to be tested may have concerns about the potential impact of contact with students who have not been tested. It is important to stress that although regular lateral flow testing is about adding an additional measure to reduce spread in schools, it is also about the benefit it brings to families and communities if asymptomatic cases are detected so that the spread within and between families can be reduced.

### **Catch-up**

You will be aware that there is a great deal of talk nationally about catch-up programmes, summer schools and additional funding. As we did in the autumn term, we will put in place a range of additional opportunities and activities for students who have developed gaps in their knowledge and understanding over the last few months. The starting point for this will be identifying where every pupil and student is up to in each subject. We will use this information, along with the best evidence of what works best, to develop our programmes. We will write to you in due course with more information, but the most important priority right now is getting our young people back into school safely, re-establishing routines and supporting them in any way that they need.

Clearly, there is work to do over the next few months and years, and we will do that work with our young people and families. However, you will not hear us engaging with some of the unhelpful talk in some parts of the media about lost generations and lost life chances. This is hysterical and does nothing for our young people. We will ensure that every single one of the brilliant young people we have the privilege of working with has the same opportunities in life as previous pupils and students who were not affected by a pandemic.

### **Face coverings**

The Department for Education has changed its guidance on face coverings in secondary schools from 8 March. Staff and students are asked to wear face coverings at all times indoors, including in classrooms, where social distancing is not possible. This means we will ask all students to have two reusable or disposable face coverings with them each day in school. We want to ensure that teaching staff can communicate clearly in lessons, particularly where a young person may have difficulty hearing. Therefore, we will continue our approach from the autumn term where most classrooms will have a designated teaching zone where the teacher can remain at least 2 metres from students. This means teachers will generally not be required to cover their faces in lessons, except when they move outside their teaching zone. We hope this will help all students to hear the teacher clearly.

If there is a reason why your child is exempt from wearing a face covering, please ensure that the school is aware. We hope face coverings will no longer be expected in classrooms after the Easter break.



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## Year 11 and Year 13 exams

You will be aware that GCSE and A level exams have been cancelled this summer and that the government has just announced the process for awarding grades this year. There is a great deal of technical detail for us to work through and we will be in touch with the affected students and parents very shortly with what all this will mean. However, what is absolutely certain is that we will do everything we can to ensure that our students are fairly treated and receive the grades they deserve.

With the success of the vaccine programme and the improvement in infection rates, there does seem to be some light at the end of the tunnel and we really are delighted that students will be back in our schools very soon. We know that the next few months will not be easy at times and we will be impressing on all young people the need to be vigilant and sensible; we will work hard to continue to keep our young people, staff and families safe. We know, as well, that many people continue to face real challenges in the lives, whether that has come from bereavement, financial worries, health concerns or the disruption we have all faced to normal life. We also know that, for many young people and families, this winter lockdown has been even tougher than the lockdown in spring and summer 2020. We will continue to do everything we possibly can to continue to support the brilliant, resilient young people we work with and the families across our communities as we move into this next phase.

Wishing all the very best to you and your families.

Yours faithfully,

Jonny Uttley  
CEO

Richard Williman  
Headteacher



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