



Dear Parent/Guardian,

I suspect that there will have been any number of variations of Christmas experience this year, but I do hope that you managed at least a day or two of rest and relaxation.

I write to try to help you distil the details of the Government's announcements yesterday and to provide you with a framework for the coming weeks. Some of the later dates are still open to Government change; but I hope that the below can now give a relatively accurate account of how the Spring Term (nice word, "Spring"...) will open up...

Saturday January 2nd. From Saturday, boarding houses will be open to receive any boarders returning on early flights from overseas. Most overseas boarders will be returning as normal from Monday 4th January (though they are welcome to stay with guardians in the UK for a little longer if they like/can). Given that face-to-face teaching will not start for a while, we are expecting that UK boarders will receive online learning at home for now, given Government guidance; but do please let your son's Housemaster know your intended return date, as we are obviously open. For those overseas boarders required to quarantine on return, please be aware that the Test and Release scheme offers the opportunity to shorten the ten day period with a test after five days with results and subsequent release after six or seven. These government approved tests cost £95 and can be arranged through school. Please contact your son's Housemaster if this is of interest.

Monday January 4th. Staff Training day. Lateral Flow Device (LFD) Testing to start; and will continue daily for a fortnight (and then as needed thereafter). Please see more below on this – and you will also receive more from the Director of Finance and Operations (DFO – the previous title was 'Bursar'), Andy MacFarlane.

Tuesday January 5th. Online learning starts for all boys. Mr Silk (Headmaster, Prep School) and Dr Koch (Vice-Master, Upper School) will be in touch with further details.

Monday January 11th. Years 3-6 will return to school for face-to-face teaching.

Tuesday January 12th. Mocks start at school for the Fifth Form and Upper Sixth. Mr Baldock (Deputy Head, Academic) will be in touch with further details.

Monday January 18th. Years 7-8 and Fourth Form, Remove Form, Lower Sixth will return to school for face-to-face teaching. Mocks will continue at school for the Fifth Form and Upper Sixth.

Children of key workers:

If you are a key worker and are not able to arrange childcare, we will take care of your son at school. Please fill in [this form](#), in order to book your son's place, even if you have already written to school, so that we are able to plan efficiently and are fully up to date with our records. Please fill it in separately for each son if you have more than one.

Lateral Flow Device Testing - and how you can help (please):

In line with government requirements, we are putting in place the facility to test all boys in years 7 and above prior to their return to school. To that end, you will shortly be receiving a letter from the DFO,

as mentioned above, with a link to a consent form. This will need to be completed by a parent or guardian for all boys under 16. Those aged 16 and over will be required to complete the form themselves please. All consent forms are required to be returned by Saturday 2 January at 2pm at the very latest. This is to allow us to plan effectively for the testing process which will begin early next week. Half hour slots will be allocated by year group at the very latest. This is to allow us to plan effectively for the testing process which will begin early next week. Half hour slots will be allocated by year group and by house, and boys will be asked to come into school at their allocated time to be tested at two points, a minimum of three days apart, over the course of the coming fortnight. Boys and parents will receive this communication by email. Priority will be given to those in exam years who have an earlier return date of 11 January.

It is no small task to get about 1,500 people tested twice each in the first couple of weeks of term, starting next Monday, not least as the Government training documents have not been released yet and the tests themselves will not start appearing until next Monday (earliest). However, we have a plan and we will be doing our best to achieve this.

By way of help, could you please:

1. Return the consent form by Saturday 2 January at 2pm.
2. Volunteer to help at school. This opportunity will be outlined in a letter from the DFO with a response form attached (again, please complete by Saturday 2 January at 2pm) and we thank you in advance for any time you are able to offer.

Learnings from last term about transmission

It is obviously quite hard to extrapolate too much information from a relatively small number of cases, but you might be interested in our limited observations from the end of last term, when we did have some transmission of the disease.

Mixing of bubbles on buses to school caused significant issues very suddenly across the Bedford schools. We have little control over the bus network, but the Harpur Trust has written to all bus companies. It is extremely important that your son sits with the same people each day within his school, year group or family, in the same seat, with a mask on and does not mix casually with others.

Friendship groups. Most other transmissions emanated from close friendship groups. This is a harder one to crack. We all work to emphasize the importance of social distancing (and still will), even in bubbles, but this is incredibly hard to achieve amongst the young, without destroying a measure of humanity about it all and putting mental health at further risk. We continue to work at this balance.

Interestingly, there was no evidence of transmission in lessons or on the sports field last term. There was also almost none in boarding – and indeed with the two boys who did get the virus (very mildly), nobody else, even the boys in their own dormitories, fell ill.

Looking forward

The lateral flow testing is not an answer to controlling the spread of transmission, though it is an answer to the issue of so many boys missing school. Boys testing positive will be sent to isolate; but their close contacts will not follow them as they did last term. Instead, unless they opt **not** to take part in the LFD testing programme, their close contacts will be tested daily for the seven days and will only isolate if they themselves test positive, too. In other words, only boys who test positive will need to isolate – not their contacts.

We therefore need to continue to work very hard at all the measures we instilled last term. Social distancing and good hygiene remain the mantras; greater use of 2m markings around the estate (not least around teacher spaces in classrooms), closer monitoring of buses, clearer enforcement of the “no touch” rule, even tighter cleaning protocols and further work on lunch queues will all be in place.

May I also remind you about the need to keep your son at home if he is feeling ill. As I wrote in my letter on the 18th December, “all of our pupil infections have either been completely asymptomatic (which is obviously good news in one way, but makes detection hard!) or only very mildly symptomatic. Those mild symptoms have rarely included any of the official ones, but are far more likely to be (in order) a headache, tiredness and/or a sore throat. I advise this so that you can be on the lookout for this (as well as the more well documented symptoms) in the coming weeks”.

Communication

We will continue to communicate as and when necessary, but especially via the Saturday bulletins. ‘The Week’ on Friday will also reach you with its weekly news update (though may take a short break during online learning).

Your own first port of call for almost all matters remains your son’s tutor. Any absences must be reported to the Bellroom (bellroom@bedfordschool.org.uk). And the coronavirusadvice@bedfordschool.org.uk address will continue to be monitored for more general Covid-related questions.

Lastly

I reported in my letter on 18 December about some of the achievements of last term – many of which can also be found in the end of term assembly. I would also like to point you to the publication “A Year in Review 2019/20”, which you can find [here](#). I do this because I know that some people, and particularly perhaps (but by no means exclusively) parents of boys in exam years, will be worried about any long term effects on their children from this period. Reading last year’s review, though, and thinking of last term’s achievements, helps us to realise all the good which has been happening recently, which has not hindered short term chances and has in so many ways enhanced long term learning. I am not unalive to the challenges, I can assure you, but I am also hugely optimistic about this generation – it is an outstanding one and, with our continuing support for now, will teach us plenty in the years to come!

I wish you all a Happy New Year and the best of good fortune for 2021.

With kind regards indeed



James Hodgson
Head Master