

18 December 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

**Re: Start of term arrangements 2021**

As you will probably be aware from reports in the media, the government has made a number of announcements over the last two days which will have a direct impact on secondary schools and their students in the New Year.

Staggered start to the Spring Term

The Department for Education has confirmed that there will be a staggered start to the Spring Term in all English secondary schools. We already have an INSET day planned for Monday 4th January, so the arrangements will be as follows:

1. Students in Year 11, who are preparing for public examinations in the summer, will resume face to face teaching from Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January as expected
2. Students in other years who have been identified as being vulnerable will also be able to return to school from Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January.
3. Students in other years who are the children of essential workers will also be able to return to school from Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January (the definition of essential worker is the same as that used during the Summer Term). At Merrill we have already collated this information from earlier communications throughout the year with parents/carers. If however, your child now qualifies as a member of this group and you have not previously indicated this to us, and would like them to attend school between January 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> please email the following details to us by Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> December.

**Email to:** [schoolclosure@merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk](mailto:schoolclosure@merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk)

**Child/s name:**

**Year group:**

**Parent/carer name:**

**Parent carer job title:**

**Parent/Carer Employer details:**

**Parent/Carer phone number:**

**Parent/carer email address:**

**Please indicate if you require a place for the full week or detail specific days:**

4. All other students will return to school for face to face teaching from Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021, and will be required to access remote learning from January 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>

I am sorry that you are being given so little notice of this change, as I appreciate the inconvenience that it may cause. Unfortunately, schools were only made aware of the plans yesterday afternoon. Once they return to school, students should continue to follow the same procedures that they have become

accustomed to during the Autumn Term. The timing of the school day for each year group will remain unchanged, as will the infection control measures in place such as the requirement to wear a face covering in communal areas and the expectation of regular hand washing.

#### COVID-19 testing in schools

It has also been announced this week that all secondary schools and colleges of further education will be given access to lateral flow testing in January. These "quick" tests provide a result within 30 minutes. The intention appears to be that staff will be given the option to be tested regularly, on a weekly basis, and that any students or members of staff who are identified as being close contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19 will be able to be tested every day over a 7 day period, as an alternative to being required to self-isolate. It is also proposed that there will be a round of testing in the first week of term in which all students and staff are tested twice – this may mean that students in those year groups which are being asked to work remotely in the first week will be invited to come on site briefly just to take a test.

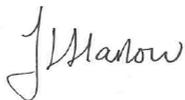
At the moment there are far more questions than answers, and I am working with my other senior colleagues in The Northworthy Trust to seek clarification on a number of issues. What I can confirm, however, is that **any testing provision at the school will be offered on a voluntary basis**, and that consent will be required from parents and/or students before any students can take part. I understand that template letters to enable individuals to give informed consent are being prepared by the Department for Education, but we are yet to receive a copy. There is also a suggestion that schools may need to seek volunteers to support with the testing process. Again there is a lack of any specific details in the official guidance, but if you would like to register an interest in getting involved with this work next term, then please do let us know.

I expect that more information will be released by the Department for Education over the coming days. Please be assured that I will continue to share details with you as they become available. If you have specific questions or concerns at this stage, or would like to express an interest in being involved as a volunteer, please feel free to get in touch by email using the address:

[schoolclosure@merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk](mailto:schoolclosure@merrillacademy.derby.sch.uk)

It will not be possible for us to reply to individual queries until 4<sup>th</sup> January at the earliest, but this address will continue to be monitored over the Christmas and New Year period so we will endeavour to include responses to frequently asked questions in our forthcoming communications to you.

Yours faithfully



Ms J Harlow  
Headteacher