

12th December 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

As Principal of Brooke Weston Academy my first duty is always the safety and welfare of our school community. As we plan for a phased return to school in the first week in January, in line with the government's direction, that responsibility feels more acute than ever. I am writing to let you know our plans for January.

Phased return for the first week of term

As the situation currently stands, only the following groups of students should attend school from January 5th to January 8th. All students in Year 11 and Year 13 and any other students taking external examinations between the 5th and the 8th of January. Vulnerable children should attend – the definition of vulnerable children is given in [this guidance](#). It is optional for the children of critical workers to return - the definition of critical workers is given [here](#).

To help us plan for January, could critical worker parents please complete this form: [Critical Worker Return](#). Parents of vulnerable students will be contacted on January 4th in order to arrange return to school.

Students who do not fall into this group will return to school on the 11th of January. From the 5th to 8th January, teaching will take place online through Microsoft Teams, and the vast majority of lessons will be live. Instructions on how to access TEAMS and how the live lessons will work can be found here: [Our Students - TEAMS](#) with further learning available from through our blended learning provision: [Online Curriculum](#).

Examinations for students in Years 10 and 12 will continue as planned from the 11th of January.

CoVID-19 rapid testing in schools

It is now clear that there are two problems we face as a society and within education. The first is the predicted rise in infections over the Christmas period and the second is the changing epidemiology. Although the rise in infections over the Christmas period was anticipated, the rapidly changing CoVID-19 variant was not expected, and we do not yet know exactly how it is behaving.

This means that if we can arrange for staff and secondary aged pupils to be tested using the quicker lateral flow device tests, this will be a big contribution to supporting the cessation of chains of transmission, and to keeping education provision open. The government has thankfully clarified over the weekend that schools are under no obligation to start mass testing on 4th January, which would be extremely challenging to achieve and do well. However, the sooner schools can put arrangements in place, the stronger the national intervention to curb transmission of the virus, so I absolutely feel we need to play our part.

The Government has told us it is their intention to deliver testing kits to schools on January 4th, but it would be foolhardy to assume everything will run smoothly. We are being prudent in taking the first part of that week to ensure everything is ready before beginning testing. Once we are certain we have all necessary resources, staff training, risk assessments and physical spaces organised, it is our intention to offer testing to students in Years 11 and 13 first. We will then encourage other students to participate on their return to school.

Parental consent for testing

Our legal advice is that we should receive written consent with a parental signature for any child under sixteen years of age to participate in testing. Arrangements for giving consent will be issued at the start of next term along with further information about the testing process itself to help you make an informed decision. To be clear, the testing is optional and all students choosing to participate are required to self-administer the swab test unless they require assistance. Staff will be on hand to process the test once the swab is taken.

After the initial mass testing phase is over, all secondary school staff will be able to have routine testing once a week; students and staff will be able to do 'serial testing' if one of their contacts within school tests positive. This means having a test each day and remaining in school unless the test is positive, which removes the necessity for self-isolating as a precaution.

Thank you for your support and understanding as we plan to do all we can to keep all our students and staff safe and to assist the national effort to control the virus. Please look out for further communications from January 4th. Of course, if there are any other major shifts in government policy over the Christmas period that mean we need to change our plans, I will write to you again.

Thank you as always for your continued support and understanding through these difficult times. Once again, I would like to wish you and your family a very happy Christmas and New Year on behalf of the staff at Brooke Weston Academy.

Yours sincerely

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

Shaun Strydom
Associate Principal