



23rd December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Firstly, our thoughts are with you all, as we are all having to cope with the increased restrictions around Christmas and the continued toll that Covid is taking on our lives.

Since I last wrote on Friday, we can perhaps see a little more clearly now why we received such rushed, last-minute guidance regarding the start of term in January. Evidently, the government was hurriedly trying to get to grips with the emergence of the new 'strain' of Covid that seems to be driving so much greater transmission, especially in the South East, but which is present across the country. We are all worried about what this will mean, both in the short term over the Christmas break, and also over the next few months. None of us know how much of a 'gamechanger' this will be, including on schooling in the New Year and beyond.

We therefore need to plan for two possible scenarios:

Plan A – the current plan of a return for Year 11 and 13 on 4th January and others on 11th January (with remote learning for the first week);

Plan B – longer-term disruption to schooling involving a number of weeks of remote learning (potentially including Year 11 and 13).

Plan A – return for Year 11 on 4th January and other year groups on 11th January 2021

The current plan is that Year 11 and 13 students will return to school as normal on 4th January 2021, with Year 11 undertaking mock exams as planned. When not in mock exams, Year 11 students will attend normal lessons.

Students in Years 7-10 and Year 12 will be 'learning from home' for that week and return to school on Monday 11th January 2021. Students will follow their normal school timetable and timings of the day, with lessons being 'broadcast' on Teams (as per the 'Remote Learning Trial' on the afternoon of 10th December 2020).

Children of 'critical workers' and those defined as 'vulnerable' (including those who would otherwise have difficulty in engaging with remote learning), will be offered supervision in school. This will be in year-group-specific IT rooms, with students joining the online lessons provided by their teachers.

In order to aid planning, we need to know how many students in Years 7-10 (and possibly 12) we need to cater for on site. Please complete the following online survey as soon as possible if:

- you are a critical worker and require your child to be supervised in school on one or more day(s) (we'd expect this to mainly be for students in Years 7 and 8)
- Your child will have difficulty in engaging with remote education at home, for example through a lack of access to IT. This would include, for example, where two siblings share access to IT, which would prevent both from 'attending' their lesson.

Headteacher: Mr T W Inman, BSc

Gordano School, St Mary's Road, Portishead, Bristol BS20 7QR

Tel: 01275 842606

Email: mailbox@gordanoschool.org.uk www.gordanoschool.org.uk

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The link to the survey is below (including a link to the definition of 'critical workers') – it only needs to be completed if you are requesting on site supervision in the first week of term for these reasons. Parents / carers of other students in the 'vulnerable' group will be contacted directly by the school.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=wwKbEeKstEKPNgL1svSOdDuyvuXW7R5Co7hjpMtF9ORUQ1ZEN0tYSzcwSVg5NzZaNFZBS0RaTkhQM4u>

Students that are entitled to **Free School Meals** but are not due to be in school in the week commencing 4th January, will be entitled to a voucher for £15 for the week from Sainsbury's. These are currently being processed.

In addition to this, the government is continuing to plan for **Covid testing** to be set up in schools from the start of term to help identify 'asymptomatic' cases and therefore reduce transmission within schools. Schools have still not been issued the key guidance needed to make plans to set this up and the context seems to be changing daily due to the impact of the new, more contagious form of the virus. It is therefore too early to be able to give further details of how this is going to work. However, especially given the news in recent days about the potentially more contagious 'new strain', we will, of course do all that we can to protect members of our community and maintain continuity of education. Our plan will be to issue parents further details, including a consent form for testing, in our next communications on Wednesday 30th December 2020.

Plan B – Longer-term disruption

Whilst it is the last thing that any of us want, we must also prepare for the possibility of schooling being further disrupted in the early weeks of next term. This could include:

- Exam year groups (Year 11 and 13) also being asked to 'learn from home', with the potential to impact on the Year 11 mocks beginning on 4th January
- Students being required to 'learn from home' for a number of weeks in Term 3

We are currently working through the implications of this so that we are well-prepared in case of this eventuality. We know the challenges for students and families of a longer-term period of 'learning from home' and will consider how best we would support students in this situation.

It is an unfortunate sign of the times, that we simply don't know how things are going to look in the New Year at this moment. Rest assured that we will do all that we can to work closely with you to overcome the challenges of the next few months together. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, "the lowest ebb marks the turning of the tide". I know, with everything that is going on at the moment, it feels like a low ebb. But we have passed the shortest day of the year, the vaccination programme is underway and, more than anything else, the strength of this wonderful community will continue to pull together to see us through to brighter times ahead... which will come!

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Happy Christmas, and we will contact you again on Wednesday 30th December with further information regarding the arrangements for the start of next term.

With best wishes for a very Happy Christmas,

Tom Inman
Headteacher

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