

31st December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

There has been a great deal in the news over the past two days about another delay to the start of the Spring term for all secondary aged children and I knew that you would all want to know what the plan is for Blackfriars Academy. Before we go into the detail of the actual plans, we want to reassure you that everything we do is motivated by our desire to work with you to keep your most precious of children as safe as we possibly can, bearing in mind their individual vulnerabilities and set against a backdrop of Staffordshire moving into Tier 4, the highest level of restrictions, and Newcastle under Lyme being considered to be a Covid 19 Hotspot.

The plan for secondary school children to return to school is based upon the Government's belief that Lateral Flow Testing will help staff and students to remain in school safely. Up to one third of people who have coronavirus experience no symptoms, in addition, many of our students would not be able to tell us if they did have symptoms such as loss of taste or smell. By testing, we will help to stop the virus spread and help to keep our Academy open as safely as possible. Our intention is to test all staff and as many of our students as possible

The Government state that they know these tests work - in validation studies conducted by Oxford University and Public Health England, they were shown to be as accurate in identifying a case as a PCR test (99.68% specificity). The tests have lower sensitivity but they are better at picking up cases when a person has higher viral load, hence the need to test frequently. Initially, the tests are taken twice, with three days separating each test. By testing students in groups and ensuring that they have had the two tests before they return to school, we can hope to keep the infection rate as low as possible in school. In secondary schools, the majority of students will not return to full-time education until **Monday 18th January**, at which point, schools will have been able to administer both tests. We believe that our students are even more vulnerable than the majority of secondary school students and are therefore very keen to ensure that we have tested as many students as possible before they return to school. This will be much more time consuming in our context and staff will require greater training because, unlike in mainstream where students will be self-administering the tests, many of our students will have to be supported or to have the test administered for them.

Before any tests can be carried out, we will require parental permission. The permission letter will be sent to you on Monday 4th January when you will also receive a phone call from the class team to discuss your child's individual risk assessment and any queries you may have about the return to school plan. Our initial planning is set out below, but this may be subject to change dependent upon arrival of testing kits, the number of parents who give permission, the results of the early tests, any more Government announcements etc.

Parents / carers must bring their child to school for their first test and then return home with them. Results (only if positive) will be texted to them. The tests will be carried out in Testing Bays by trained staff following procedures laid out by the Government. The tests will be staggered so that there will not be any chance of self-isolation rules between families being violated. Details of

this will be discussed with you on Monday 4th when a member of the class team rings you. The plan for carrying out the testing is below:-

	Week 1 4 th - 8 th Jan	Week 2 11-15 th Jan	Week 3 18 th – 22 nd Jan – all students in school
Monday	INSET Day – Staff training on procedures / Risk assessments etc	Vulnerable children & children of critical workers (Test 2) Gladstone (Test 2) Portmeirion (Test 2)	Moorcroft (Test 2) Wedgwood (Test 2)
Tuesday	Staff (Test 1)	Bridgewater (Test 1) Royal Doulton (Test 1) Middleport (Test 1)	
Wednesday	Vulnerable children and Children of critical workers * (Test 1)	Moorcroft (Test 1)	
Thursday	Gladstone (Test 1) Staff (Test 1)	Wedgwood (Test 1)	
Friday	Portmeirion (Test 1) Staff (Test 2)	Royal Doulton (Test 2) Bridgewater (Test 2) Middleport (Test 2)	

Green denotes the day that your child will return to school on a full-time basis

*Please discuss with class team on Monday if you are a critical worker or if you feel that your child's risk assessment should reflect their greater need to be in school before the testing roll-out.

We are aware that some of our students will struggle with testing (particularly those in Dudson, O'Cliff and Spode) We will therefore discuss arrangements individually with you as parents / carers when we ring on Monday 4th January.

Trying to develop a plan that keeps all students and staff as safe as possible is always difficult and we understand that, for many of you, this extension to the time out of school will be difficult. What we are trying to do is balance the increased risk to students because of the higher incidence rate in our local area, the new strain of Covid, our students' medical needs and their vulnerability to catching Covid, particularly after the 'freeing up' of restrictions at Christmas. Reviewing risk assessments this morning, our view is that, for the majority of our students, they are safer at home until we can get the testing process underway and to bring them in gradually but safely. There will be work set for all students from Tuesday 5th January 2021. Queries about this can be

discussed during your class team phone call on Monday 4th January. Can I thank you all in advance for your support during these incredibly difficult times,

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alison Parr'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.

(Alison Parr, Principal)