

Thursday 31st December, 2020

Dear parents and carers,

I am sure most of you will be aware of the government announcement last night to delay the opening of secondary schools and to move a number of regions, including the North East into higher covid alert tiers.

The government has made these decisions based on the rising levels of infection across the country and the increasing prevalence of the new, more infectious strain of covid -19.

The government has stated that the delay in the opening of secondary schools is to allow the mass testing programme to be put in place. Secondary special schools are part of the mass testing programme. The additional training day we have on the 4th of January is to allow us to begin to put in place some of the measures required to implement the testing programme, however it is clear that such a complex process will require more than one day to be implemented in any school setting, and will be even more complex in a special school.

The information about the mass testing programme has not been fully shared with schools yet, we expect to begin to receive detailed training on Monday. When we have received this, we will be able to talk to parents and carers about the implications for your individual child and how we will run the programme in school. I apologise that I currently do not have more detail but want to reassure you that we will share information with you as soon as we are able to.

Until we know how mass testing will work in our school we are unable to fully open to all students.

Unless contacted directly by the school on Monday 4th January, your child should remain at home next week.

From Tuesday 5th January the school will be open to the children of keyworkers only and to a small number of children and young people who have been identified as extremely vulnerable. We will be using the criteria we used during the first partial closure of the school in March 2020 to identify these children.

We will contact parents and carers directly on Monday if we are able to offer your child a place in school on Tuesday.

We hope to increase the number of children and young people who are able to access school later in the week if circumstances allow. Again we will contact parents and carers directly to offer places in school if they become available.

I appreciate that this will be upsetting for many of our students who will be looking forward to returning to school and may pose childcare issues for many parents and carers. I am very sorry for the late notice and the disruption this may cause, but we are acting as quickly as we can in response to the changes announced by the government last night.

By putting these measures in place, we hope to be able to open the school safely to all students as soon as possible.

Families whose child normally receives a free school meal will continue to receive free school meal vouchers to cover the time their child is not in school. These will be sent out using the voucher system used over Christmas.

The move to Tier 4 has also changed the government guidance on shielding for those people classed as clinically extremely vulnerable. We recognise the complex health needs of many of our young people and will be happy to discuss worries and concerns that families have about the return to school for their child at the current time. Pastoral teams will be in touch with families as soon as possible next week.

Once again I apologise for the short notice and the lack of clear, detailed information. I will be in touch early next week to update you on the testing programme within school.

I would like to thank you for your patience and your continued support of the school during these difficult times and wish you all a safe and, hopefully brighter, New Year.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Hamilton.

Head Teacher