

4 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

As many of you will be aware, Somerset has now been placed into the Tier four Covid-19 restriction level. In addition, the Secretary of State also made an announcement about the reopening of schools and mass testing on Wednesday 30 December.

Both of these events means that we have now revised our plans for the return to school this week. I know that last minute changes are unhelpful, so please accept my apologies, but I'm sure you will understand why this is the case.

I have also been able to speak with all other Somerset special school head teachers, to share our thinking and explore all possible options. I believe we have reached a shared understanding of what we need to do to keep children in our Special Schools as safe as possible.

Mass Testing in Special Schools

Thank you to all of those who have spoken to the Family team this morning, this has helped inform the decisions we have made with regard to our return to school.

As a school we have signed up to the rapid asymptomatic testing programme. We believe this will help to remain as safe as possible and open for as many children as possible. There is a lot for us to put in to place and we need time to do this properly.

We have set up a testing centre on school site today and we are hoping to be able to begin offering staff tests from tomorrow (Tuesday 5 January).

We will also offer testing to pupils/students over the age of 11, who can administer the test themselves or with minimum levels of prompts and encouragement.

No pupil/student will be forced to be tested and testing will not take place without parental consent. If your child is over 16 and is competent to make their own decisions, we will work with them and you to agree consent.

We need time to work with NHS partners to better understand the role they will play in the mass testing of pupils with SEND who are not able to test themselves, should this be an option later down the line.

We believe that offering mass testing as a school is an additional way of helping us in reducing the risk of the virus in school and our wider communities. Please see the additional letter and consent form regarding mass testing in school.

Bubble Closures and Staffing

We will continue to monitor our staffing levels and make decisions about which classes are open on a daily basis. We will be open to all pupils, where it is safe to do so and there is sufficient staffing to maintain pupil safety. Here are the principles we continue to follow:

- Try to maintain bubble, with its own staffing team;
- Reviewing risk assessments of most vulnerable pupils, that we would want in school fulltime because of external risk factors;
- Consider part time opening of bubbles (part-timetables, with additional of home learning) where staffing drops below the required number;
- Close individual bubbles where staffing drops below required number;
- Review need for whole school closure in conjunction with Governing Body

We very much look forward to seeing your children in school tomorrow.

Wishing you a happy and healthy new year.

Yours sincerely



Helen Farnell
Executive Head Teacher