

10th February 2021

Dear Parents, Carers and Students

I continue to wish that you and those around you remain well and I hope that your family members in the top 4 vaccination priority groups have received, or been offered, their first vaccine dose.

With only a few days left before the end of Term 3 and a much-needed February holiday break for all of us, in truth, there isn't a great deal to update you on since my last letter in early January. There haven't been any significant changes in government policy noteworthy of a mention (or U-Turns!) and there isn't much to report. We are in this strange-no-man's-land awaiting the outcome of the DfE/Ofqual consultation on the summer exam's awarding process and keeping an eye on the news in the hope of hearing positive news about vaccination rates continuing to rise and Covid case rates continuing to fall. None the less, I wanted to get in touch to provide you with an update on a few matters:

Key messages in this letter:

- **Possible Wider Re-Opening of Schools after 8th March**
- **February Half Term**
- **Free School Meals Provision over the February Half Term Break and the COVID-19 Winter Grant Scheme - Winter Fuel Payments 2021**
- **Positive Covid Test Contact Tracing over the February Half Term**

Possible Wider Re-Opening of Schools after 8th March

You will have heard the Prime Minister's announcement the week before last confirming that schools in England will not open more widely until 8th March at the very earliest, subject to a review of the public health evidence. Although it's very sad that students will not be returning until at least a couple of weeks after half term, it is in some ways reassuring to at least have a 'target date' for the wider re-opening of schools.

Given the confirmation that students will continue to learn remotely from home for at least some of Term 4, we continue to review and reflect on how we can continue to support students as best we possibly can, both in their learning but also in the wider sense. We have appreciated the positive feedback about how we have supported students through this challenging period but as the 'fatigue' of learning from home builds, we are carefully reviewing exactly how we can develop this further as we progress into term 4. Following the letter of the 31st December, setting out remote learning provision for this term, there will be further clarification of term 4 provision regarding remote learning, homework and pastoral care within a letter from Mr Smith and Mrs Bartlett before the end of next week.

There is some ongoing speculation in the media about the reopening of schools more widely beyond the 8th March; how they may do so, which year groups may need to be prioritised, whether it may be regionally different, suggestions about rotas for different year groups coming in on different days etc. At the moment this all continues to be speculative and I don't expect to hear any confirmed plans until nearer the week beginning 22nd February; the two weeks' notice of reopening plans the Prime Minister said he would give schools, parents/carers and students. Unfortunately, if history is anything to go by, it is highly likely that I will hear of this news at the same time as everyone else via the evening news.

February Half Term

The Department for Education recently confirmed that 'schools will close as usual over February half-term and are not expected to remain open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers during that week.'

It is clear from the pupil, parent and staff feedback we have received that we all need some rest away from school work and screens over the February Half Term holiday period. Staff have been asked not to set or request submission of work, provide feedback or respond to parental/student communications over the holiday period. Similarly, there should be no expectation on students to engage in or complete any new home learning activities over the half term break if they are up to date with all their work. I suggest the holiday period is, however, a good opportunity for some students to use the time to 'catch up' on any incomplete or outstanding work that remains from this term.

If you have any urgent concerns about your child's welfare over the holiday break, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Chris Smith, Pastoral Deputy Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead via his email: CSmith@corsham.wilts.sch.uk

Free School Meals Provision over the February Half Term Break and the COVID-19 Winter Grant Scheme - Winter Fuel Payments 2021

Local Authorities have been provided with funds to support families facing hardship during these unprecedented times under the COVID Winter Grant Scheme. As you will know, some of these funds have been used to make sure children eligible for benefit-related Free School Meals have access to food for their lunches over the school holidays up to Easter 2021. In addition to our normal food voucher arrangements for next week, Wiltshire Council will be supporting the same families with their winter fuel bills in the form of a fixed amount e-voucher. We are in the process of confirming the arrangements with Wiltshire council for next week and we will be in touch with these families with more information in due course.

Positive Covid Test Contact Tracing over the February Half Term

Schools continue to play an important role in contact tracing for those pupils and staff who continue to attend school as part of our provision for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. As a reminder, I wanted to clarify what you should do if your child tests positive for COVID-19 during the February break.

Public Health have identified a 6-day window after the final day of teaching in which schools must be informed so we can assist with contact tracing should your child test positive for Covid-19 over the holiday period.

- 1) Parents/carers must continue to inform the school of confirmed student positive test cases if symptoms developed within 48 hours of last being in school (up to Sunday 14th February if they were in school on Friday 12th).
- 2) Parents/carers of pupils who were not symptomatic but tested positive within 48 hours of last being in school (up to Sunday 14th February if they were in school on Friday 12th) also need to let the school know.

For example:

If a pupil was last in school on Friday 12th February:

- Develops Covid Symptoms on Sunday 14th February (within 48 hours of last being in school)
- Gets tested on Monday 15th February
- Receives a positive result on Wednesday 17th February
- Notifies us by email on 17th February.

The student will have been infectious while in school on Friday 12th February and we would need to contact Public Health who would carry out their risk assessment and potentially ask the year group bubble to self isolate.

- 3) Where a student tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), having developed symptoms more than 48 hours since last being in school (from Monday onwards if they were in school on Friday 12th), **the school does not need to be contacted**. Parents and carers should follow contact tracing instructions provided by NHS Test and Trace.

If you need to inform the school of a student positive Covid-19 test result as per 1) and 2) above please email me at Rbell@corsham.wilts.sch.uk as all other telephone lines/inboxes will not be monitored over the holiday period. If informing me of a positive case it would be really useful if you could include the following information within your email:

- Name of Child and Year Group
- Date of onset of COVID-19 symptoms (including what symptoms they had)
- Date of the Covid test
- Date of the Covid Test result (and evidence of the result/ID number)
- Date your child was last in school
- How do they get to school?
 - E.g. walk, cycle, car, public transport, school transport, taxi
 - If by car – do you car share with anyone else?
 - If public transport/school transport do they know who they sat near?

At the start of Term 4 on Monday 22nd February you will need to continue to inform us if your child tests positive, is self-isolating or symptomatic and contact the school via Attendance@corsham.wilts.sch.uk whilst also making sure your child self-isolates for the required number of days.

And finally,

As we reach the end of Term 3 after another 6 weeks of lockdown and remote learning it seems hard to believe we are only a few weeks away from the one-year anniversary of my first letter home to parents last year about Coronavirus; little did we know then how our lives would have changed over the next 12 months. It is timely to look back and celebrate how far we have come since then but equally important to look forward with optimism. I continue to be inspired by the engagement and perseverance of our young people, the tireless efforts of our staff and the huge support of parents doing their best to support their children in the most challenging of circumstances.

So, as another term ends, let me finish with a suggestion and a quotation.

The suggestion: over the holiday period try to avoid the speculative news about reopening plans and the endless talk of catch up, which far too frequently uses catastrophising language and does a disservice to the skills of teachers and patronises children and young people. Instead, look forward

with optimism that schools will re-open and young people will be supported in the very best way we can.

And with that in mind, so to the quotation. The physicist Amory Lovins was asked whether he was an optimist or a pessimist. He replied:

“I am neither — because they are just two different forms of fatalism. The optimist says things have to get better, and the pessimist says things have to get worse. I believe in applied hope. Things can get better, but you have to make them so.”

Have a restful break from remote learning duties, we will be ready to resume in term 4 and prepared for the term ahead with ‘applied hope’.

Look after yourselves and those around you.

Take care

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rod Bell". The letters are connected and fluid, with a prominent 'R' and 'B'.

Rod Bell
Headteacher