
Rob Pavey, Headteacher

1 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers of all Years,

Start of term

- **Staff INSET** will take place on Monday 4th January, as planned
- **Years 11 and 13** will learn online from Tuesday 5th to Friday 8th January, and will come to school in person on Monday 11th January.
- The **Year 13 Sport BTEC exam** scheduled for **January 6th** will take place as planned in school.
- **Other year groups** will start learning online on Thursday 7th January (we see no reason why we should wait until Monday 11th January, as the guidance seemed to suggest, but we do need a bit of extra time to prepare), but will not come to school in person until Monday 18th January.
- **Year 10 mock exams** (Music Technology and RE re-takes for absent students) are likely to take place in person on Friday 15th January in school: confirmation will be sent to the students concerned next week.

All online learning will follow the normal timetable via Google Classroom, in the manner that is now familiar. If any student does not have a device they can use for the whole of the school day, please email the appropriate year team, and we will arrange for a loan machine to be dropped off (we had a delivery of 130 devices from the government at the end of last term).

School will be open to any student who needs it if there is a problem of any kind with accessing lessons from home, or for the children of key workers or those who are vulnerable in any way. Students who come into school should wear their normal uniform, and will either be supervised in a computer room to join online lessons, or will be physically present in class while their normal teacher teaches the rest of the class online. On Tuesday 5th and Wednesday 6th January, students in years 7 – 10 and 12 are very welcome to come into school if it is absolutely necessary, but as lessons are not being taught online for those two days, their normal lessons will not be available. Food parcels will be available for children who are entitled to Free School Meals, but who are learning from home: please ring reception to check they are ready to avoid a wasted journey.

Mass testing

Mass testing will be done via Lateral Flow Tests, which involve swabbing the back of the throat and nose. Students will do the swabbing themselves, before handing the swab to a staff member for processing. We support the idea of mass testing, and we will roll it out as soon as possible, but I need to be honest about the limitations. Below are some of the issues, which have not appeared in government communication. An outline plan follows afterwards.

- Guidance and statements are not clear about what the government would like to happen: at Cheney, we will aim to get full weekly testing for all students, but this is not a trivial undertaking, and it is not likely to be ready soon, although a partial programme will be available much faster. Government guidance about who is to be tested and how often appears to be shifting, but we will do what we can.
- There are 5 million students of secondary school age in England; Test and Trace tested less than half that number in the week before Christmas, which is an indication of the scale of what schools have been asked to do with two weeks' notice.
- Much has been made of military assistance: this will consist of 1,500 personnel available to give advice over the phone. There are about 5,000 secondary schools in England.
- The workforce planning tool provided to us suggests we need 17 members of staff for a school of Cheney's size. All these staff will need to be recruited, trained and have a DBS check.
- The likely financial support we will receive will probably cover about 3 weeks' costs.
- Testing every student and every member of staff every week will involve taking the assembly hall or sports hall out of action (needed for lessons and mock exams) and will involve disruption to every lesson of the week.
- Currently, we are not allowed to give tests to students to take home, or to get them to do the whole process themselves during tutor time (the best solution), although this may change.

All the above is not to say it can't be done: it can, and it will, but not easily, not immediately and not without significant impact. Here is the outline plan:

- Work with Oxfordshire County Council on a standardised risk assessment, clarification of clinical governance issues, job descriptions, rates of pay and recruitment.
- Test all staff, starting next week.
- Administer a first test when students come back to school. This is a major challenge, and will have to be done by existing staff, but we will try to achieve it for Year 11 and 13 on Monday 11th January and for other years the following week. This may involve a staggered return to school on that day.

- Roll out weekly testing to Year 11 and Year 13 as soon as possible; I cannot promise this by the week of 11th January, however, as it will depend on recruiting staff to do it.
- Extend this programme as resources allow to other year groups.
- I also attach the official information letters that have come from the government. This includes information to accompany the consent form (please read the attached document before filling in the Google Form below), a privacy notice and some data protection FAQs.
- Gain parental consent as soon as possible. Please fill in the Google Form below to indicate that you give permission for your child to take part in the mass testing. Participation is entirely voluntary, students will administer the swab themselves, students can decline to take part at any point, even if parents have given permission. Students over the age of 16 can give permission themselves, although we also welcome parental consent: <https://forms.gle/E3Z5oGgxuSfeyi3N8>

Serial testing

You may have read that close contacts of a positive case can avoid having to self-isolate by taking a lateral flow test every day for seven days. This depends on that person being able to socially distance effectively, as the tests themselves appear to miss 30% of positive cases. This can and will be useful for staff who are better able to maintain social distancing, but is not possible for students. We will therefore continue sending students who are close contacts home to self-isolate, at least until there is clearer evidence about the safety and effectiveness of serial testing.

Outlook for the rest of term

Unfortunately, I think this term is going to be considerably more disrupted than last term. It seems likely to me that the serious outbreak we had at the end of last term was the new variant, because of the speed with which it spread. I am afraid that I think the previous definition of a close contact is not likely to be sufficient in a classroom; we suspect that almost three quarters of the students in the Year 8 tutor group where the outbreak originated caught the virus. We may well need to send any class in which a student tests positive home to self-isolate, which will unfortunately have a significant impact. We will be thinking about this carefully over the next week.

Summer exams

There has been no announcement about any changes to the exams this summer in England. This is speculation at the moment, but I think there is now a strong chance that they will be cancelled again, although that very much depends on the course the pandemic takes over the next few months. If they do get cancelled, I am not expecting any announcement until the last moment, possibly in April. We must therefore assume that they are going ahead, while preparing for the possibility that they won't. This means that

the mock exams for Year 13 take on greater significance, as do the second Year 11 mocks. Students should also remember that class work, homework and unit tests will also be taken into account in calculating a grade; the more evidence teachers have, the better able they are to predict good grades. Teachers cannot predict good grades without evidence, so there is a clear advantage in taking part in mocks and tests, and in submitting homework on time.

In short, there is no cause for panic (teachers will predict the best possible grade, without cheating), but now is the time to engage fully with lessons (whether online or in school) and not to put work off until another day.

Many thanks in advance for your continued and very welcome support, and happy New Year!

Rob Pavey
Headteacher