

24 February 2021

Dear Parent/ Carer

I am writing following the government announcements on Monday evening about return to school and testing. It is lovely to be working towards a firm timetable for students to be back in school with us. We are greatly looking forward to having that energy and enthusiasm that our students bring back in school.

While we must not get ahead of ourselves there is light at the end of this Covid-tunnel. The relatively low rate of infection locally, the roll-out of vaccinations and the measures we have in place in school, together with the use of lateral flow testing, are all encouraging and I hope will reassure parents/ carers that now is the time to have students back in school and returning as soon as we can to enjoy the full experience of being in school with their peers and with staff who know them well.

In this letter I wanted to outline our plans for bringing students back to school and to manage the testing programme. Further detail will follow.

The government has sanctioned the return to school from 8 March. To ensure that students return after a long period of home learning and can feel settled and well supported we will phase the return by year group beginning with exam year groups, Y11-13, followed by Y9 and then Y10. Y9 in particular will benefit from a little time with fewer students in school as they will be using some specialist teaching spaces that they have not used before and will be finding their way around the whole school for the first time.

In preparation for the return of students, we will designate 4 and 5 March as “no live lessons” days, apart from tutor time. Work will be set but teaching staff can then work together in school on planning for the following week.

During the week beginning 8 March, those year groups not yet back in school will continue with remote learning and our vulnerable/ key worker group will continue to come into school.

We will continue with our staggered start and end to the school-day so Y9, 10 and 12 arrive for 8.45am, Y11 for 8.55am and Y13 for 9.05am. Students will be asked to wear a face covering in lessons, as will teachers unless speaking to the class from the socially distanced box at the front of the classroom. Students and staff who are exempt are asked to wear a lanyard identifying themselves as such and this avoids questioning.

Before students return to the classroom we will be providing lateral flow testing as prescribed by the government. We have been providing testing for all students and staff who have been in school since the beginning of January so procedures are established and staff trained and experienced in supervising this. Students self-swab in a simple procedure. Testing is not mandatory but students are strongly encouraged to participate. The consent of parents / carers is always required.

The first set of tests will be offered next week with subsequent tests taking place when students are back in school. Once home test kits have been delivered to school these will be issued so that students will be able to carry out a test at home.

Attached with this letter is an invitation to come into school at a specific time on a specific day for a test. This requires a consent form to be sent to school electronically or a hard copy to be signed and brought in to the test, unless we have already received a consent form from you following my letter in January. Once tested the student will go home and be notified of the result by email. The lateral flow tests pick up asymptomatic cases ie somebody who is infectious but shows no symptoms. A positive test will trigger self-isolation, a PCR test at a testing centre and if that is positive, then an extended period of self-isolation.

Please also find attached the consent form. This is required for students in all year groups. Please return it by email to covidconsent@vandyke.cbeds.co.uk as soon as possible.

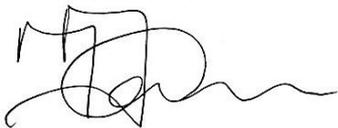
Testing such large numbers of students is a logistical challenge but will provide a degree of additional reassurance for students, parents/ carers and staff that the return to school is safe.

The grid provides a summary for the coming few weeks:

	Return to school	Remote learning
Mon 1		All
Tue 2		All
Wed 3		All
Thu 4		All No live lessons
Fri 5		All No live lessons
Sat 6		
Sun 7		
Mon 8	11 12 13	9 10
Tue 9		9 10
Wed 10	9	10
Thu 11		10
Fri 12	10	

If you have any questions please contact the school office in the first instance and we will respond quickly.

Thank you for your continued support.



Tim Carroll