



The Matthew Arnold School

Part of the Bourne Education Trust



Thursday 24th December

Dear Parents and Carers

COVID-19 mass testing programme and the January return

You will probably have seen or read the stories in the news recently about secondary schools being asked to implement a phased return to school in January in order to set up a mass COVID-19 testing programme for students and staff. Despite the last-minute nature of these government requests, a great deal of work has gone on behind the scenes at national and at county level, and in our case, by the Core Group of the Bourne Education Trust. I have discussed the way forward at length with them and with Anne Field, our Chair of Governors. I have also attended online government webinars and been in close contact with the other Spelthorne secondary Headteachers.

I was initially uncertain whether to write to you. Everyone deserves their holiday, whatever it looks like, and the situation may have changed again by January. But then I thought of all the messages of support I have had from you throughout this pandemic. The recurrent theme was that you wanted to be kept informed, and I agree - we can cope with most things as long as we know what is going on. My apologies in advance, then, for the amount of information in this letter!

The government testing programme is envisaged as follows:

1. The test process is administered on school site by school staff and volunteers
2. Students self-test twice at the beginning of the school term with 3-5 days in between tests
3. Staff self-test once, and then weekly until further notice
4. From then on, any staff and/or students identified as being a contact of a confirmed case will be tested every day for the next 7 school days. They may continue to come to school as long as each test is negative
5. Participation in any part of the programme is optional; no student or staff member will be turned away from school because they have not participated

The tests used are known as '[lateral flow](#)' tests. They give a result within 30 minutes which makes them well-suited for a programme like this. A positive lateral flow test would impose an immediate period of self-isolation during which a [PCR](#) (standard) test should be taken as quickly as possible.

Most schools start back on Monday 4th January. They are likely to take Monday as a training inset for these tests, then bring back exam years on the Tuesday, and the rest of the school on Monday 11th, with the interim time being used to invite students in just for testing.



The extra complication for us is of course the fact that we will be returning to the new building. This doesn't officially become 'ours' until Thursday 7th January, and we have designated two vital days for unpacking and staff orientation. As things stand, therefore, we are asking year 11 students, children of key worker parents and those from vulnerable families to come back on the 11th, with the possibility that other year groups will not return until Monday 18th. We will be providing remote education for those students from 11th January (more details to follow). The intention is that students in those year groups undertaking remote learning from home will be invited into school before their return to undertake two lateral flow tests. Where timing does not allow this, students will be tested once they have returned.

I am naturally very reluctant to eat further into the term in this way, having already been constrained by the readiness of the new building. We are already offering an online school for year 11 students on Monday 4th, Tuesday 5th and Wednesday 6th, and we are looking at all possible ways to get students tested (or at least the process started) before Monday 11th January.

To do this we would need to do the following:

1. Find a suitable building to hold the testing (probably our Sports Hall)
2. Get parental consent in plenty of time (I will send out a form next Tuesday, 29th December)
3. Explore the use of software which parents can use to book tests
4. Finally, and most importantly, ask for volunteers from the school community to help administer the tests. Full training, PPE and equipment will be provided, and there will always be a core staff team in the test site. The consent form mentioned above will give the opportunity for parents/carers and other adults to volunteer their time

I know you will have many questions about the testing process itself. The consent form I send out will contain links to other documents produced by the school and the government.

Setting up this programme in schools is an incredibly complex operation. We have been sent some information about how it should work already, but more detailed guidance is expected to be produced by the government over the Christmas holiday period. Please accept my apologies for having to send this letter after term has already ended. We are having to respond to a vast quantity of extremely last-minute and complex government guidance.

As a final caveat, please bear in mind how quickly the national situation has changed in recent days. We should all be prepared for further changes, changes which may well make the planning for these tests redundant.

Thank you for your patience, and all my best wishes for a safe, healthy and enjoyable holiday.



Mary Gould
Headteacher