

January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers and Students,

*Happy New Year to everyone in the STAR Multi-Academy Trust Community*

As we approached the end of last term, I wrote to say 'thank you' to everyone in our Trust community for all of your hard work and endeavour, which had made the return to school during the Autumn Term possible and positive and, for the most part, sustained. I also suggested that the New Year might bring further challenges for education as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact on all areas of wider society.

We continue to find ourselves faced with ongoing uncertainty in schools where we must plan for various eventualities and recent Parliamentary briefings have once again changed the planned position. I am writing to share the current position, which is mandated to schools by the Department for Education.

The current infection level in our locality, alongside the Tier 3 status in North Yorkshire, means that our primary schools will be open to all pupils on 5<sup>th</sup> January (following a staff training day on 4<sup>th</sup> January). Alongside this, our primary schools will continue to prepare for failsafe remote learning eventualities should this become the reality. The roll-out of lateral flow testing for primary school staff is suggested for late January.

The staggered start for our secondary schools has now been amended:

- Both schools have staff training and preparation on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January – this allows for vital remote learning preparation and also the first steps into lateral-flow test training
- 5-8<sup>th</sup> January secondary sites will be open to vulnerable students and children of identified Critical Workers ONLY
- Week 11<sup>th</sup> January our secondary schools will be open to exam year groups, critical worker children and vulnerable students
- Week 18<sup>th</sup> January all students will return to on-site learning
- Weeks 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> January, those not eligible to on-site learning will have remote learning provided in accordance with our Trust Remote Learning Policy

The government strategy is that this staggered start in secondary schools will allow for the roll-out of mass weekly lateral flow testing. Our initial focus must be to ensure high quality remote learning is in place from 5<sup>th</sup> January and to embark, alongside North Yorkshire health colleagues, on planning the logistics and training for testing and from there to consider a rational timeline for roll-out of a testing programme. School-wide weekly lateral flow testing is a sizeable operation and moving to this, alongside moving to school-wide remote learning, is a considerable challenge, but one with which we will engage positively as we consider the continuation of our students' education of paramount importance.

Please do allow school leadership some time over the coming days to engage with incoming guidance, to plan and prepare and await further communication from your child's school with regard lateral flow testing. Be assured, it is being carefully and diligently researched and planned.

You will understand that our school leaders are working with rapidly evolving advice and that the above information may be subject to change at any time, with due regard to Health and Safety necessitating short-notice partial or full closure in extenuating circumstances. Please can I therefore ask all families to pay close attention to all school level communication to ensure measures are maintained to protect everyone's welfare. Please also remember that local area Tier restrictions apply at all times when students are not on the school site. Let us hope that 2021 soon evolves into a more positive year.

Yours sincerely,

*Ian Yapp*

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