

2nd January 2021

COVID Update

Dear Families,

May I firstly take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy New Year and hope that everyone has had a lovely and safe Christmas.

Last week the Government announced further measures in order to keep everyone as safe as possible as transmission rates continue to increase across the country, this included the North East moving into tier 4 restrictions. In addition to this the Government is offering secondary schools and colleges the opportunity to engage in various testing programmes in order to identify asymptomatic people (which accounts for a third of all cases) and also to help break the transmission chain. The testing programme is a 3 strand approach and involves the following:

- **Mass testing to help identify asymptomatic people (2 tests 3-5 days apart)**
- **On-going testing:**
 - **Weekly testing of staff**
 - **Testing to allow contacts of a positive case to remain in schools and college (test every day for 7 days)**

All of the above testing is done via a lateral flow test, which involves swabbing the throat and nose. The tests are done onsite within the school and college and results are obtained within 30 minutes.

All testing is optional and would need consent from an individual (parent/carer, staff member or child if they are over 16 with mental capacity).

As you can appreciate there is a lot of planning and preparation in order to mobilise any testing programmes that we feel will be appropriate. This will include setting up test sites, training, compliance checks, risk assessments and obtaining consent. Mainstream secondary schools have been given a staggered start back to school in order to mobilise their testing plans.

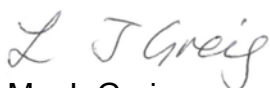
Initially we had anticipated returning back on Tuesday 5th January, however, due to the amount of preparation required to mobilise any testing programmes, our students will now return on **Wednesday 6th January**.

The Government have announced that any parents who wish to keep their children or young person at home in the first week will **not be penalised** for non-attendance whilst testing programmes are set up. Teachers will phone families on Monday to gather views of what families wish to do.

Whilst in tier 4, students who are clinically extremely vulnerable are advised **NOT** to attend school/college. Remote Education plans will be in place for these students. Please speak to the health professionals involved with your child or young person if you need any further advice on this.

We will communicate with you again once we have created plans around our testing programmes. If you have any queries please raise these with your child's class teacher when they phone on Monday.

Yours sincerely



Mrs L Greig
(Interim CEO)