



Pensby High School

Irby Road, Heswall, Wirral.
CH61 6XN

T 0151 342 0570

F 0151 342 0571

E schooloffice@psf.wirral.sch.uk

www.pensbyhighschool.com

Headteacher: Mr K Flanagan

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Dear Parents & Carers

I sent an email to you at the start of the Christmas break to give you a very brief outline with regard to reopening the school for the Spring term and I am writing to you now with a fuller outline of the week beginning 4 January 2021, however, I would add a caveat in that central government have and may well change their instructions again in response to the national increase in coronavirus infection rates.

There are two main issues to focus on, return to school itself and the use of lateral flow tests, both are still not entirely clear, so please forgive me if I have to write again before we return.

Return to school:

Term was officially due to start on Monday 4 January 2021 for all students, however, we have been instructed to limit the reopening of the school to Year 11 and vulnerable/keyworker children, with all other students initially being taught on-line and a subsequent phased return of all pupils to school.

The new instructions regarding the start of term were issued by central government after school had closed on Thursday 17 December 2020. For the sake of clarity, school had been due to close on Friday 18 December 2020 but this was brought forward in response to direction from central government so that schools would not have to call parents with regard to self-isolation on Christmas Eve.

Over the Christmas break the Department for Education added an additional INSET day so that schools have the opportunity to respond to the school reopening plans suggested by central government. Therefore, whilst all staff will be present in school from 4 January 2021, the additional INSET day means that we will not be open to any students on Monday 4 January 2021 and **Year 11 will therefore return on Tuesday 5 January 2021.**

Arrangements for Education from Tuesday 5 January 2021 onwards:

Students present in school from Tuesday 5 January 2021: Year 11 students will be in school and following their normal timetable.

Students in Years 7-10 who are identified as '**vulnerable**' are entitled to return to school from 5 January 2021. The school will use the appropriate national criteria to identify 'vulnerable' students and will inform parents/carers that their child is eligible to return. Please would these parents email returertoschool@psf.wirral.sch.uk indicating their child's name and form and that they will be returning from 5 January 2021.

Students in Years 7-10 who have parents who are 'key workers' are entitled to return to school from Tuesday 5 January 2021. The children of key worker parents (who have previously provided documentation to the school regarding their key worker status) are eligible to return on 5 January 2021. Parents who have recently become key workers should provide relevant proof of their status (via email) for their children to be eligible to return from 5 January 2021. Please would these parents email returntoschool@psf.wirral.sch.uk indicating their child's name and form and that they will be returning from 5 January 2021.

Students in Years 7-10 will be provided with online learning from Tuesday 5 January 2021 using the Teams platform as the method of communication. Equally, we are unable to offer fully interactive lessons at the moment as our broadband provider (Wirral Local Authority) cannot guarantee that they can provide the necessary bandwidth. Therefore, it might be that we have to limit the number of 'live' Teams lessons taking place at any one time.

The reality is that we need 4 January 2021 to plan what we are doing with regard to Years 7 – 10 and to organise who requires provision as a vulnerable/keyworker students given that we are hoping to teach our normal timetable and we have Year 11 in school. It is likely that I will need to take staff from Years 7 – 10 to manage vulnerable/keyworker children if places are required in any great number and that will impact on what we can offer in terms of online learning, whilst we manage Year 11 day-to-day.

Lateral Flow Tests:

Identifying people who are currently infected with coronavirus so that they do not come into school is of vital importance. Once again, I would ask that if you have any concerns regarding your child showing coronavirus symptoms that they stay at home and are tested before returning to school. Your support and vigilance as parents has to date limited the number of positive cases in our school community.

I am sure that lateral flow tests being suggested by the DfE have many benefits for all schools and communities across the country, but I along with many headteachers are unclear as to how we can provide these in our schools from 4 January 2021 given the lack of adequate time and resources to plan for their implementation. **At the moment, I cannot provide lateral flow tests when pupils start to return from 5 January 2021.**

I want to be clear with parents as to the requirements set out by central government for the introduction of lateral flow tests in schools to dispel any ideas that school leaders are putting 'obstacles' in the way of the proposals.

The DfE guidance requires that I effectively setup a clinical testing centre, with a non-porous floor that must be 'scrubbed' down at the end of each day. Like many schools we have set aside all the largest, and potentially most suitable, areas in the school to provide for 'Year group Bubbles', as per the existing guidance from central government. This means that I no longer have spaces suitable for a 'test centre' of any size that are clean, heated and can be cleaned down at the end of each day.

The school then has to recruit appropriate staff / volunteers with the necessary clearance to work with young people and for them to be trained to safely undertake the lateral flow tests. These processes of safe recruitment and proper training require time and appropriate resourcing.

It is also unclear to me how I fund such an arrangement going forward. It is important that parents are aware of this because spending money now will directly affect what the school can provide for your children in September 2021 and beyond.

So far, the school has been unable to claim back a penny for the additional expenses that have been incurred in responding to the pandemic because the school has a 'reserve' (i.e. some money 'in the bank'). This reserve has resulted from careful financial management, making difficult decisions and thinking about every penny the school has spent over the last seven years.

It is this reserve that has allowed the school to grow from some 560 students when I started as Headteacher to getting on for 900 students currently. It is these 'savings' that should be allowing the school to develop the curriculum we offer, the extra-curricular offer and the replacement of vital equipment (for example outdated computers) but is now being spent on additional cleaning and hand sanitiser.

Schools that have managed their money carefully are in effect being penalised and I am conscious that the future for our school is undermined if this continues.

The DfE guidance with regard to lateral flow tests specifies the number of staff required for a school of our size. Putting aside the difficulties of an appropriate space within school to establish the test centre, the recruitment of staff and the training of these staff, the funding being proposed would cover additional costs for between 4-5 weeks only.

For every further five weeks we run the such testing I will need to lose the equivalent to a newly qualified teacher from the staffing in the following year and class sizes will have to increase and the number of subjects at GCSE will have to reduce.

The reality is that we need more help to do this and that is why professional bodies are fighting for further support from the Department for Education. I want to offer testing as proposed by the DfE but it needs to be adequately resourced.

All the contents of this letter are predicated on no further changes before Monday 4 January 2021, before Year 11 return to school Tuesday 5 January 2021.

I will write to parents by Monday 4 January to collate the requirements for vulnerable/keyworker children and the proposals with regard to the return of other year groups.

In the period before your child returns to school, I would encourage you to make use of the provision currently in place on Wirral for symptom free testing that is available at: The Floral Pavilion, Greasby Library and Eastham Library. Details of the opening times of these test centres are on the Wirral Council Website: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/coronavirus-updates/wirral-symptom-free-community-testing-guidance#wgSM-0>

Yours sincerely

K Flanagan
Headteacher