



NEWSLETTER EXTRA

No. 695a: EXTRA
w/c Tues 5 January
will be Week A

Dear Parents and Carers

Happy New Year !

Well, it's not quite the smooth entry into 2021 that we would all like, and there is even more uncertainty than there was when we broke up in December. So, my wishes to all of you and your families for a healthy, happy and peaceful new year are all the more sincere. My colleagues and I are committed to doing our very best to educate, guide and support your children; an essential part of this is good communication between home and College, so if you have concerns or queries, please let us know.

NO CHANGES TO PLANS FOR THIS WEEK

Despite the hours and acres of media coverage, there is essentially no change for Clyst Vale students and parents. The national issues relate mostly to Primary schools, and to Tier Four areas. There will not be staff shortages, as unions are clear that their members will continue to teach KVV students in schools. This is not a case of "I'm all right, Jack", or to suggest that these issues are not important; they really are, especially given the rates of transmission of the new covid variant. The national education position is grim, and the real worry is that it will reach us in 2-3 weeks' time. However, this week looks reasonably clear:

- The College is closed today, 4th January.
- Tomorrow is an INSET Day, and no remote learning will be set. Keyworkers' children and vulnerable students are able to attend. There are approximately fifty such students
- From Wednesday 6th, lesson 1, remote learning will be set for all students.

Year 11 Parents' Evening

Again, we aim to conduct this with the times previously published and in the same fashion as the recent Year 13 and Year 8 evenings. It is very likely that more teachers than previously will be operating from home. If this changes, we will contact Year 11 parents directly through "In Touch".

“Vexed Questions”

Last night’s BBC News summed things up quite well: “wall to wall uncertainty” as covid rates soar, and the Prime Minister spoke of more extreme measures within the next few weeks. It must have been worrying and bewildering for parents with children in Primary Schools. He avoided answering a question about whether students could be sure they would be in school on January 18th, fuelling speculation that they won’t be. In my view, much of the media coverage about schools is comparing apples with pears: arguments to close schools relate to covid, medicine, transmission, protecting the NHS and buying time for the vaccines to work (ie not much to do with schools per se). Arguments to keep schools open relate largely to lost learning, lost opportunities for psychological growth and social development, and the impact on mental health. This extends to families, too: home-schooling, difficulties in juggling work and childcare. A person in Brighton put it perfectly: “morally, I think schools should close, but practically no”. It is a very difficult balance.

It is really very tough for the government to impose stricter restrictions for all sorts of reasons; in my world, when children will be so clearly affected (and it would break a commitment to keeping schools open). The whole exam question comes into play: a national closure of schools would make it harder for the summer exams to be meaningful; a closure in Tier Four areas only would aggravate the unfairness between Year 11 and 13 students who have been in school most of the time compared to those where it has been under 50%. The education profession would perhaps be happier if the scientific evidence was published, to explain why it is ok for schools to be open in some areas and closed in others; this is what today’s legal action by NAHT and ASCL is about. Hopefully, this week will bring more clarity and certainty. We are certainly fortunate in a Devon secondary school to have a little time to react, and although I haven’t seen the very latest figures, rates in our area were about half the national averages on 28th December.

Mass testing

This is troubling me. Throughout my time at Clyst Vale, I have always tried to do my best for children and families. I believe that children are better off learning in school (although not at all costs). I believe that in principle mass testing (or “screening”) is a valuable activity in fighting coronavirus. However, I have concerns and am proceeding carefully. We are in a national emergency, so it is all hands to the pump, but I do question whether it is right for *schools* to have a key role in track-and-trace, now supervise testing, and – who knows - start performing minor medical procedures such as vaccinations by the summer.....?

The scale of what schools are being told to complete is daunting. In our case, two Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) to every returning student, three to five days apart (1880 tests), weekly testing for all staff (180 tests), and on-going “close contact testing” in the event of any positive results for seven days (our Year 7 or Year 9 isolation numbers would mean over 400 tests).

The Department for Education’s guidance suggests that we would need 6 swabbing bays for 330 'subjects' to be tested in five hours (11 subjects per bay per hour). So, we could just about test two year groups in a day. If we can only find space for four bays, it would take ten days to test the whole College. We need at least 12 adults to staff this.

We’re pretty good at organising things, but running such a programme is hugely complicated when at the same time we are maintaining online teaching, pastoral care, safeguarding and in person teaching for KVV students; and then the whole year groups as they return to College

My colleagues and I are not specialists in health care. But we worry from scientific research papers that LFTs are at best 50% reliable, and have concerns that self-swabbing by hundreds of teenagers can be done efficiently and accurately. ‘False negative’ test results are a particular

concern raised by the research papers. I am aware that schools in Tier Four areas will continue with isolation for groups rather than daily testing until concerns over accuracy have been resolved; we are in a different situation, but will keep a close eye on developments. False confidence in the tests must not undermine the vital use of general care, social distancing and hygiene by every student.

This week we will be issuing parental permission slips, and possibly calling for further volunteers to assist with supervising tests. This raises further issues regarding recruitment, safeguarding, the safety of students and indeed the safety of the volunteers.

The public messaging from government ministers about how easy mass testing will be, is a bit optimistic and does not reflect the reality of schools. Once again, I hope that Clyst Vale parents will read behind the headlines, understand our difficulties, and continue to bear with us. I am confident that when we have decent guidance, decent support, the right equipment, and enough time, we will do a good job. We will get mass testing up and running, and hopefully we'll be able to start next Monday or very soon after. In the meantime, if a child tests positive, it is likely that we will need close contacts to self-isolate for ten days.

Finally...

It will be very good to see students back in College this week. We don't know what next week or the week after will bring, but there is almost universal agreement that there is light at the end of the tunnel by July if not earlier. Until then things could be "bumpy", and thank you very much for your continued support.

Best wishes,

Kevin Bawn
Principal

Evenings & weekends – reporting of Covid-19 positive test results

As a further precaution, we have introduced a dedicated phone number, solely for reporting positive Covid-19 test results at evenings, weekends

The number is: **07818 212 931**

It is not for suspected cases, non-Covid-19 illness or absence, and is not an advice line.

We would prefer you to text positive Covid-19 test result information to this number, including:

- Name of student
- Student's tutor group
- Date symptoms appeared
- Date of test
- Date of test result

If necessary, someone will contact you having received this information. Thank you!