

24th February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that you have been able to have a more relaxed week during half term and that the break from online lessons has been welcome.

In light of the announcement that schools will reopen on Monday 8th March I wanted to share with you some important information specific to students returning to Watling.

It is great news, and after what will have been a challenging eight school weeks for everyone, we all look forward to finally welcoming the students back to Watling the week after next.

We have yet to see all the detail from the Department of Education around how the return to school will work but the following areas should give you some clarity and allow you to talk with your child about what will happen and give time to discuss any worries or anxieties. Tutors will also be discussing this plan during registration early next week.

Re-opening

Watling Academy will welcome all students back from Monday 8th March with registration and lessons returning as normal. In line with the government guidance, all students are expected to attend from that point. I do understand that there will be differing situations and some households will contain relatives who are considered clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable, but the advice is that all children should return to school when we re-open.

Face coverings

As was the case before Christmas, all students will be required to wear a face covering in lessons and in social and communal areas unless they have a valid medical exemption. This does not apply outside or during outside PE lessons.

Testing for COVID-19 in advance of returning on 8th March

You will have seen it is an expectation that ALL secondary schools offer mass testing to their students on their return. This involves an initial test before students return followed by two further tests once they have returned. The Department for Education have told schools that they can phase the return for students during the week beginning 8th March so that all staff and students can be tested.

The aim of the testing programme is to try and identify any asymptomatic cases of COVID to avoid transmission within the Academy and the possibility of groups of individuals, classes or even the whole cohort being asked to self-isolate due to contact with a positive case.

- Testing is entirely voluntary, and you will need to give your consent to your child being tested
- Your child will still be able to return on Monday 8th March even if you do not give consent for them to be tested

Despite the voluntary nature of the testing, I would urge you to consider giving your consent, once you have talked to your child about it and if they and you are happy. We have a well-trained team of staff on site who have now gained six weeks experience of conducting the testing and guiding and reassuring the critical worker students through the process. I fully understand though, that you will all have differing views and would like to assure you that we will absolutely respect the decision of every individual family as to whether they wish to grant consent or not.

Given our context of one year group and only 180 students, I have decided that we will offer the first test to all students next week on Thursday or Friday 4th and 5th March. This will allow all students to return on Monday 8th March without having to stagger their return over three days to accommodate testing. The subsequent two tests can then take place during the first week back whilst Watling is operating at full capacity.

You will receive a separate letter tomorrow outlining the arrangements for COVID-19 testing including an individual appointment time for your child to be tested here at Watling on one of those days.

Academy Preparation for Mass Testing

To fully prepare for the two days of mass testing next Thursday and Friday and also to be able to COVID test all Watling Academy staff **there will be NO Live Lessons on the afternoon of Wednesday 3rd March and all day on Thursday 4th and Friday 5th March.**

The arrangements for those days will be the same as they have been during this week. Recorded PowerPoints and presentations will be available on your child's 'Teams' page and the work will be set alongside that.

As teaching staff will be involved in facilitating the testing of students on these days, they will not be instantly available to support students with completing these tasks. Teachers will do their best to respond to any questions or concerns at their earliest convenience. I would like to thank you in advance for your understanding with this.

I know that for some this will be disappointing, but I think this is better than the alternative, which is to disrupt learning for the first few days in the week beginning 8th March.

Timetable

Students will follow their tutor group timetable for the three weeks through until Easter. When we return after Easter the timetable will change and students will also be taught in ability-based groups for some subjects as we had planned to be the case immediately after Christmas.

PE lessons at St. Mary & St. Giles Primary will resume and these will continue to be on Wednesday and Thursday as they were last term. Double check your child's OLD timetable to confirm the day for their tutor group as they will need to come to school in PE kit on that day.

Academy lunches

You will remember that we have parted company with the catering provider we were using before Christmas and so our current provision is a cold food only offer delivered in partnership with Denbigh, our other Trust School. Lunch bookings for the week beginning 8th March will reopen on Monday 1st March. A letter later in the week will outline the offer and arrangements for booking.

Breakfast and After School Clubs

These will both resume from Monday 8th March and again, bookings can be made in the usual way. We will do a reminder as part of the letter about lunches later in the week.

I appreciate that there is a lot of information to take in here but let's finish by focusing on the good news that we can get back to some sort of normality in routine for the students in less than a fortnight. Until then stay safe, stay well.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized initials and a long horizontal stroke.

Mr I Bacon
Head of School