



23rd February 2021

Dear parents/carers,

Following yesterday's announcement from Government about the 'roadmap' out of lockdown, I wanted to write and share the initial information I have been sent and how it will affect our whole-school community from 8th March going forward.

The roadmap outlines four steps for easing restrictions and before proceeding to the next step, the Government will examine the data and assess the impact of the previous step or steps. This assessment is no longer based on the R-rate and the four steps include:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
- Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
- The Government's assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new 'Variants of Concern.'

There will be a minimum of five weeks between each step: four weeks for the data to reflect changes in restrictions; followed by seven days' notice of the restrictions to be eased. The Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser have said that this will give adequate time to assess the impact of each step and reduce the risk of having to re-impose restrictions at a later date.

The first step, **on 8th March**, will see all pupils return to face-to-face education in schools and colleges. The reopening of education settings to all is being prioritised due to the significant impact caused by being out of school to the mental and physical health and wellbeing of children and young people.

It was great to hear this news, but there will be work to do over the next two weeks to ensure we keep everyone safe and to ensure we are following the guidance. School will still have restrictions and there will still be expectations on social distancing and staggered start and end time. I will write more on this, as I understand the implications and expectations going forward.

It may be important to understand why the Government has made a 'big move' to invite all pupils back to schools and colleges, rather than a more staggered or gradual approach. Senior officials have confirmed that this follows the medical and scientific advice which is to collect the data on the big step to inform the next step. It is much harder to assess the impact of decisions if they are incremental.

Love learning, work together, achieve and shine.

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You may have read over the weekend that Professor Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer, was reported to have said that he was opposed to the plans for the full reopening of schools. At the briefing last night, Professor Whitty was questioned on this and he said he was rather surprised to read it since he categorically denied it to the journalist at the time. He went on to explain why he thinks it is emphatically the case that it is the right decision to open schools fully:

- There are overwhelming advantages for children being in school, from an education and life path point of view.
- The risk to children is low from going to school and catching Covid-19. The risk is not zero but it is so much smaller.
- Given the huge benefits, the evidence is strongly in favour of children going to school.
- The reason why schools were closed except for those pupils who need our help most and the children of key workers, is the impact that this can have on R. Professor Whitty said that there is now some headroom and it is right that we open schools first. There is a natural firebreak at Easter.
- He commented that there are several things which take the risk in schools down even further, referencing the increased system of controls and Covid-19 testing of education staff and secondary-aged pupils.

I hope this information gives some explanation to the opening of schools to all children and I look forward to sharing our plans and considerations once I have understood fully what is expected of us and what school will look like from 8th March.

Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Kind regards



Tracey Hart
Headteacher

