



To All Headteachers

**Children, Young People and
Education**

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Dear Colleague

Return to School in January and Mass and Serial Testing in Schools

I hope you were able to get some form of break over the Christmas period. I am sorry to have to disturb your break once again, however it is evident from the calls and emails we are receiving following yesterday's announcements that you need information today.

Return to School in January

Primary – The Government has implemented its contingency framework and decreed that primary schools in Kent, with the exception of those in the districts of Canterbury, Thanet, Dover and Folkestone & Hythe, will not open to face to face learning on 4th January, but will operate remote learning for the majority of pupils. Vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers can attend from 4th January. We acknowledge that the Government's decision that schools in four districts in Kent should open as planned is causing some public debate. We have questioned the decision, but unfortunately the reply provides little further insight in to how it was reached. For any primary school that has an SRP, it is important to remember that all pupils in the SRP are defined as vulnerable and should, therefore be able to attend.

Secondary – All secondary schools are expected to open to face to face teaching for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers from 4th January; this will include all pupils in your school's SRP if you have one. Pupils in Years 11 and 13 should be in schools for face to face teaching from 11th January, with remaining year groups from 18th January. The Government's statement indicates that remote learning should be in place as soon as possible for Years 11 and 13, and by 11th January for pupils in other year groups. We know schools are already receiving queries from parents about remote learning provision. We will include details of the Government's expectation on our website (Kent.gov.uk) to help schools manage parents' expectations. Clearly, we all want remote learning in place as soon as possible for all pupils not in school.

We will need to work with secondary colleagues urgently next week to determine the need for school transport to operate in the weeks commencing 4th and 11th January. We know

that Btec exams are being taken by some students in some schools next week and therefore we have left the bus network and hired transport vehicles in place for Monday. However, it is likely that we will have bus services operating with no students travelling, something we would wish to address. As a starting point it would be helpful please if every secondary school could provide details of the students taking exams next week, and the dates of these exams to enable us to map this against transport routes. Please send the child's full name, DOB and date that they are attending the exam to – homeschooltransport@kent.gov.uk

Alternative provision and special schools – The Government's expectation is that all return to face-to-face education from the start of term as planned, with individual special schools being offered greater flexibility on face-to-face attendance of pupils and students in the first week of term. This will enable them to appropriately mobilise their mass testing programme. Where pupils are not attending, either because of your decision or the parents, please ensure the child's transport provider is informed.

The definition of critical workers and vulnerable children is now broader than it was in the Spring and can be found [here](#).

In respect of vulnerable pupils, KCC as the corporate parent for Kent CICs expects these pupils to attend school unless there is a strong reason not to do so, which is agreed by their social worker.

We will be uploading guidance to KELSI, under the [Covid page](#). This will include signposting to national guidance as well as local information and resources relevant to schools and settings in Kent. The national guidance [Schools and childcare settings: return in January 2021](#) applies to all schools in Kent; with those schools subject to the Contingency Framework receiving additional guidance: [Contingency Framework – Implementation Guidance](#).

Turning to the matter of covid testing in schools. We support the intentions behind the introduction of mass and serial testing within schools. However, together with other LAs in the South East, we have lobbied Government to allow schools to move forward with the introduction of testing at a pace which allows for appropriate planning and safe implementation. There is a risk that hastily implemented plans could do more harm than good.

The Government remains committed to rolling out mass and serial testing in secondary schools in January. This continues to be badged as an "offer", which both schools and individuals can take up if they wish, although there has been little indication that schools can reject the "offer". Testing will start with staff, students in exam year groups, and those vulnerable pupils and children of key workers who need to attend school from the start of term, followed by secondary aged pupils in other year groups who will be tested before they return to face to face learning on 18th January. We continue to believe that this timeframe is challenging. Schools' ability to respond will be affected by their individual circumstances, and therefore we remain committed to supporting schools to move forward at the fastest pace commensurate with their ability to plan for and safely implement this programme. Again, to support schools we will include a statement to this effect on Kent.gov.uk. Additionally, you may find the [Testing Readiness Survey](#) on a school's readiness for testing useful.

We are aware that the issues of liability and insurance cover have been raised. Our insurance team have provided reassurance that schools that buy in to the County's insurance policy will be covered for the administration of covid testing in schools and have provided the [linked advice note](#) which clarifies the circumstances and extent of medical/supportive procedures that can be performed by staff for which the school's policies will provide cover. The relevant wording for staff and for volunteers assisting the school in this instance is that when they are providing medical support as long as they follow pre-set guidelines and act in line with training/instruction they have received from a competent/qualified person or body (DHSC in this instance) they will be considered by the insurers to have acted reasonably and be protected by the school's liability policies. Schools that buy alternative insurance policies are likely to be in the same position but should check with their own insurers.


The use of volunteers has been promoted by Government to implement the testing regime. You will of course follow your own policy and procedures on the use of volunteers in school, which will include when a DBS check is required as well as ensuring any volunteers are aware and familiar with the school's key policies. However, if you wish to revisit your policy you may find information on the following site useful: <https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/policy-bank/staff/volunteers-in-school-sample-policy-and-guidance/>

We are currently looking at how we can help schools deliver FSMs to their pupils not in school who are eligible for these due to low income. We are unlikely to be able to replicate the arrangements we put in place for Christmas because of the resource pressures. We are currently talking to Wonde, who provide a voucher distribution service free for schools to use. We believe many schools already utilise Wonde for other purposes, meaning this provides a neat solution, which can also then be applied for February half term. We will get back to you on this at the start of next week.

The model parental consent letter schools have been provided by the DfE/DHSC regarding testing includes a section on what happens if the child tests positive, and says *"Pupils will need to take a further 'PCR test' (similar to those done in local and regional testing sites) on the same day (or as soon as possible). [School / college] will be able to provide these PCR test kits to perform at home or you can go to www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test or call 119 to book a follow-up test. If ordering a PCR test yourselves, they should choose to visit a drive-through test site if possible, as it is faster than requesting a home test."* We are enquiring as to whether schools are being provided with additional PCR tests to be able to give to students.

Evidently the situation continues to change rapidly. I will provide further information as this becomes available.

Yours sincerely



David Adams
Interim Director of Education