

HIGH STANDARDS, HIGH ASPIRATIONS, HIGH EXPECTATIONS

5th January 2021

Update following the announcement of the new National Lockdown – January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

As you will be fully aware, last night the Prime Minister announced that the UK's coronavirus alert level has increased due to the speed with which the new variant of the virus is spreading and is now at five, the highest level, which means that there is a risk of healthcare services being overwhelmed. A new **national lockdown** will be in place from 00:01 on 6th January. The Government instruction is to stay at home, with extreme measures enforced by law, while vaccines are rolled out.

It seems likely that this lockdown will last for the rest of this term with the current intention being that schools will reopen for Term 4. The hope is that by that point enough people will have received the vaccine to protect our most vulnerable and that the current rate of infection will, once again, have been drastically reduced.

As we had already planned, from today Bristol Metropolitan Academy will be open **only for the children of critical workers** and those classed as **vulnerable** to attend on site. We have previously circulated a sign up link for those requiring a CW placement. House Teams will be contacting those who have requested a place throughout today to confirm details. We thank you in advance for enabling any student who can safely remain at home to do so. This maximises the impact of the lockdown but also maximises the use of our resource into online learning so that we can make it as high quality as we can in the circumstances.

We will provide remote learning to be completed at home for all other students. Remote learning will include significant proportions of live instruction from teaching staff complemented by additional learning materials where appropriate.

With the shift to online and live learning there will be the need for device access and internet for our learners. In most cases the minimum would be a smartphone device or tablet. If this is a significant barrier for your child please do contact their House Team or on info@bristolmet.net as we have a small number of loan devices available with more promised by the Government. Likewise, we have a small number of 4G dongles available for loan so if internet access is a barrier please also do get in touch.

I am aware that, unfortunately, Show My Homework fell at the first hurdle today (like everyone, they had no prior warning and found themselves a very popular system first thing today). They have now fixed it and have increased capacity on their server. It may take 48hrs to settle but should then be reliable.

We started delivering live lessons this morning and they have been relatively well attended for day 1. Please ensure your child is checking SMHW and Emails for information and their MS Teams Classroom for lesson links and, most importantly, are taking part in the lessons.



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I also wanted to update, as much as I know currently, about some other aspects that will have come out of last night's decision:

Free School Meals:

Currently the Government have adopted the same approach as they did at the start of the first lockdown which is to ask catering providers to have daily lunch available for collection. We, along with most other schools I believe, are lobbying the Government to rethink that approach and fund the provision of supermarket vouchers which we believe are much more flexible in lockdown situations. We will of course update when we have information. If we do not have a voucher system reinstated within the next 48 hours we will arrange for a food package to be made available.

Year 11 students and GCSE/Public Exams (you can skip this section if you don't have a Year 11 student):

We had expected that Year 11 students would be able to return to school from Monday 11th January. This is no longer possible: remote learning will continue to be provided and monitored.

Last night the Prime Minister announced that the public examination series will not take place in full. Today Michael Gove MP announced that the Summer examination series in its current form would be cancelled. Gavin Williamson MP, the Secretary of State for Education, is due to announce "replacement assessments" tomorrow for Year 11 students. We absolutely appreciate how unsettling this is for our Year 11 students and, of course, their families. It is also massively unsettling for school staff. Please reassure your Year 11 students that, regardless of the current uncertainty, all of the time, energy and efforts they have put into their studies is not wasted. Ultimately education is about gaining knowledge, skills and understanding with exams about demonstrating that. Although we do not yet know what will replace them, we can be confident that whatever it is we will still assess this. It is therefore vital that students maintain their confidence and positive attitude, which we have been blown away by this Academic year so far in the way they returned from the last lockdown, throughout this time. It is also vital that students engage with their teachers, attending live lessons and completing the work set. We know that whatever the system that is announced looks like it is almost certainly going to involve teacher assessment so now is not the time to opt out of engaging with their regular teachers. Miss Barnes, Year 11 Achievement Leader, will be delivering an assembly tomorrow for Year 11 students so please ensure they have checked their SMHW/Emails for information and ensure they tune in.

Together we will ensure that our young people leave with the qualifications they deserve and the life chances that will enable them to fulfill their potential.

Rollout of mass testing:

The planned rollout of mass testing in Secondary schools for asymptomatic cases of the coronavirus will be paused at this time. We are however still being asked to implement the programme of testing for staff and for those students who take up an on site place. We will therefore continue to make our plans and communicate to the families of children on site to implement testing for those who consent. Only yesterday I wrote to ask for any willing volunteers and was blown away to receive 40 volunteers within a short period of asking. Parents, carers, older siblings and ex-students. It was genuinely humbling and shows the strength of the local community of which Bristol Met belongs. Clearly at the minute we will not need to use these volunteers but I fully expect, as part of the re-opening programme, to be asked to implement mass testing in the coming months so I hope some will still be able to assist when the time comes.



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I am sure there are still many other questions people have. I wish I had all the answers but like all other school leaders find myself somewhat behind the curve on a daily basis as we react to the evolving situation and direction of travel. Please do feel free to send any questions to info@bristolmet.net and I will endeavor to provide answers in my next communication (if I have an answer).

Until then I thank you again for your patience and understanding. I know the current situation over the last 10 months has been draining for the community (and indeed the world). I know it has divided and united at the same time. The constant focus, debate and pace of change has been exhausting for everyone but at every turn I have appreciated the support that has been shown to the Academy. My final plea, despite sometimes what seems to be the focus in some areas of the media, is merely to remember that schools were designed to be filled with children. School staff want to be in school. They want to have children sat in their classrooms. The decision to close schools is not one taken by me, by Bristol Met staff or indeed by any school staff in the country. As soon as we are allowed we cannot wait to re-open the doors and, hopefully, say goodbye to lockdown closures of schools forever.

Until next time please stay safe and look after each other.

Best wishes,

Mr C Shaw
Principal