

Our ref: PJS/DKP

18 December 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

Having finished my draft of this letter on Wednesday, something just told me to hold back a few days, then we got information about the testing and yesterday afternoon the new curveball regarding a later start for Year 7-10. This came as a complete surprise and therefore we've had to make some hasty plans overnight which I will share later in the letter. It is all fine, although to be honest we're still a little bemused about the decision and we feel we could have adequately planned the testing and have students in at the same time, but more about my thoughts about that later.

Well we've made it to the end of a very strange term and despite all the challenges it certainly feels pleasing that we've been able to get back to normal and resume where we left off. Usually we would send out a newsletter full of the events that have taken place over the half-term but sadly we have not been doing those extras that make school special because of the current situation. It looks like things will continue this way for a while, but I'm hopeful that maybe by the summer term things will return to something more familiar. I have to say that the students have been fantastic, adapted seamlessly to the multitude of new systems and reminded us what a great job this can be. We are all pleased that we avoided closing year groups or the whole school, although we have had enough positive cases to keep us on our toes. I am pleased that, even when we've had a case at school, no other students appear to have been infected as a result of those cases.

I would like to extend my thanks to the staff team who have been brilliant, many of our support staff have got a very different job to usual, however they have taken it up with a 'blitz spirit' and have made the zones in the school work. The senior leadership team have also gone above and beyond as we have run our own track and trace system which inevitably often happens outside of school hours. I would also like to thank you, the parents, for the fantastic support we have received. Inevitably there have been the usual moans and critics however they have been drowned out by the number of people who have sent in cards or emails just thanking the staff, which have gone down really well. We are dealing with a sub-optimal situation for sure, but it's our ability to roll with things and adapt, that will be what sets us apart. It feels like it's been a whole team effort from staff, students and parents and therefore I end the term tired but pleased that we've made the best of a bad situation.

We have adapted to the 'new normal' and our parents' information evenings and Open Evening were well attended. The live streaming format was new to us, but generally went well and many parents appreciated the opportunity to listen along whilst washing-up, or watching it at a time convenient to them. Our Year 7 parents did a trial with the virtual parents' evening appointments which we will be using for all year groups until we are able to go back to the traditional way. Inevitably some good will come out of the pandemic and how we engage electronically with parents is one of the things that we will consider and we will be asking for your thoughts on these in the future to work out which aspects we keep.

Despite the fact that it has felt at times like we're just keeping our heads above water, I can assure you that we are not standing still. The improvements to the school have continued, from the physical improvements to the site through to the work on teaching and learning, we feel that Aldworth is swiftly moving in the right direction. Last week we reached a watershed moment when a member of staff got to all lessons and didn't have a single name on the board – that means there was no child who had perhaps talked out of turn twice. That was a huge moment, even at Court Moor we might get a period like that every few months, it's something I wouldn't have expected to have at all for probably a matter of year, so I was very pleased about that particular landmark.

We will be anxiously awaiting any Covid test results over the holidays and we are dreading having to contact people to ask them to self-isolate over Christmas. It would be really helpful if you could give us the head's up if your son/daughter is getting a test before the result comes through; that will ensure we're pre-warned and remain vigilant. It's obviously a bit of a pain continuously checking emails until Christmas Eve and being on standby to inform people so if it's possible that would be much appreciated. If you have a positive test after 23 December then still let us know on [enquiries@aldworth.hants.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@aldworth.hants.sch.uk) however NHS Track and Trace will undertake the contact tracing until we return.

You will have seen in the news this week that schools will be given rapid testing kits in order to avoid the mass self-isolations that we have had to endure. Some guidance has been issued since I first drafted this letter and we are in the process of identifying appropriate areas in the school and assigning staff to be on standby. We will also be sending out a consent form for testing for each child, that should spare us the need to contact parents during the day if we have a positive case and should enable the system to run relatively smoothly. It is a choice and should you choose not to give your consent then your child will be required to self-isolate for ten days. There is an online training course this afternoon for us where things should become clearer, but it appears that if students have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive, then they will be tested each day for seven school days to keep them safe. There is currently some confusion about the details and about the degree of testing they are expecting – so please just bear with us whilst we work out our response and we'll communicate our plans when we're clear about our responsibilities. We should certainly have everything in place to run the testing from 11 January when most of the school come back – it's always good to learn new skills!

Yesterday afternoon's announcement came somewhat out of the blue and, as I mentioned earlier, seems to have dubious reasoning. Talking to colleagues I think this is about putting a clear time between when students may have seen a wider group of people and returning to school in order to suppress infection transfer, which is a good thing. The second potential reason may be to allow some kind of further staggered returns if there is the expected peak after Christmas. We will be working as if this is running for a week, but planning for it extending in some fashion. For the first week all Year 7-10 will access our online provision which is the same as students who have been self-isolating have used. Work for all years is available on Teams. The system we've run means the teachers have already lined up the work they would be teaching after the holiday so that work is all ready to go. We know this works and students should be able to access it effectively. We will organise for work packs to be available for collection on the Monday at 12.00 for any parents who do not have internet access. If you require a work pack please email [enquiries@aldworth.hants.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@aldworth.hants.sch.uk) or phone early on Monday 4 January so we can prepare them on the first morning back.

From the official start of term all staff will be in school and therefore will be available for any queries regarding the work via telephone, email or through the platforms themselves – so we should be able to offer strong support to the children. Teachers in school will be teaching Year 11, running the sessions for our Key Worker provision, training or waiting online for any questions/help required. In that week we will draw up a provisional timetable for the second week (in case it is extended) and get teachers to practise 'live learning' techniques or make videos which can be used in the event of the return date being extended.

You will recall that earlier this term I did a survey for parents and we felt we had sufficient access to IT to make more live sessions work however it needs careful timetabling which we can't do until we have a sense of how much key worker provision we need. When the students return on 11 January the arrangements will be the same as this term in regards to arrival times and procedures with the students remaining in the same zones as before.

We are collating lists for students who qualify for the key worker provision. The provision will run as normal school hours and students will be kept in their year group bubbles following their timetable but will be using our virtual school lessons set up by their class teachers. This means that they will be accessing the same work as students at home and not taught by specialist teachers but supervised by staff. School uniform must be worn and packed lunch brought in. We will provide lunch for students who are designated as free school meals.

Year 11 are to come to school as usual and there will be catering provided for those who want to buy food from the canteen. It is essential that we continue to follow caution if children exhibit symptoms or are in a household with people who are being tested, it would be a real shame to have to send more Year 11 home unless it can't be avoided. We will aim to get the school testing up and running as soon as possible in that week so if we do get some cases we can reduce the numbers isolating. They should come to school at the normal time and through the same gate as usual.

In a roller-coaster term it feels like we've had a sudden corkscrew just as the end was in sight. As I've been amending the letter I've had a member of staff saying that a minister has said things in the media which are contradictory to what we've been told – so I'll just have to say the information in the letter is correct as of 13.00pm on Friday and I will contact you before the start of next term if things change again. However, I will wait until things have settled otherwise I'll be chasing my tail, so please don't worry if there's an announcement and no immediate response from the school over the holiday; you'll have seen how many U-turns there are so I'll try and wait for things to stop spinning before letting you know our plans. I am sorry that we're not opening for all as normal, however we have to do as directed – even if we're not entirely convinced by the need. I do think it will help with reducing the post-Christmas spike from a school point of view though, which has to be a good thing, but please don't complain to us about this decision because it simply isn't ours to make.

I appreciate this is a very functional letter for the end of term, however the changing circumstances have made that necessary.

All that remains is for me to wish you all a happy and a safe Christmas and I'm sure we're all looking forward to a New Year which, at some point, will start to feel a little more normal again. Thank you again for your support over the last six months – we have never needed it more.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Jenkins', written in a cursive style.

**Mr P Jenkins**  
**Headteacher**