



Friday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Parents, Guardians, Carers, Children and Young People,

In light of the Prime Minister's announcement on Wednesday, I wanted to write to you today to clarify the forthcoming weeks for our schools.

The Prime Minister has stated that the earliest that schools would begin to reopen to further groups of children and young people is from 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021. This decision will be subject to a number of key criteria being fulfilled by that time including a consistent drop in the infection rate, the death rate decreasing, and the effective and improved roll-out of the vaccination programme – there is much at stake and whilst we understand the Government's need to set out a timeline, we are also seeking assurances that this is realistic. We don't want to raise expectations only to have to change our plans at the last moment again.

We are waiting for the new guidance from the DfE, and as that becomes available, I will write to you to ensure that you are as up to date as possible with the national picture, and our decisions as a Trust. At this stage there is no clarity on whether all children and young people are intended to return, or if there will be a phased 're-start' for those not currently learning in school. We are aware that we will not know the Government's timeline until after the half-term break, and so we will continue to plan as though most pupils will not return on 8<sup>th</sup> March, and will ensure that you have as much notice as possible should this position change.

As things stand at the moment the following areas are in place:

- **Testing:** We are now fully underway with the testing of staff in all our schools, in line with the DfE and PHE guidance. It is hoped that this will give an added assurance both for the availability of staff, and our ability to react quickly to any potential spread of the virus.
- **Remote Learning:** Remote Learning resources and approaches are continuing to be developed and expanded, as appropriate, across the Trust and Schools. Schools are also sharing resource, and continue to plan together to support broadening the curriculum offer. We are continuing to work to try to improve the IT access for families, and for our schools. Remote Learning will continue until we are advised that all pupils will be returning to school.
- **February half-term:** None of our schools have been required to open over the February half-term, and so we will not be opening any of our schools during the break. Some schools may have let their facilities out to external providers to run holiday clubs. Please contact these external providers directly to arrange any bookings if this is being offered. Your child(ren)'s school will provide you with information in relation to Free School Meals provision during this time; and Local Authorities have agreed to provide child-care information (where it is available) for parents for support during the half-term break.

As a parent with remote-learning going on in my own house, I completely understand the pressures on you all, and the impact that continued uncertainty has for all families. I appreciate how hard this can be, and I wanted to offer my thanks to you all for all that you are doing to support your child(ren), and your schools in this most complicated and uncertain of times. We don't say enough

how grateful we are to you for the juggling that we know that you are all having to undertake, and we are conscious of how it must feel to you following the announcement last night.

I continue to hear from our schools that you are doing a fantastic job, and that many of you are in regular contact with your child(ren)'s school for both support and guidance during this lockdown period.

There is an end in sight, and we will get through this and back into whatever normal may look like. Thank you so much for all that you have done, and for what you are going to be doing over the forthcoming weeks.

I will be in touch again just before the half-term break, and again once we're back at the start of Term 4 to keep you up to date with our plans and how we will be working.

You continue to be in my thoughts and prayers. Stay safe and keep well.

Thank you.

With kind regards,

*Jez Piper*

**CEO**

**Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust**