



March 5, 2021

Blackminster Middle School

School Bulletin

Dear parents and carers,

At last, the government are starting a cautious easing of our national lockdown, and we are very much looking forward to being back in school from next week. It has been made clear that the reopening of schools is a national priority, which is why it is happening even as restrictions remain for much of society.

Staff have been working hard to prepare to welcome students back, and this letter contains a lot of important information about how we plan to do that as safely as we can. You'll find lots of links to other resources too, and some information that I've been asked to share.

A copy of this letter will be on our website (www.blackminster.worcs.sch.uk) so that you have the links available should you need them later.

Returning to school

We are very much looking forward to welcoming students back into school next week, and judging by the responses to our student questionnaire, the children are looking forward to coming back too. Start dates are

Year 6 and Year 8 – Monday 8th March

Year 7 - Tuesday 9th March (remote learning will be provided on March 8th)

It will be Week B on the timetable.

We ask that students are in uniform, except on days when they have PE, when PE kit should be worn.

Risk management in school

We will be operating a very similar system of measures to those that were operating until lockdown. This includes keeping KS2 and KS3 students apart; separate sittings in the hall at break and lunch times; separate playgrounds for KS2 and KS3; lots of handwashing and sanitising; enhanced cleaning and hygiene protocols. We appreciate that social distancing is difficult for children, especially in classrooms, but we will be encouraging children to keep their distance wherever possible. Windows and doors will be open to increase ventilation, and we'll be having lessons outside when we can. I'd ask parents and carers to discuss the importance of all of these measures with children before they return to school.

New guidance has been issued on face coverings - you'll find this later on in this letter.

COVID testing in school

Year 7 and Year 8 students have undertaken their initial lateral flow tests in school. We'd like to thank parents and carers for your support in this, as we've had over 80% of our students take part. We'd also like to thank our students, who've approached this with calmness and their usual sense of humour! Second and third tests will take place on Monday 8th and Thursday 11th for Year 8 students, and Tuesday 9th and Friday 12th for Year 7. After that, test kits will be issued and students are asked to test at home twice weekly. We'll send out more information along with the test kits as soon as they arrive in school. Testing is not mandatory, but we'd strongly encourage all KS3 students to take part in order to reduce the risks of people without symptoms inadvertently spreading the virus to others in our school. Staff are also testing themselves twice-weekly for the same reason.

Please note that the government currently has no plans to test year 6 students in school, although please see below for information about how families can access test kits.

Rapid flow testing for households and bubbles of school pupils and staff

On Sunday 28th February, the Government announced that households with primary school, secondary school and college age children, including childcare and support bubbles, will be able to test themselves for coronavirus twice a week at home. Households, childcare and support bubbles of primary, secondary and college staff and adults working in the wider school community, including bus drivers and after school club leaders can also be tested. The twice-weekly test kits can be accessed:

- via employers if they offer testing to employees
- at a local test site
- by collecting a home test kit from a test site
- by ordering a home test kit online

Schools cannot give test kits to parents, carers or household members, although we will be issuing kits to all of our KS3 children for use at home. We are expecting these on or before March 15th. Letters containing advice on where to access testing will be coming out shortly, and we'll share these with you as soon as we can. The guidance provides information on who can be tested and how people can get a test.

Press release from the government is here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/all-households-with-children-of-school-aged-to-get-rapid-covid-19-tests-per-person-per-week>

The full guidance on rapid flow testing for households and bubbles of school pupils and staff is here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rapid-lateral-flow-testing-for-households-and-bubbles-of-school-pupils-and-staff>

Face coverings in education

On Monday 1st March, the Government updated the guidance on the use of face coverings for schools and other education institutions that teach people in years seven and above in England. The Department for Education (DfE) recommends that, in settings where pupils and students in year seven and above are educated, face coverings should be worn in classrooms and during activities unless social distancing can be maintained. This does not apply in situations where wearing a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity, for example in PE lessons.

In our middle school, where we have children from both the primary and secondary age range, we are asking students in all year groups to follow the advice for secondary students, and we would ask for the support of all

parents and carers in ensuring that children understand why we are asking this and why it is beneficial to everyone in our school.

If your child is exempt from wearing a mask, please drop us an email (office@blackminster.worcs.sch.uk) so that staff are aware and your child won't be repeatedly asked or reminded!

Please do make sure that your child has a mask (and perhaps a spare) in school each day, and a small plastic bag in which to store it when not being worn.

Please would all parents and carers watch this short video with their children to show how to wear a face covering safely? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Tv2BVN_WTk&t=49s

Travelling to school safely

The DfE have shared the following advice for students on travelling to school safely.

- if you live a short distance from your school or college, walk, cycle or scooter to and from school wherever it is possible and safe to do so
- avoid sharing a car with anyone outside of your household or support bubble
- if you are using public transport to get to school, plan ahead and allow more time for your journey

When you are travelling by public or dedicated school transport, don't forget to:

- wear a face covering (unless you are exempt, including if you are aged 11 and under). It is important you wear them for the entirety of your journey, including inside a bus or train station
- social distance where possible
- wash or sanitise your hands regularly
- be considerate to fellow passengers and staff.

Message from Dr Kathryn Cobain

Dr Kathryn Cobain has recorded a short video for parents and carers in support of the return to face to face education (<https://youtu.be/YUoKV8F4YT4>). We've been asked to share with our families, so I'm pleased to do so.

Winter Warmer Fuel Vouchers

I've been asked to share this information on behalf of Act on Energy.

Are you or anyone you know struggling to pay your fuel bills this winter? Act on Energy can help. Fuel Vouchers are available for families and households in Worcestershire on pre-payment meters and those paying by direct debit or on receipt of bill or paying direct to the supplier, such as LPG, oil. So, if you have seen a drop in income from COVID-19 or receive one of the benefits below APPLY NOW for Winter Warmer vouchers.

Apply if on Benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

- Universal Credit OR if you have a gross annual household income of £30,000 or less:
- Recently been made redundant
- Furloughed, waiting to receive first payment and don't know when this will be
- Self-employed and income is unpredictable and/or they are waiting to apply for payment from the government
- Any referral from a Foodbank Fuel

Vouchers are available for gas, electric, oil, LPG and solid fuels. For more information and email: support@actonenergy.org.uk or call Freephone: 0800 988 2881

Important dates

March 17 th	Parents' Evening (by SchoolCloud – please see previous communications)
March 19 th	INSET day – school closed to students
April 1 st	Parents' Evening
	End of Term
April 19 th	Return for summer term 1
May 31 st	Half term
June 7 th	Return for summer term 2
July 20 th	End of term

Finally...

We know that students and parents may feel a little apprehensive as well as excited about the return to school. If we can do anything to help or support you, please contact us and we'll do all we can.

I'm very much looking forward to seeing many of you in person (although from an appropriate distance!) next week.

Kind regards,

Linda McQuone



Acting Headteacher