

11<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Parents,

The last four weeks have brought, perhaps, the biggest challenges for us all throughout the entire period of the pandemic. We ended last term thoroughly enjoying all the children's performances in our wonderful series of 'Christmas Crackers', with news emerging of a vaccine, bringing real hope for a return to a more normal life by late Spring. Whilst steeling ourselves for a possible surge in cases following the relaxation of measures over Christmas, we finished a very different but hugely successful Autumn Term, planning for something similar on our return in January. Since then, we have all had to make adjustments to plans for Christmas, adapt to tighter Tier 4 arrangements and, subsequently, resign ourselves to a further period of national lockdown. As we enter the midst of the winter season, the new variant of the virus continues to significantly affect transmission rates, hospital admissions and, very sadly, the number of COVID-19 related deaths across the South East of the country.

Whilst no-one wishes to be back in a full lockdown, I do feel that the national picture and our very own local circumstances dictate that we should all do our utmost to follow government guidance to 'Stay at Home' and to control the possible spread of this new highly transmissible variant. As such, it is absolutely the right decision that we move back to our online provision of 'Dulwich Virtual' across the school, to ensure the health and safety of our entire school community, whilst we learn more about the new strain and how to keep it under control. At the same time, this will hopefully allow the vaccination programme to gain real traction amongst the most vulnerable and indeed those working on the front line.

Please be assured we will keep all these matters under constant review and we very much hope that we will be able to welcome more children, beyond those of critical workers, back to school as soon as we know it is safe to do so, prioritising the very youngest within our school community.

Accompanying this letter is a link to the updated version of this term's 'Dulwich Virtual' programme. I thank everyone who has been working so hard over the Christmas break to reflect carefully on our previous experiences of online learning, and who have produced these guidelines for accessing our specially adapted curriculum.

Please do read the information carefully and take particular note of the amended timetables for the children's learning whilst they are at home. As previously, we have tried to ensure that the



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core academic subjects take place in the morning. Lessons in Upper School are generally longer to minimise the need for reconnection online and we have maintained the afternoons throughout the school for co-curricular involvement in creative, active and fun activities. Time is provided at the end of the day for consolidation for all children. As ever, please do provide feedback about what is working well and how we can adapt our provision further. We wish to support the children in the very best way that we can whilst they are learning at home and we need to work in partnership with you to achieve this.

You will note within the guidance provided that there is a section dedicated to pastoral care. Throughout this new period of lockdown, we must all recognise that there is only so much that we can achieve in one day and we should ensure that we are looking after ourselves and each other. A focus on wellbeing and maintaining a positive mind-set will be important factors in supporting everyone through another period of enforced physical separation from teachers and friends at school. Should you have any concerns in this regard, please do contact an appropriate member of the pastoral team, via the email addresses supplied in the guidance. Our theme for this term is 'Nuture mind, body and soul'; a very good reminder for us all.

In an earlier letter last week, I wrote about our plans for achieving the government's aim of setting up mass testing in schools using lateral flow devices to help identify asymptomatic carriers of the virus. Over the last fortnight, I have been working with colleagues in school to review the guidance, plan, train and rehearse a 'testing task force' of staff, to facilitate this testing here at Dulwich. Prior to the government's announcement of lockdown, we were finalising the arrangements to test all staff and the children in Year 8 who were initially identified as being permitted to return to school. At present, owing to the absence of clear protocols for testing children younger than Year 7, we are unable to offer this testing more widely. However, we have now tested all staff who are needed or are planning to work in school for this coming period using this process, and we aim to continue to do so on a weekly basis. We do hope to be able to roll out this programme more widely across the school in due course; I will provide more information on this to parents once it becomes available, or when we are able to welcome back our senior year groups.

I am sure that parents will wish to join me in welcoming new staff joining us this term. Mrs Kaylee Marchant joins the team in Nash House as a Teaching Assistant. Mrs Alice Coleman joins the SEN department in Little Stream. Mrs Coleman was Deputy Leader of Learning Success and SENCO at a local primary school, having moved back to Kent from London. She has previously been Deputy Head and KS1 Lead at St Nicholas Prep School in London. Mrs Helen Gardner will cover Mrs Davey's maternity leave as from the February half-term. Mrs Gardner is involved with running Benenden Pre-School on a voluntary basis, having previously worked at both the Thomas's Kensington London Day School and SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary School.

Mrs Wendy Davis takes on the role of School Nurse, working alongside Mrs Montgomery and Miss Fosbery. Mrs Davis is an experienced nurse with a background in infection control. I am hugely appreciative of all the medical team's work over the last few weeks, whilst setting up our in-house testing centre. Indeed, we could not have done this without the senior management team, staff volunteers and the IT Department; and I thank them all for their unstinting support.

Mrs Barber will take over the role of Head of Year 1 in Mrs Davey's absence after half term and in Upper School, Mrs Potter returns to full-time teaching, adding managing the library to her role as an English specialist teacher.

Over the first few evenings of this term, we are running three separate online meetings for parents in Nash House, Little Stream and Upper School to remind you how to access resources and online provision on the school iNet. This will follow a similar format to previous evenings that I have hosted of this nature, but please do feel free to join these Zoom Meetings should you need a quick reminder of the learning platform and its key features.

Topic: Nash House Dulwich Virtual Information Evening  
Time: Jan 12, 2021 07:00 PM London

Topic: Little Stream Dulwich Virtual Information Evening  
Time: Jan 13, 2021 07:00 PM London

Topic: Upper School Dulwich Virtual Information Evening  
Time: Jan 14, 2021 07:00 PM London

I look forward to seeing you (virtually) over the coming weeks and hopefully welcoming you and the children back into school before too long

Thank you for your continued support throughout this challenging period.

With every good wish,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul David". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Paul David.