



WINCHESTER
COLLEGE

11 February 2021

Dear Parents,

Covid testing and a possible return in March

There is still much uncertainty about the return to face-to-face teaching across England for secondary schools. However, the logistical challenge of mass asymptomatic screening for the school community requires forward planning and this letter sets out a possible timeline in the run-up to 8 March 2021. There is of course no guarantee that any of this will take place, but we issue this now because when decisions are made by the government there will be little time to absorb quite a lot of information.

With the continued uncertainty, we are acutely aware of the difficulties this poses for our international pupils and their parents. We would like to provide some certainty, especially for those in public exam years, and we would therefore strongly advise against returning in March for any pupils requiring an international flight. The Second Master in his letter earlier this week explained that remote provision will continue and that any mock examinations taken in March will be very effectively proctored remotely if necessary, so pupils unable to return to school in March will not be disadvantaged.

We want to make it possible for all our overseas pupils to return to school for Cloister Time and we are working in partnership with our testing partner DRW, the manufacturers of the Samba machine, to create this facility on site and reduce the cost and the quarantine period for pupils. Therefore, we would like to offer the ability to arrive from 12 April (7 days ahead of the start of term) for any pupils based overseas by:

- offering quarantine facilities within boarding houses and airport transfers,
- testing on arrival, and
- offering a *test to release* to minimise the quarantine period.

For planning purposes, it would be useful for parents of international pupils to indicate their level of interest in the quarantine facility mentioned above by writing to covidenquiries@Wincoll.ac.uk. There will be a charge for this facility to be determined.

An overview

This communication details the outline plan for a staggered return to school. A return to school will commence on a Monday, so testing will be made available to all boarding staff on the weekend before, then over the subsequent seven-day period, starting on the Monday, every boy returning to school will be tested for COVID-19 prior to entering their boarding house. As before, we will be conducting the mass screening using Samba machines at our temporary test centre on Kingsgate Park (the site of our sports centre). VI Book 1 and V Book will be priorities because of their mock examinations.

For the avoidance of any doubt, the Samba test amplifies a conserved region of the genetic material from the COVID-19 coronavirus, so remains highly sensitive in detecting variants. We will not be using the Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs) provided by the UK government for this mass screening. LFDs cannot match the sensitivity and specificity of the Samba system, though when deployed in certain configurations can provide an augmentation to the system we already have in place at Winchester.



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We were able to acquire a fleet of Samba machines at no rental cost last November as we were helping to determine the feasibility of the methodology. However, this cannot continue and we will, this time, be charged for the machines. Given the ongoing costs involved in screening pupils for coronavirus on an ongoing basis, we are asking parents to make a contribution towards this. We understand this will not be particularly welcome at this time and every effort has been made to limit the cost. We anticipate running our screening for COVID-19 both in March if schools are allowed to return and upon return from the Easter holidays.

A charge of £50 per student per test will be added to Blue Bills to reflect the cost of the screening test.

For those on bursaries above 50%, the cost will be waived.

For those on bursaries below 50%, a pro-rata charge will apply.

The cost of ad hoc testing during the term for students showing COVID-like symptoms will remain borne by the school.

How do I book a test?

The government is due to set out a roadmap to exit lockdown in the week commencing 22 February. If reopening of schools is possible within March, an electronic booking system will be made available via *Winchester Weekly* in the week commencing 22 February in order to allow parents to book tests for their son's return in the week commencing 8 March. As before, you will also receive a separate e-mail, with a link to the booking system, containing a unique identifier for your son, which will be a required piece of information to make each individual booking.

Participation in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight COVID-19 saliva testing programme

We are pleased to share the news that Winchester College has been invited to take part in an exciting new COVID-19 testing programme. Once again, we mention this now because when things progress to implementation they will move very quickly.

The test is very simple and involves collecting a sample of saliva in a plastic pot. Free weekly tests will be offered to **all pupils** and **all staff** at the College. We will be sharing more details with you soon about how this process will work. This is not compulsory, but I strongly encourage you to take part, so please do look out for this.

A more detailed instruction for the various testing processes will be sent with the booking form in the week beginning 22 February if schools are to go back to full face-to-face teaching in March 2021.

With all good wishes,

Dr John Cullerne,

Undermaster