



**Bexley Grammar School**  
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IB World School  
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Dear Parent/Carer,

First of all, thank you for all the messages of thanks and support that have been coming in as the festive season gets underway. I have been very touched by the depth of gratitude that some of you have expressed to my staff for the work they have put in this year to support your children through a year that none of us could have predicted. Your appreciation is the very best way for me to be able to thank my staff.

Now to business. Some of you have expressed concern to me about how tracing contacts and isolating will work if we have confirmed cases of the virus reported during the last week of school. I can assure you that headteachers have been raising these concerns at considerable volume with the government over the past few weeks and have anxiously been waiting for a response. None of us want to be tracking students on Christmas eve and, worse, emailing you to tell you that your child must self-isolate over Christmas and the New Year!

We finally received a small concession yesterday in an announcement from the DfE to clarify end of term arrangements which has “allowed” an adjustment to the end of term by, essentially, swapping an INSET day from somewhere else in the school year. This would enable your children to finish school on Thursday 17th and would only oblige us to trace students up until 23rd December (6 days following the last day of term). The DfE has made it clear that it is not allowing schools to change their calendars to close, for example, a week early. However, we have two INSET days at the end of the school year which we have decided to move to next week to enable your children to finish school on **Wednesday 16th December**.

**In summary, instead of finishing on Friday 18th December next week the last pupil day will be Wednesday 16th December and instead of finishing on Wednesday 21st July in the summer, the last pupil day will be on Friday 23rd July.**

Making this change, only a week before our new end of term date will, inevitably, raise all sorts of questions; I fear I will not be able to field them all. However, I hope the following will help.

I have liaised with the Chair of Governors who is supportive of my operational decision for the benefit of the school community. The benefits are:

- The gap before Christmas after the last day of term is larger, reducing the chances of self-isolation requirements to run over the Christmas period.
- The chances of a school-based transmission reaching vulnerable family members over the festive period is reduced.
- Exhausted staff, who need a holiday, will be 'on call' for a shorter period of their Christmas break.

Conversely, I am aware of the following issues:

- You may have unexpected childcare issues at such short notice.
- A few students who are currently self-isolating will now not be able to return to school before the break.
- Students, especially those who have already had one or more periods of self-isolation, will be missing a few more lessons.
- Your planning for next summer may be affected. Please change your calendars for next year to mark the 22nd and 23rd July as school days. I am hoping that most of us have not yet committed to holiday bookings in the current climate of uncertainty, but if you have already booked a departure on either of these days, please let the attendance office know as soon as possible.

Wednesday 16th December will be a full day, not the usual early finish. Despite losing a day and a half of school, and acknowledging that many students have already had to work remotely for a week or more, I should point out that students in years 9 and above have been receiving more teaching time than usual this term because of the staggered starts and finishes. The examination years, 11 and 13, have had 30 minutes more contact time each day since September, over a week more of school in total. And, ironically, all students have had less disruption to their lessons this term because there have not been any trips and visits and only limited house and other extracurricular activities, none of which have affected lessons.

Please keep your child off school if they display any symptoms of Covid-19 and notify us as you have been. Also, you should continue to notify us immediately of a positive test, up until and including Tuesday 22nd December **only if your child had developed symptoms within 48 hours of being in school**. If your child **“tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), having developed symptoms more than 48 hours since being in school, the school should not be contacted. Parents and carers should follow contact tracing instructions provided by NHS Test and Trace.”** *DfE guidance 8 December*

Finally, I return to my opening comments with my personal thanks to each and every one of you. I write to you as a group of parents and carers but each of you are in your own unique family and work situations. The pandemic has taken its toll on each of us differently. To each of you, however you are experiencing the restrictions to our normal lives and the uncertainties and fears with which we are having to co-exist, I wish you some peace during this festive season and hope that you can hug at least some of your loved ones and forget for extended periods that we are not yet quite back to normal.

And then, a Happy New Year to you all!

Best wishes,  
Steve Elphick