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22nd December 2020

Dear Parent

Arrangements for the Start of Spring Term 2021

I met this morning with the CEO of SCIS and other Scottish Boarding School Heads to discuss the implications of the weekend announcements by the Prime Minister and Scotland's First Minister and subsequent steps internationally to temporarily suspend border crossings with the UK. Following this, SMT met at Strathallan to consider what this means – as far as we can determine at this point – for the start of next term. I am therefore writing to update you – Pupil, Parents and Staff – and will write again as and when further clarification or further changes are made.

i. Reasons for new changes

The detection of a new strain of Covid-19 in the UK (and elsewhere) which appears to be more easily transmitted has driven up UK cases, predominantly in the South East of England and in London. This, combined with calculations based on the previously announced 5-day Christmas 'easing' of tier restrictions, suggested that the NHS (already at 90% capacity in some part of the UK) might not cope with an ongoing increase of cases that require hospitalisation alongside seasonal NHS demand normally seen in January and February. There is currently no concern that the new Covid strain is more virulent, more harmful or more resistant to vaccine treatment. Rather the issue seems focused on its easier transmission. There is also a question over the possibility that teenagers and children might be able to transmit the new strain of virus more easily, unlike the current predominant strain of the virus. At this stage this is a possibility but one not yet backed up by data and evidence. Consequently, the changes announced over the weekend have some implications for the start of next term and how education will be conducted initially. The implications however are not at this stage overly disruptive.

ii. Key Changes to Note

The key changes we are making to the start of next term are:

- i. **Teaching will begin on Tuesday 12th January for online lessons until 16th January, after which time in-person lessons will resume.**
- ii. **Winter Timetable will NOT run in the first week of term for online lessons.**
- iii. **The school will be open for boarders** from Monday 11th January who will attend lessons remotely while remaining in house bubbles once they return. (Boarders can if they wish stay at home to access lessons in this first week).
- iv. **Day Pupils will access lessons online from Tuesday 12th January until Saturday 16th January from home.**

- v. **In-person lessons are due to begin on Monday 18th January** from which point school buses will run, boarders are due back and day pupils should report to school as normal.
- vi. Pupils whose parents are **Key Workers** can return to school on 12th January, including day pupils. The Definition of a key worker can be found on the Scottish Government website as before.
- vii. **Music, SfL and EaL** lessons will begin online and revert to in-person as appropriate after 18th January.
- viii. **Mock and Prelim Exams** will be moved – see VII below. The first week of term will therefore be revision for candidates taking public exams and presents a good opportunity for them to enhance their attainment levels at this stage of the year.
- ix. Tier 4 restrictions in Scotland will prevent fixtures but **games and exercise** will continue to be organised for boarders in the first week of term and for everyone from week two.
- x. **Bubble arrangements** will be reviewed in the week before term and, where deemed necessary, bubbles will be reduced and tightened in light of any new guidance.
- xi. **Term will start with House Meetings and Tutor periods** from 8.40am Tuesday 12th January.
- xii. **Online teaching/learning** arrangements will follow the current timetable including breaks and transition time. Chapel (Wednesday) and Assembly (Friday) will be as normal and online as before.

iii. What is NOT Changing

Many of the arrangements currently in place in the school will remain:

- i. Overall hygiene arrangements will remain as before.
- ii. Daily temperature checks will remain compulsory.
- iii. Face masks will remain in use as before.
- iv. One way systems in operation will remain.
- v. Lunch sittings will remain alongside hygiene arrangements for the serving of food.
- vi. Classroom arrangements and expected behaviours will remain regimented as before.
- vii. Health Centre oversight of the health of pupils and of any who are or become symptomatic will remain and we will be led in all decisions by their clinical input alongside that of our school Medical Officer Dr Burnett and the NHS Health Protection team for Tayside.
- viii. Sport and activities will continue in line with any guidance updates from the respective governing bodies, though bubble arrangements may be imposed further on internal training arrangements.
- ix. Quarantine for pupils requiring it will continue OFF SITE after 10th January until they have completed the correct period in isolation. Once this is done they will re-join their house bubbles and, from 18 January in-person lessons.
- x. Day Pupils with symptoms (at any stage going forward) or boarding pupils self-isolating at the end of the holidays should NOT attend school in-person until it is clear it is safe and they have permission to do so. Lessons can be accessed online as normal throughout the term as last term for anyone self-isolating after 18th January.

- xi. Parents should remain in cars during drop-off/pick-up and boarding houses remain out of bounds to all (including parents) except for members (Pupils, tutors, residents and staff) of each house.
- xii. Visitors to the school will be significantly restricted as before.
- xiii. Boarding House duties and supervision will be arranged as normal and adjusted where appropriate to ensure that pupils are fully cared for and looked after and that staff and pupils are safe.
- xiv. GCSE and A Level exams are so far expected to go ahead as previously advertised.

iv. Notes for Overseas Boarders

Travel issues are likely to impede some plans and I ask all parents and pupils check with their travel agents/airlines and with advice on their own national government websites on travel to the UK. The current bans put in place vary from 48 hrs to 10 days, with Hong Kong the longest announced delay to 11th January. **This information is subject to change.**

As things stand, the school expects to be able to receive boarders from either guardians or back from overseas from 28th December as planned. With quarantine now 10 days instead of 14, pupils have already begun to adjust their arrival dates - please keep the school informed via Mr Giles (Director of International Study Programmes) of any changes to your travel plans as previously requested:

Mr David Giles: d.giles@strathallan.co.uk

Mr Carlos Silva comopsassistant@strathallan.co.uk (Mr Silva is coordinating pre-term boarding).

Those requiring self-isolation in the UK will be able to complete this in school up to the 10th January. Thereafter, anyone requiring completion of quarantine or to begin quarantine will need to move to the Royal George Hotel in Perth until they have completed this. The school has exclusive use of the hotel and pupils will be supervised and able to access lessons remotely during this time.

v. Travel in Tier 4

While travel in Tier 3 and 4 regions is discouraged, it is allowed for essential purposes – education and work are considered essential as things stand and therefore I anticipate journeys for attending school as boarders and as teachers remaining permissible. If this changes, we will advise accordingly.

vi. Access to boarding Houses for Day pupils for possession in week 1 of Term

Should any day pupils require access to Houses or the Prep School for books etc. ahead of week 1's online learning, please contact your Matron as appropriate (via the usual email address) from Tuesday 12th January to arrange this.

vii. Mock Exams and Prelims

These will now take place as follows:

GCSEs	Wednesday 20 th January – Thursday 28 th January
Highers	Thursday 28 th January – Tuesday 2 nd February
A Levels	Monday 1 st February – Friday 5 th February

Sanhedrin interviews following exams will move dates accordingly and pupils will be advised of dates and times in due course.

viii. (No) Whole School Testing

Despite being announced in England, there are no routes to this currently available in Scotland. We are discussing this with our NHS Health Protection Team and will continue to do so. If the situation changes, we will contact parents to explain what would be required. Please note therefore that this is not something that is currently available to/required of Scottish Schools.

Conclusions

Please note that these arrangements may be subject to change. As the situation develops into 2021, the national and indeed international picture may change. If the infection rates decline due to Tier 4 arrangements and the restrictions imposed on Christmas and New Year, if the Oxford vaccine is approved (which will roll out faster than the Pfizer vaccine), then the restrictions likely to last into February may begin to ease, or at any rate seem closer to ending as the vaccine programme gathers pace.

This may be the penultimate or possibly even the last 'big push' nationally to buy enough time for the NHS to cope while vaccines come into effect. If so, then we will have navigated a 15 month 'roller-coaster' and come out the other end still in good shape. We will therefore continue to work hard to keep our school a safe place to live in, to work in, to learn in and to enjoy. Thank you for your support, patience and cooperation for which I remain grateful. I look forward to the day when I get to write a better kind of letter.

For now, please be reassured that we are planning and adapting as the situation and the Government's advice may require, and that as we are paying close attention to what might be required going forward **we will inform you next in early January of any further changes**. Right now it is imperative that the whole community takes time to rest, recharge, switch off and recover. For that reason, I do not plan to update you further until after SMT meet on 7th January to review the situation formally once more, by which time we will be in receipt of any further guidance. So please enjoy family time, please do not overly worry and please do stay in communication if you encounter any specific issues or worries ahead of next term.

Please note that the school closes today (22nd December) for a period of shutdown and administrative offices re-open on 5th January. Those pupils returning before this already have contact details for the relevant staff (see above – Mr Giles and Mr Silva) so do keep us informed through the period of the holidays if travel plans change.

Stay safe, stay well and a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy 2021 when it comes!

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

DM lauder

Headmaster