



Introduction

We have been in regular contact with the UK Health Security Agency (HAS) over the last three weeks, and their advice has been invaluable in helping us to manage our way through the spike in infection rates. On account of daily testing of all our boarders, and thanks also to the many day parents who have submitted their children's test results to us, we have been able to track infection rates very closely, and the HAS's clear view is that rates have levelled off.

This is clearly to be welcomed, but we cannot be complacent, and we must all continue to do our bit to prevent the spread of the disease. Encouraging in your children the highest standards of personal hygiene, including regular hand-washing, adherence to social distancing, the wearing of face-coverings for pupils in Year 7 and above, and keeping your children at home should they display any of the symptoms of COVID-19 – all these precautions remain absolutely critical.

The final fortnight of term

Despite the government's "business as usual" approach, and its encouragement to schools to continue with the festivities traditionally associated with the end of the Michaelmas Term, we have decided that it would be inappropriate for us to do so. Infection rates, though plateauing, remain of some concern, and we are anxious not to expose pupils, parents or staff to anything that might jeopardise their Christmas plans.

We will not, therefore, be holding any further assemblies or chapel services, nor will there be any carol services or Christmas concerts.

You may remember, however, that last year we produced an online service of lessons, carols, readings and music. This was very well received, and we will be doing the same again this year. You will be sent a link at lunchtime on Friday 17 December, which will enable you to watch the service at 17:00 that afternoon, and though clearly no substitute for the real thing, we hope that all Mount Kelly families will gather together to watch what we nonetheless hope will be a meaningful celebration of Christmas.

As a small recompense for the absence of live events and traditional Christmas jolliness, every pupil, on leaving School on Friday 17 December, will be presented with a small box of Christmas goodies to take home with them, and which we hope all our families will enjoy tucking into as they watch the online service.

With regret, we are unable to invite parents in to watch the Pre-Prep Nativity, but it will go ahead regardless, and both the event itself and the all-important preparation and lead-up will be filmed, and a link to the recording will be sent to all Pre-Prep parents shortly afterwards.

With regards to the drama productions that were scheduled for final fortnight of term (the main College production, and the Year 7 productions), these have been postponed until next term. The Year 5 production will be recorded and parents of Year 5 pupils will shortly receive a link to the online recording.

The role of parents

As always, we remain grateful for the support of all our parents at this challenging time, and would repeat the request in last week's Update for the parents of day pupils to observe the following precautions:

- Encourage your children to observe the highest standards of personal hygiene.
- LFD test your children as frequently as is practicable, and particularly if a member of their household contracts COVID or presents with symptoms.
- Particularly, LFD test your children on Sunday evenings/Monday mornings, prior to the start of the week.
- If your children are eligible for vaccination, please do all that you can to ensure they are vaccinated.
- Keep your children at home should they present with any of the symptoms of COVID-19.
- Keep the school informed of COVID-related developments in your household.

We would also ask that the parents of boarders who spend any meaningful time out of their boarding houses, perhaps for a weekend, LFD test them prior to their return to the boarding house.

Conclusion

Though the final three weeks of term have certainly been impacted by the pandemic, reviewing the term as a whole we are pleased with everything that has been achieved. Despite significant staff and pupil absence, and ongoing uncertainty with regards to next year's public examinations, we have been full steam ahead not only in our academic delivery, but also in our sport, our swimming, our outdoor education programme, and in the performing arts – in everything, in fact, that makes a Mount Kelly education what it is.

This happy state of affairs is very largely thanks to the support of our parents, so the final Parent Update of 2021 is an opportune moment to thank you all. It has felt as though we have been beating to windward for much of the term, but the commitment and encouragement of our parents has done much to keep the boat moving nicely through the water.



Overseas Pupils

The end of the Michaelmas Term

Having run a series of very successful holiday camps since the start of the pandemic, we simply do not have the resource to offer accommodation to boarders beyond the end of this term, and so the School will formally and fully close at 14:00 on Friday 17 December.

We understand entirely the anxiety that our overseas pupils and their families are facing, however, and particularly the fear that a positive diagnosis within ten days of the end of term would jeopardise travel plans. With that in mind, it may be that overseas parents, who intend for their children to return home for Christmas, would want them to leave early, and we would be content for them to do so.

Though we are unable to offer formal blended teaching, any overseas pupils who do leave early will be able to continue to progress in their learning via Teams, with lessons for those at the College being livestreamed and recorded, and independent work being set in the normal way.

Overseas parents who do wish to bring their children home early should contact the School's Transport Manager, Mrs Gaynor Bersey (BerseyG@mountkelly.com), with regards to travel to the airport.

Day pupils, and overseas pupils who are spending the Christmas holiday in the UK, are expected to remain in School until the end of term, and normal teaching will continue right through to the final day of term.

The start of the Lent Term

Overseas parents whose children are leaving the UK for the Christmas holiday will be aware of the recently announced government requirement for all those entering the country to remain in isolation until they have received a negative PCR test result.

Unfortunately, we simply do not have the capacity to offer isolation accommodation at school, so parents of pupils returning from abroad for the Lent Term must make their own arrangements for their children to remain in isolation pending receipt of a negative result. They should look to family members and friends, or to their guardians, for support in this respect.

Should any parents who are sending their children back to us from abroad be completely unable to find somewhere for their son or daughter to isolate, whilst they await their PCR test result, they should contact the relevant Housemaster or Housemistress. We will do what we can to help, of course, but can make no promises.

The start of the Lent Term

All our boarders – apart from those who are required to take a PCR test on account of returning to the UK from abroad – will take a LFD test on their return to School in January, and will not be allowed into their boarding houses until they have received a negative result.

The full details of the return to School testing programme will be published in the New Year, though parents returning their children to school from anywhere within the UK should factor this into their plans, as any UK boarder who returns a positive LFD test will be required to leave the School immediately.