



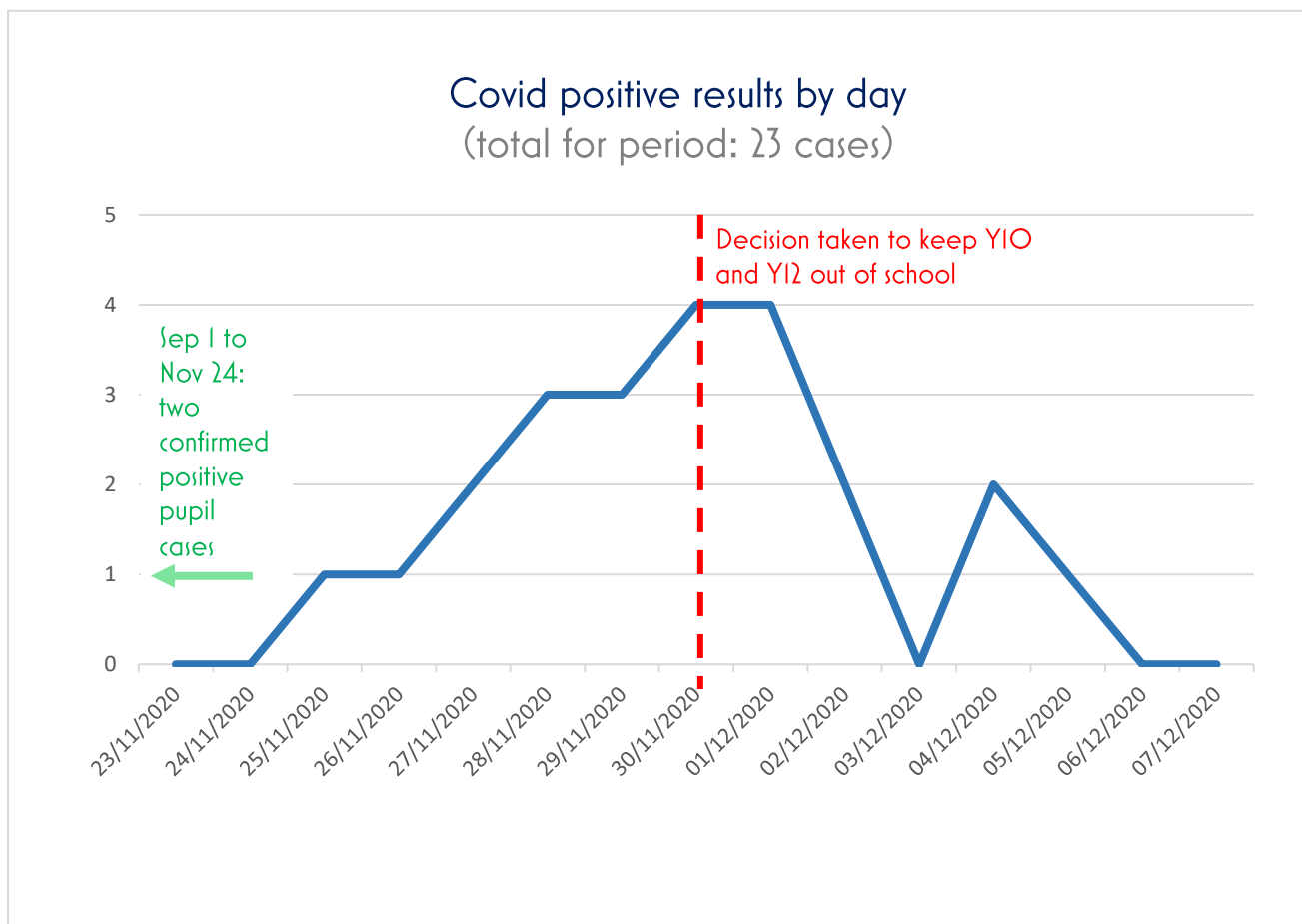
from Tom Lawson MA (Oxon), Headmaster

8 December 2020

General Update

Dear Parents,

A week or so after the spike in positive cases which necessitated the move of Year 10 and Year 12 to remote learning, I can now report that Public Health England have responded in support of the actions we took. Happily I can report that the 'outbreak' appears over with a sharp drop in cases reported. This successful prevention of further spread is at the expense of many pupils in all years self-isolating and much smaller numbers physically in school than normal with others engaged in remote learning.



We look forward to any pupils in Year 11 and 13 not required to self-isolate returning to in-person schooling, unless it is inconvenient to do so. Year 9 numbers in school are very low at the moment, I hope we will see more in tomorrow and Thursday but if they remain as they are it will be more effective for them to switch to full remote learning along with Year 10 and 12. I will write again to Year 9 parents if that is required.

Pupils travelling overseas

I am hugely grateful to parents and guardians for confirming arrangements where possible to get pupils needing to head overseas for Christmas onto flights over the last week. Getting away in good time ensures that there is no possibility of them having a positive test just before the end of term which could seriously disrupt travel plans. We are looking forward to welcoming all pupils back into school in the New Year following the isolation for five days plus testing time and a negative test result (for pupils from countries not in a travel corridor). We will get the various links to how this system works to parents and guardians when the system goes live. This self-isolation should generally be at guardians and any parents concerned about this should get in touch with their hsm in the first instance.

Exams

Well done to all Year 9 and 10 pupils for completing a series of internal tests. There were some great results and they provide a useful baseline for pupils and teachers to focus their efforts in the coming term. Year 11 mock exams are planned for Week 3 of next term giving plenty of time for all pupils to return and settle into routines. Mock exams for Year 13 will be in the week after half term, that is the week commencing 22 February 2021.

The government has announced that GCSE and A-level exams will go ahead. The additional measures they have confirmed are (in their own words):

- more generous grading than usual, in line with national outcomes from 2020, so students this year are not disadvantaged;
- students receiving advance notice of some topic areas covered in GCSE, AS and A levels to focus revision;
- exam aids - like formula sheets - provided in some exams giving students more confidence and reducing the amount of information they need to memorise;
- additional exams to give students a further chance to sit a paper if the main exams or assessments are missed due to illness or self-isolation; and
- a new expert group to look at differential learning and monitor the variation in the impact of the pandemic on students across the country.

We are planning to time exam leave for pupils in order to best balance the mitigation of Covid risk and giving pupils contact with their teachers. We view the Covid contingency papers as undesirable and they take place at a disruptive time during family and school holidays; we should avoid them wherever possible.

Covid-secure arrangements for next term

We plan a full return to in-person schooling at the beginning of next term. Having carefully examined the options to avoid the very large-scale disruption that characterised the last two weeks, **we plan to introduce self-administered instant antigen testing for all pupils prior to the beginning of term. Weekly testing will then take place until at least half term.** This scheme will require a proportion of the cost passed to parents (approximately £80 to take us up to half term) and to be effective, everyone needs to take part and report positive test results to us. When testing positive on this self-administered test, pupils will isolate until this is confirmed or otherwise with an official PCR test.

3
8 December 2020

As we go down this path, I will be asking for the 'buy in' of the whole parent community, otherwise the gains would be minimal. We will work up the details and get all the information to you as soon as possible, but if you have an objection to taking part in such a process next term I would be grateful if you could let me know.

I really think things are looking up, and I hope you too feel that, while challenges remain, the worst is over.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Lawson
Headmaster