

From: Andrew Fleck BSc, MA
Principal



**SEDBERGH
SCHOOL**

FOUNDED 1525

21 January 2021

Dear Parents

Frustrating as the School closures are, I hope that the Term has got off to a good start through Remote Learning and the various pastoral and practical activities which are taking place. It is a daily boost to see what our pupils are doing.

Now that Term is well underway, we have been turning our thoughts to re-opening, we are already ready to welcome pupils back into School at just a few days' notice. Whilst we scan the news and educational press for clues about re-opening every day, we appreciate that parents will have a wider range of pressures and will not focus on this issue to the same extent. At the same time, we know that this is a pressing issue for parents and the purpose of this letter is to bring you up to date with an uncertain situation.

The Secretary of State for Education made a statement on the subject yesterday morning in which he wrote, *"We are keeping plans for the return to School and College under continuous review and will ensure that children and young people return to face to face education as soon as it is possible. We will inform Schools, Colleges and parents ahead of the February Half Term."* In other words, *"There is no news."*

Therefore, the formal situation is that we don't know whether Schools will re-open after Half Term meaning that, for the time being, we cannot allow pupils to return to School unless they are the children of UK Key Workers. I know this will be frustrating, especially to international families who live in countries where travel restrictions are being relaxed but unfortunately, these are the regulations we are bound by. Given this situation, we are unable to advise families whether they should book flights to the UK for pupils to return after Half Term.

Our own informal assessment of the situation is that the change in infection rates in England is encouraging but three of the four criteria which Government will use to decide if Schools re-open are yet to show significant progress, making re-opening in February deeply uncertain. The Government has raised speculation about prioritising vaccination for Teachers and School employees which suggests they are negotiating with teaching unions over the return date. There is also some suggestion that pupils will return to School at different times depending on the local situation. Whilst this would have limited bearing on Boarding Schools, Government regulations are blunt instruments and we will be bound by whatever local restrictions are in force.

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In summary, we foresee three possibilities. It is possible that Schools will return after February Half Term, but we would need to see rapid decreases in hospitalisations and mortality rates coupled with an increase in vaccination rates to meet Government criteria. A second option is that limited Year groups return for a short period before Easter, these would be most likely to be primary age pupils and those in exam cohorts. The third scenario is closure until the start of the Summer Term. Any of these scenarios may be varied through local restrictions.

I am sorry not to be able to give you clear insight into arrangements for return and recognise that some parents may ask, *"What was the point of the letter?"* More than anything, we wish to acknowledge that this is an important subject for parents and pupils, and offer clarity about the current situation however unsatisfactory that may be. We will continue to track the subject and will communicate further when any new developments are announced.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Fleck". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Andrew Fleck