

Tuesday, 5 January 2021

Statement from Education Minister Senator Tracey Vallois:

“Following the announcement last night of further restrictions and school closures in England, which mirror announcements made by the other devolved administrations in the UK, I know that many parents, students and teachers will be wondering about the implications for Jersey.

“I would like to reassure parents, students and our school community that my officials and I are reviewing daily the situation in the Island and advice is taken frequently from our local health and education professionals. We are not in the same position as the UK, but that doesn’t mean we can be complacent and I remain vigilant in the light of the ongoing volatile situation.

The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) met on Monday and considered both the trajectory of the virus and the roll out of the testing programme for school staff and certain year groups of students. The STAC continues to provide advice to support any decisions that I need to make and my officials attend its meetings to ensure that all questions and issues relating to nurseries, schools, colleges and higher education students are fully explored.

The Competent Authority Ministers (CAM) will meet later this week to discuss the latest assessment and advice from the STAC and officials and I will update parents at the earliest opportunity about whether or not any new decisions are required.

In the meantime, I would like to thank all of our school leaders, teaching and support staff, caretakers, secretaries and all school staff who are all in school this week, working hard to make plans and prepare for students to return next week.

Testing programme

The start of term for pupils in Government of Jersey schools has been delayed by a week, until Monday 11 January, in order to roll out a voluntary testing programme for all Government and private school and nursery staff, along with students in Years 11, 12 and 13.

So far, of the c5000 staff and students eligible, 2,187 have booked appointments to be tested since the announcement of the testing regime on 1 January 2021. This is an

encouraging start and a high uptake is expected which means that schools will be able to make the best-informed start to the term possible on the 11 January.

Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell

The advice I received from the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell and the Medical Officer for Health in Jersey, last week, is that schools should remain open to pupils as the risks to the health, welfare and education of our children from a continued absence from school continues to outweigh the risks from COVID-19.

Throughout the pandemic, the health and safety of children, staff and their families have been our shared and absolute priority, so safety plans, risk assessments and strategies are being reviewed in all schools this week with additional control measures and an improved contact tracing approach being implemented.

Working with the STAC and education officials, the schools' guidance is being reviewed with head teachers to improve and tighten control measures to restrict the spread of COVID and reduce the number of direct contacts in the event of a confirmed case.

Combined with enhanced testing programme which will improve considerably the 'early warning' system that has been at the heart of the test, track and isolate programme across the Island, I am confident that all schools will be as prepared as possible to deal with Covid positive cases when students return on 11 Jan 2021.

Our staff should also be reassured by the new testing regime, strengthened control measures in schools and the refined contact tracing approach.

University Students

We strongly advise our students to contact their respective Universities to confirm arrangements for start of the spring semester. Those who have already left the Island and now wish or need to return are asked to follow the travel guidelines published on government website. As before and over Christmas and New Year, there are currently commercial travel options available for students to choose and plan for their return to Jersey.

Students living in households where Income Support is claimed and who are advised by their University to postpone their return, may be able to access additional financial assistance. They are advised to contact Customer and Local Services for an assessment of their individual request.

If any student does need to go back to the UK, for example because their course is practical in nature and must be completed during this time, they should contact the Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills if they require any advice.

Examinations

Any decisions taken by Ofqual and the UK Government regarding summer exams and qualifications also apply to pupils in Jersey. The full details have not been announced, but when this information becomes available, parents/carers and schools will be informed and students in Jersey will be offered the same opportunities as pupils in the UK.

We will do all we can to ensure that students' education is disrupted as little as possible; and that – whatever the ultimate decision by the Department of Education in the UK - we will do all we can to ensure that results are fair and robust.”