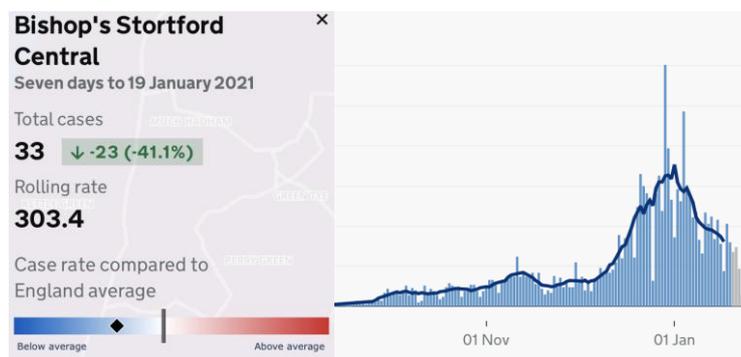


25 January 2021

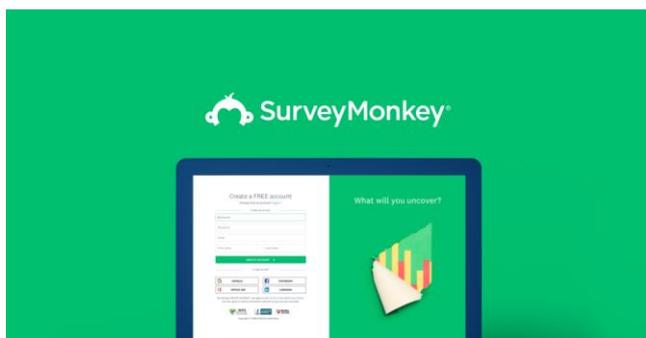
Dear Parents/Carers

I hope you are well – I know that life is a bit ‘hum drum’ at the moment but it is good to see the levels of Covid-19 transmission fall in our area to a position where we are now below the national average (See below).



This combined with the roll out of the national vaccine programme focussing at the moment on the oldest and most vulnerable members of our community is good news. However, the more contagious new variants mean that we are all having to be extra cautious as we are at school with our 40 Key Worker, Vulnerable and SEND students with weekly testing and maintaining a rigid approach to hands-face-space.

Our students continue to do extremely well under the circumstances. We have had a fantastic response rate to live online lessons - looking at attendance on the SMHW lesson-by-lesson monitor, we have a figure of 93% which rises to 96% when we take out technical problems – which are fortunately becoming less frequent. The feedback we are receiving on our online survey reflects this. If you have not had time to complete the parent survey, the link is below alongside the link for students. It takes five minutes and is really useful for us as a school to see what we are doing well and where we need to improve our virtual teaching and support.



Birchwood Student Questionnaire January 2021

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/birchwoodstudentjan21>

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Birchwood Parent Questionnaire January 2021

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/birchwoodparentjan2021>

I know that teachers at Birchwood are working hard to set lessons, which will allow Year 11 and 13 students to do their best if it is entirely a teacher assessment or an external assessment. We are also focusing on Sixth Form, Post 16 and University applications to ensure that students are able to move on to do what they want to do. We have record numbers of students applying for University and the Sixth Form, which makes absolute sense - to stay in full-time education and improve your qualifications whilst the world tries to reconfigure post-Covid.

Year 8 parents: We are unable to run our normal Options Evening on Tuesday 2 February due to Covid restrictions. With Year 8 interim reports going live on Friday 29 January and Parents' Evening schedules for Tuesday 2 March, we think it would be prudent to move the Options Event to after this (date to be confirmed) – we will also know by then whether this has to be online or can be hosted in school. There is plenty of time to process students' option requests ahead of them starting their GCSEs in September.

Wellbeing: As a thank you to our hard working students, we are having a well-being break on **Friday 29 January** with taught lessons finishing at 12:30pm (end of Period 3). This will also give our teachers a small break. If your child is up-to-date by then, then they can enjoy Friday afternoon to do something they want to do. If ever there was an incentive...

As for a **return to school**, this is a topic of great debate at the moment. Learning from home is not a substitute for being in the classroom and I know that it is far easier for teachers to gauge what students have learnt when the student is in front of them. We are three weeks away from half term and we have been told that we will receive at least two weeks' notice by the Secretary of State so we should know soon. A return may mean staggered returns for certain year groups or a return to a tiered approach depending on local area infection rates. It is difficult to speculate. As soon as I am clear, I will let you know.

Thank you again for everything you are doing to support your child during these trying times.

Yours sincerely

Chris Ingate

Dr Chris Ingate
Principal