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31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I hope that this finds you and your family well and that, despite the unusual circumstances, you've had an enjoyable Christmas break.

Apologies for interrupting the Christmas holiday but, as you will be aware, the Education Minister has today issued revised arrangements in respect of the return to school of pupils in 2021. While we all recognise the importance of schools remaining open, it is evident that the public health and scientific advice now clearly indicates that full re-opening of schools is not possible at this time. The details of the announcement can be accessed at the following link – [Weir announces changes to schools` reopening arrangements | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/News/2020/12/23/weir-announces-changes-to-schools-reopening-arrangements)

In summary, all pupils, other than children of key workers, will now be taught remotely for the first week of term with face-to-face teaching becoming operational for pupils in Years 12 – 14 from Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January. Face-to-face teaching of pupils in Years 8 – 11 is expected to resume on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February with remote learning continuing until then.

In order to allow preparation for this, the Department of Education has indicated that the first day of term, Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January, can be used in planning for remote learning so there is no requirement for pupils to be involved in remote learning on that date. However, vulnerable children and children of key workers may attend school if necessary. (The definition of a key worker has been broadened and details are provided through the link above.) Supervision will be provided for these pupils but their normal timetable will not operate, due to the demands of maintaining remote learning for all pupils, and we would ask that pupils attend in their school PE kit as physical activities will be included as part of the school day. If your child/children is/are in this category and that you would wish him/her/them to attend school during the week commencing Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January, please complete the Google Form [Supervision in school 4-8 Jan 2021](#) by Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2021. A separate form will be issued for pupils in Years 8 to 11 for the period from Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January.

While these arrangements will not permit examinations for Year 11 to go ahead in January, examinations for pupils in Years 12 – 14, including CCEA GCSE Mathematics, will go ahead as planned. Study time will be made available this week for pupils in Years 12 and 13 to assist with their preparation.

Further, and more detailed, information will follow next week but hopefully this provides you with sufficient guidance for your own planning in the interim. If you have any queries, please contact us via the school email account, [info@balacademy.ballymena.ni.sch.uk](mailto:info@balacademy.ballymena.ni.sch.uk).

Best wishes for the remainder of the holiday and for 2021.

Yours faithfully,

S.W. Black (Principal)

