

Message

From: Jon Coles [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=D88DC1677D22412BB79F04979C6D50D9-JON COLES]
Sent: 21/12/2020 1:00:49 PM
To: KINNIBURGH, Julia [Julia.KINNIBURGH@education.gov.uk]
CC: Herrington, Dominic-NSC [Dominic.HERRINGTON@education.gov.uk]; TAYLOR, Sophie [Sophie.Taylor@education.gov.uk]
Subject: RE: Start of term

Julia

Thanks very much.

I'd really like to talk at some point about communication of these major announcements. Recognising of course that decisions are being made at pace and need to be communicated rapidly, I still think that they could be communicated in a way that lands much better with schools.

On this one, some of the substance wasn't clear and the absence of rationale as much as the timing was central to the negative reaction:

- The message that years 7-10 and Y12 *must not* come into school wasn't clear. I still don't think it is – people only know this (insofar as they do) through intermediaries who have spoken directly to the DfE.
- It wasn't clear that the rationale for this is epidemiological: it was presented as an enabling measure to allow schools space to plan mass testing. [This provoked understandable anger amongst the overwhelming majority of schools which have been fighting to stay open all term and were already dismayed by the 'make Friday an INSET day' message.]
- The message that mass testing is a request not a requirement wasn't clear.
- The proposals about timing of mass testing sounded like a requirement as well – and are essentially impossible to implement while taking a holiday over Christmas.
- The tone of this and other communications isn't landing well despite the attempts to sound appreciative and I think this could be a lot more effective.
- The length of comms is really unhelpful. I understand why it feels right in the context of DfE's written culture, but I think you should consider much shorter messages.

What's done is done, but these examples are representative of some wider points about communication of similar announcements which we might discuss at some stage.

Final point of good governance: DfE is getting into the habit of telling people what to do without doing so directly and explaining what powers are being used. Schools are being asked/told not to obey the law which tells them the minimum number of sessions they must be open for attendance. I think that the rule of law demands that you explain what powers are being used to make that ok, why they will not be in breach of the law and how Ministers are accountable for the exercise of their powers.

Jon

From: KINNIBURGH, Julia <Julia.KINNIBURGH@education.gov.uk>
Sent: 19 December 2020 10:02
To: Jon Coles <jon.coles@unitedlearning.org.uk>
Cc: Herrington, Dominic-NSC <Dominic.HERRINGTON@education.gov.uk>; TAYLOR, Sophie <Sophie.Taylor@education.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Start of term

[** This message came from outside United Learning **]

Dear Jon

Thank you for your email. I know NR spoke to you yesterday and we have now sent you our draft guidance. I'm very happy to chat further if that's helpful.

Best wishes

Julia

From: Jon Coles <jon.coles@unitedlearning.org.uk>

Sent: 18 December 2020 15:14

To: KINNIBURGH, Julia <Julia.KINNIBURGH@education.gov.uk>; Herrington, Dominic-NSC <Dominic.HERRINGTON@education.gov.uk>

Subject: Start of term

Julia, Dominic,

I am writing to let you know what we're planning to do at the start of next term (and why) so that if you have any concerns you can tell me. Today is our last day of term, so we are communicating with parents, who need clarity. My understanding is that despite the tone of the announcement, we have significant flexibility.

We haven't been given a clear reason for closing our schools to pupils in years 7-10 and 12 in the first week of term and therefore we will be fully open. In fact, if we were to close, we would be acting outside our Funding Agreement, which sets a requirement for the minimum number of sessions we must teach.

My understanding is that mass testing in the first week back is optional. Therefore, we will not start mass testing that week, but will give ourselves proper time to plan, resource and implement mass testing in an orderly way later in the month. Doing anything else would require significant input from Heads over the first holiday period they would otherwise have had in some months. In any case, I have little confidence that our schools would receive the testing and other materials they would need by 4 Jan, so there seems a high probability that planning over the Christmas break would be nugatory.

I am conscious that this is very different to what Ministers have been saying in public in the last 24 hours, but it seems to me the right approach in the interests of children and young people. Please let me know if you have any concerns about this.

Finally, there was quite strong agreement on a call of the larger trusts earlier to my suggestion that really very quickly there needs to be much clearer guidance to trusts and schools as to the modalities of this – the musts, oughts and mayas of what is proposed – and the rationale for staggered starts and timing of testing. I believe that Leora will convey this to you along with an offer from us (including me) to help with this.

With best wishes

Jon

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