

Media Release

For immediate release

Date: 15th December 2021

Grammar School and Sixth Form Centre to close to most students with immediate effect

The Grammar School and Sixth Form Centre has closed to most students with immediate effect, after a case of the Omicron variant was this evening confirmed at the school.

However, the school will remain open tomorrow (Thursday), Friday 17th, Monday 20th, Tuesday 21st and the morning of Wednesday 22nd December for any student invited to attend by the school's Principal and those children whose parents cannot make alternative arrangements and must continue going to work on those days.

A student was confirmed to have the Omicron variant this evening. They tested positive as part of the school contact tracing programme and have no direct links to travel. As we only sequence a proportion of cases, at this stage it is unclear to what extent the variant is present within other recent cases at the school.

As confirmed by Dr Brink at Tuesday's media briefing, it is highly likely that the variant is already present within the community so an increase in cases is anticipated in the weeks ahead. The measures announced by the CCA this week are designed to slow the spread of the variant while keeping the island running.

While there is no Public Health requirement to close the school to most students with immediate effect, the decision by the Committee for Education, Sport & Culture was taken due to the proximity to Christmas and its desire to minimise the risk of students and staff becoming positive and having to isolate over the festive period. The management of cases in schools is likely to be very different from January once this important family holiday time has passed.

Deputy Bob Murray, Vice-President of the Committee for Education, Sport & Culture, said:

'We learned of the presence of the Omicron variant at the school this evening, and have taken swift steps to do all that we can to minimise the risk of any further spread of it through the school. We cannot ignore how close we are to Christmas and that was at the forefront of our minds when we decided to end the term with immediate effect for the Grammar School and Sixth Form Centre. We are 10 days from Christmas and we want to minimise the risk as much as possible of any student or member of

staff contracting the virus and needing to isolate over the festive period. The school has contacted parents directly to inform them of our decision.

‘But we also need the community to understand that things will look different in January when students return to settings. We are expecting a lot more Omicron cases and it is simply not possible or proportionate to disrupt our young people’s education any more than absolutely necessary. We have made the decision this evening because of how close we are to Christmas. If this was January it is highly unlikely that we would have come to the same decision as we must live responsibly with Covid-19, which now includes the new variant, and that means us all finding a way to manage its implications in such a way that allows education to continue.’

Nick Hynes, Director of Education, said:

“It was inevitable that we would get cases of the new variant in education settings and I want to thank the young person, along with many of their peers, for doing the right thing, being vigilant with the lateral flow tests and seeking a confirmatory PCR once that came back positive.

‘We have this evening worked closely with Public Health to understand the circumstances of this case. The young person concerned has not travelled off island and was identified through the school testing and contact tracing programme so it is likely that there are more positive cases in the school. As soon as we became aware we took immediate action, working with the Committee, to try and limit the risk of further spread and therefore further disruption for families at Christmas.

‘At this stage there are no other confirmed cases of the Omicron variant at other schools, so the action we have taken is focused on this school only as we have taken the decision based on the evidence we have. As Deputy Murray said, things will look very different in January and all involved in the delivery of education will have to adapt to what is likely to be a new norm of managing disruption as a result of absences while maintaining our absolute focus of keeping settings open and delivering education.’

Ends