



The Westminster School

Safe, Happy and Learning Together

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Dear Parents/Carers

COVID Cases Update

This has been the most challenging week of this academic year. We knew at some point we were going to feel the impact of COVID but we didn't think it would be this early and to this extent. We are living with it as best we can but it is beginning to have a profound impact on the daily life of the school.

We have been closely monitoring the data about COVID over the past couple of weeks and we have been in regular contact with our colleagues at Public Health. Following an increase in positive COVID cases amongst pupils and staff, we have been in close collaboration with Sandwell Education and Public Health as it is apparent that we need to implement more robust measures to protect the school community. These measures have been agreed by all parties, including the Governing Board. There is therefore a slight deviation from the published government guidance as we are now classified as having a COVID outbreak within school.

What does it look like in school at the moment?

The landscape of COVID within school is shifting day-by-day, hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute. Since the start of the academic year we have 16 positive reported pupil cases, however 11 of these have been within the past week. Consequently, we have seen significant levels of contact tracing leading to 25% of the workforce being out of work pending PCR test results coupled with 30% of pupils pending test results. All the contact tracing has been conducted by the School Leadership Team and not by/with NHS Test and Trace as the government mantra might lead you to believe. This is putting increasing pressures on the Leadership Team and we are having to make rapid decisions to keep everyone safe.

We have stepped up our COVID control measures in school as per our risk assessment. Cleaning regimes are being bolstered throughout the school day and staff are encouraged to wear face coverings in communal areas. We also have CO2 monitoring as part of the fabric of the building and this is providing information about ventilation. We are keeping the mixing of pathways to a minimum but lunch times remain a challenge due to the volume we are dealing with.

Due to the time delay in getting test results back we can often see pupils returning before staff returning which in turn create significant operational challenges. We are unable to mix our class groups because this could lead to further spread. We will therefore need to take a more measured and standardised approach to dealing with our current outbreak. Please see the **What Next** section towards the end of this letter about our measures for this point on.

All of the staff have been stoic and supportive during challenging times and I would like to give my heartfelt appreciation for their dynamism and adaptability to maintain a normal education for our young people.



What do the symptoms look like?

Many of the positive cases reported in school do not have the traditional COVID symptoms. Our intelligence shows that the most common symptoms resulting in positive COVID are a sore throat, cold symptoms (including a runny nose) and headaches. More importantly we have seen a significant rise in pupils being ill with diarrhoea and vomiting (D&V) and at first, we thought this was a winter sickness bug, however it could also be a sign of COVID. I would therefore urge you to look at the extended list of symptoms found below which Public Health has authorised us to use during these challenging times. The extended list of symptoms have been approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC and if you require any further information please click on the link ([Symptoms of COVID-19 | CDC](#)). If pupils are displaying these symptoms throughout the school day or when they are at home, you will need to obtain a PCR test.

The extended list of symptoms are as follows:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature and/or
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)
- **headaches**
- aches and pains
- feeling very tired for no good reason
- **sore throat**
- **cold like symptoms including a runny nose**
- sneezing
- **tummy ache/upset tummy in children.**

(In bold are the common symptoms we are currently seeing in school that have led to a positive PCR test).

I appreciate as we approach the winter period we will see increasing amounts of the above symptoms; however we need to take a cautious approach to suppress the spread of the virus as we will not be able to eliminate it.

What if my child was previously classed as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) or Clinically Vulnerable (CV)?

There is no requirement for them to shield or isolate. This message was reinforced by the [Department of Health and Social Care on 23 August 2021](#). It is important that they continue to attend school as we have lost some much time over the past 18 months.

DHSE letter states:

“A very small number of children and young people will have been advised to isolate or reduce their social contact for short periods of time by their specialist, due to the nature of their medical condition or treatment rather than because of the pandemic. If this is the case for your child, they should continue to follow the advice of their specialist.”

As infection rates continue to rise within the school community and the COVID risk is therefore increasingly slightly, and you may wish to speak to your paediatric consultant or specialist for advice based on their unique situation. If you have been given advice to reduce social contact during this time, attendance will not be impacted and will be reported as an X code.

Why do I need to book a PCR test when I have a stock of rapid Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) at home?

LFT tests were designed to identify asymptomatic spread and should not be used if a child has COVID symptoms. They are an important tool in our arsenal, however when symptoms are present a PCR test is the most accurate way of identifying infection. We will not be able to accept LFT test results as proof of a negative result.

Throughout this week we have been working with our Public Health colleagues to obtain a reasonable stock of postal PCR tests as we had simply run out. We have a small supply now in stock for those of you who have struggled to obtain one. We hope to have much larger stock levels next week and in the event you have to collect your child throughout the day we hope to be able to provide you with a postal PCR test to make it easier for you. I

have also provided feedback to NHS Test and Trace about the challenges you have experienced in obtaining a test through 119 or the website.

Can I get a test if I don't have symptoms?

Yes - you are able to get a test if you don't have COVID symptoms. School-based scenarios detailed below are numbers 1, 2 and 6.

1. You've been in contact with someone who's tested positive
2. You've been asked to get a test by a local council or someone from NHS Test and Trace
3. A GP or other health professional has asked you to get a test
4. You've been asked to get a test to confirm a positive result (if showed up on an LFT)
5. You've received an unclear result and were told to get a second test
6. You need to get a test for someone you live with who has symptoms

For further information please click [here](#).

Does my child need to isolate?

There are a few different scenarios we need to talk through where they would need to isolate.

- If your child is sent home as a direct contact, they **do not need to isolate** while they await a PCR test.
- If your child has tested positive, they **do need to isolate** for the recommended time communicated by NHS Test and Trace.
- If your child has symptoms, they **do need to isolate** while they are awaiting a PCR test result.

What happens if my child has a test result from NHS Test and Trace?

Please report all COVID results to headteacher@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk. It would be helpful if you can provide us with a screenshot of the text message. If the test returns as positive, please also include the test and isolation dates.

If you have a test result over the weekend, please email it into headteacher@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk and we will do our best to contact Sandwell's Travel Assistance to reinstate transport ready for Monday morning. However, this might not always be possible based on the timescales we are working towards.

What happens if my child has already had COVID in the past 90 days?

If a close contact has tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 90 days then no PCR or LFT is required, unless they develop new symptoms.

You have contacted me twice this week each with different messages. What's that about?

As I said before, the landscape of COVID is changing rapidly. The message we provide on Monday night not be the same message on Thursday. This is because more cases continue to present in school increasing the risk or because staff are isolating away from school while they wait for pending test results. This all impacts on the operations in school. We also take into consideration the information and guidance we obtain from Public Health which could see a change in what we communicate to you and what we need to you to. To create some clarity, we are going to be following a more standardised approach.

Clarification for various classes

Classes	School return date?	Isolate?
Waseley	6 October 2021	No need unless symptoms develop or positive test.
Chestnut	6 October 2021	No need unless symptoms develop or positive test.
Wenlock	8 October 2021	No need unless symptoms develop or positive test.
Juniper	When individuals have provided a negative PCR test result	No need unless symptoms develop or positive test.
Haden	11 October 2021	No need unless symptoms develop or positive test.
Hazel	4 October 2021	No need unless symptoms develop or positive test.

For affected transport routes, please refer to the letters you have already received from school.

What Next?

Scenario 1 – My child is a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19

- The child will need to remain away from school for a period of 5 days.
- The whole class group will remain away from school for a period of 5 days.
- Any transport links will need to remain away for a period of 5 days.
- They do not need to isolate unless they develop symptoms.
- The child needs a PCR test on day one or as soon as possible.
- The child needs an LFT test on day five before they return to school.
- If they develop symptoms between day one and day five they will need to book a PCR test.
- An online learning offer will be provided and communicated to all those concerned.

In this scenario the 5-day period away from school will allow for infection and symptoms to develop and show as the day 1 test alone is too soon to identify any infection. It will also allow time for test results to be reported and for staff to return to work.

Scenario 2 – My child's class teacher/support/team have tested positive.

- This is not a Public Health issue; this is an operational capacity issue.
- The child will need a PCR test as they will be identified as a close contact.
- The whole class group will remain away from school for a period of 10 days (this is the isolation period of the member of staff).
- They do not need to isolate unless they develop symptoms.
- The child needs a PCR test on day one or as soon as possible.
- The child needs an LFT test on day five AND day ten before they return to school.
- If they develop symptoms between day one and day five they will need to book a PCR test.
- An online learning offer will be provided and communicated to all those concerned.

In this scenario, we just do not have the teaching staff onsite to support young people. As a consequence, we need time to get back up to capacity.

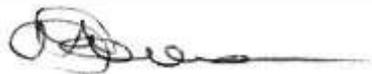
I would like to thank you for your support, these have been challenging times and we appreciate the inconvenience this may have caused, however the decisions that have been made have been done so in the best interest of the school community and to keep everyone safe. If we contact you to collect your child during the school day, please do so with increased urgency. Keeping them in COVID isolation for extended periods is daunting for them but also ties up staffing resources that need to be deployed elsewhere.

If your child's PCR test comes back positive, please ring the School on 0121 561 6884 and email to headteacher@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk.

We would be grateful if you could send a copy of all test results to headteacher@westminster.sandwell.sch.uk.

If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the School.

Yours faithfully



O M Flowers
Head Teacher