

Position Statement following the Omicron variant: December 2021

Ambitious about Autism, and our Schools Trust, run TreeHouse School, The Rise School and Ambitious College serving around 300 children and young people across London and the Home Counties.

Since March 2020 when the first lockdown was announced we have been guided by our values, mission and by information, advice and guidance for education providers issued by the Government, Public Health England (PHE), Health and Safety Executive and other key bodies. When taking account of this guidance, our first consideration is the safety and well-being of our pupils, learners and staff.

In late November 2021 a new variant of the virus was identified, the Omicron variant, and initial guidance was issued to schools and colleges. This position statement takes account of that guidance. As more becomes known about the new variant we will keep our position statement under review.

This position statement also takes account of changes being made to practice in our settings because of saliva tests becoming more readily available to support students who have previously not been able to tolerate testing.

Our key principles

Since the first lockdown our schools' and college's decision making has been guided by a set of principles. We have adapted these principles as the situation and Government guidance has changed¹. Our key principles are:

- We will continue to put the safety of our pupils, learners and staff at the forefront of all we do;
- We will follow Government guidance but, taking account of the vulnerability of our community of pupils/learners and staff, we are taking a more cautious approach to having children and young people in school or college;
- We will work in partnership with placing Local Authorities and parents and carers on an ongoing basis around our Covid plans.

Running a 'Covid Secure' school or college

The pupils and learners who attend our settings need specialist support tailored to their needs. They thrive in settings with a positive and supportive culture that prioritises their needs, safety and wellbeing, where the environment has been adapted and staff are trained and skilled in meeting their needs. They need personalised support to enable them to adapt to changes in routines or environment.

Our staff also benefit from a positive and supportive culture, experienced and competent leadership, a safe and secure environment and opportunities to learn and develop.

This is our priority. Things will be different, as we continue to manage the risks posed by Covid-19, but our values and aims remain the same.

It is critical that our schools and college are 'Covid Secure' which includes:

¹ Our Position Statement first published in March 2020 has been updated throughout the pandemic. Version 2 was published on 12 May 2020, Version 3 on 8 July 2020, and Version 4 on 19 August 2020, Version 5 on 5 November 2020 and Version 6 on 14 December 2020, Version 7 on 4 January 2021, Version 8 on 3 February 2021, Version 9 on 12 February 2021, Version 10 on 1 March 2021, Version 11 on 14 May 2021, Version 12 on 31 August 2021, v13 in November and Version 14 on 2 December

- Having updated risk assessments in place for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) pupil/learners, staff;
- Having updated risk assessments in place for our buildings;
- Continued wearing of masks in communal areas;
- Having the correct levels of trained staff in place to meet pupils/learners' needs safely;
- Having robust hand-washing and respiratory hygiene in place, including CO2 monitors;
- Enhanced cleaning arrangements;
- Engagement with the NHS track and trace system; it is important to note that under the new guidance schools/college no longer are responsible for track and trace. However, **we would be failing in our duty of care if we did not act when we deem a pupil/learner or staff member a close contact and ignored the fact;**
- Having the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) in place as needed;
- Having well thought out plans in place for pupils/learners and staff who are symptomatic or have tested as positive.

Advice for parents

We ask all parents and carers to work with us to balance the risks of increasing rising levels of infection.

We recognise that this pandemic continues to turn the world upside down for many of our pupils, learners and their families; and routines and arrangements have been disrupted significantly which will have caused anxiety and distress. Our schools and college will listen to concerns and work in partnership with pupils/learners and their families to put in place strategies to support children and young people in our settings.

Staying safe

In our schools and college, our key priority is to stay safe, provide education in-person (as much as possible) and remain alert to rising infection levels. This is particularly important given the new Omicron variant and because we have staff members and pupils/learners who were previously deemed clinically extremely vulnerable and have since returned.

As a result, if we have a positive case in the school/college and identify pupils/learners as direct contacts then we will ask parents/carers to work with us to do the following to keep everyone safe:

- **Vaccinated students** deemed a close contact are asked to undertake a precautionary PCR test. They can continue to attend school/college whilst they await the result. If they cannot tolerate a PCR test we will accept the results of a lateral flow test or a saliva test. If the initial lateral flow or saliva test is negative they must continue to test for 7 days from the date of notification of them being a close contact.
- **Unvaccinated students** deemed a close contact, take PCR and stay at home until the result is returned. If negative they can return to school or college but must undertake daily LFTs or Spit Tests for 7 days from the date of notification of them being a close contact.
- **Vaccinated, symptomatic students** must undertake a PCR, stay at home whilst they await the result. They can return to school/college if negative but must continue to test for 7 days from the date of notification of them being a close contact.
- **Unvaccinated, symptomatic students** must take a PCR and isolate for 10 days regardless of the result.

We will keep our approach under review as we await further guidance on the Omicron variant and in the meantime continue to work with pupils and families to reduce anxiety around vaccinations and testing to ensure as many children and young people as possible can access both.

Saliva tests

The organisation has purchased some saliva tests to support the children and young people who cannot tolerate a LFT or a PCR test. We will run a pilot test programme initially. We will supply these tests to parents whose child/young person has been unable to tolerate PCR/LFT regimes. We ask parents and carers to read the instructions carefully to minimise wastage as, unlike LFT and PCR tests, they are not free. We will not charge parents/carers for these tests. ***To reiterate we will only supply saliva tests to those children/young people who, up to now, have been unable to tolerate LFT/PCR tests.***

Masks

Unless exempt, staff will continue to wear masks in communal areas. They will not be wearing masks in classrooms, when working directly with children and young people unless it is part of their individualised risk assessment.

If your son/daughter has been wearing a mask and you want them to continue to do this, we are happy to accommodate this.

The guidance relating to dedicated school and college transport states that children aged 11 and over should wear a face covering.

Staff will also be asked to follow the TfL guidance on mask wearing when commuting in and out of work.

Vaccination

There is strong evidence that vaccination is reducing the chances of severe illness.

We support the vaccination programme and have actively encouraged our staff to be vaccinated. Now that everyone over the age of 12 is eligible for the vaccine, we ask that you support your child to be vaccinated if you can. More information and resources can be found [here](#). Please do get in touch with your GP to book.

Students/learners who are vaccinated will not need to self-isolate when identified as a close contact.

We know that some learners will have anxiety phobias regarding needles, and we'd love to support in any way we can. Please access resources [here](#) and also get in touch if we can help further.

Bubbles/social distancing

We are not working in bubbles or practicing social distancing. However, there might be a need to revert to these working practices should we have an outbreak in the school/college. We will work with Public Health England, as we have throughout this pandemic, before we make these decisions. We have a contingency plan in place, as per Government guidance.

Testing

We have put a strict testing regime in place for all staff. Testing is mandatory and staff test twice a week, logging their results online. We believe this, along with vaccination, is most effective way of keeping everyone safe and ensuring we can remain open.

We are asking all parents/carers to do their best to test children aged 11 and above twice weekly – on a Sunday evening and Wednesday evening and share the results with us, just like our staff do. This will be a lateral flow test, which we can send home or you can get free in your local pharmacy. Once again, we have produced resources to support and explain this to your child/young person, you can find them [here](#).

Symptoms

If your son/daughter is in any way sick, please do not send them into school or college. This is important for all members of our school/college community. We need to ensure we do everything in our control to manage infection levels. This includes the well-documented covid symptoms of

- Loss of sense of taste or smell
- Continuous cough
- Temperature

but also extends to the symptoms that are presenting with the Delta variant of

- Headaches
- Stomach ache
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

Our risk assessments have been updated and you can access them on the school/college website.

If your child is unwell with Coronavirus symptoms or has been directed to self-isolate (e.g. through NHS track and trace or by their school/college), they must not come into school or college.

If your child develops Coronavirus symptoms or is unwell at school or college, you must collect them as soon as possible.

Where pupils/learners are not able to attend their setting, due to clinical and/or public health advice, the school or college will support their parents/carers to provide learning and support virtually.

Parents/carers should plan their holidays within school and college holidays and avoid absences during term time. In planning holidays, parents/carers are asked to note the [Government's travel guidance](#) on potential quarantine requirements for entering other countries and returning to the UK. Your child or young person will not be able to attend school or college during a quarantine period.