

Our position statement on supporting pupils and learners to return fully to school/college from 8 March 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 the first lockdown in March 2020, 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.

On 22 February 2021 Government published its [roadmap out of the current lockdown](#). This included ensuring all school-aged children, except for those deemed Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV), are in school/college from March 8.

We have been working to increase the number of children and young people in our settings during the period of lockdown and in line with Government guidance. From Monday 8 March all primary school children will return. At the same time, we will move our staff testing from site testing to home testing and phase the remainder of our children and young people back into school or college taking a person-centred approach. This will look different in each of our settings and the school/college will work with parents to support this process.

All education settings need to continue to follow Government and PHE guidance and control measures to minimise the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

As a specialist setting for vulnerable children and young people the Government asked that we remained open to all of our children and young people throughout lockdown. We will bring all children and young people back into school and college. However, we must ensure we can operate safe settings.

Our key principles

Since the end of March 2020 our schools' and college's decision making has been guided by a set of principles. We have adapted these principles¹ as the situation and Government guidance has changed. This update is based on the latest Government guidance. 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 continue to follow Government guidance and keep our position under review;
- We will continue to ensure that each pupil/learner has an individualised, updated, Covid-19 risk assessment which takes into account the risks of the new variants of Covid-19;
- Pupils and learners will learn in 'bubbles' with the same staff assigned to these bubbles, where possible;
- Pupils/learners and staff will not always be able to social distance within bubbles because of the support needs of our pupils and learners;
- Staff with peripatetic roles (e.g. Speech and Language Therapist, Occupational Therapist) will need to work in a few bubbles. We will ensure we minimise the number of contacts these staff have;
- When outside of these bubbles, staff will practise social distancing of 1m plus;
- We will work in partnership with placing Local Authorities and parents and carers on an ongoing basis.

¹ Version 2 was published on 12 May, Version 3 on 8 July, and Version 4 on 19 August, Version 5 on 5 November and Version 6 on 14 December 2020, Version 7 on 4 January, Version 8 on 3 February 2021, Version 9 on 12 February 2021

Running a 'Covid-secure' and safe school and college

The Government's guidance is clear that:

"While coronavirus (COVID-19) remains in the community, this means making judgements at a setting level about how to balance and minimise any risks from coronavirus (COVID-19) with providing a full educational experience for children and young people."

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

- Having risk assessments in place for pupil/learners, staff and buildings, all reviewed regularly. Site specific risk assessments have been updated to account for the full return to school/college and are published on our school and college websites;
- Having the correct levels of trained staff in place to meet pupils/learners' needs safely;
- Ensuring pupils, learners and staff who have Coronavirus symptoms (or someone in their household that does) stay at home and follow Government guidance;
- Having robust hand-washing and respiratory hygiene in place;
- Enhanced cleaning arrangements;
- Engagement with the NHS track and trace system. This means that if a person has tested positive for Coronavirus within a 'bubble', pupils, learners and staff in that 'bubble' may be asked to self-isolate;
- Practising social distancing when possible;
- Having the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) in place as needed;
- In line with Government [guidance](#), face masks will be worn by all staff in communal areas such as corridors and toilets and in class, if they choose to.
- Not insisting our pupils/learners wear face masks, given they have special educational needs. If pupils/learners chose to wear face masks we will support this to happen.
- Ensuring we have a home testing process in place for staff and supporting parents/carers with information, advice and guidance on home testing for their child/young person.

It is critical that any service we deliver must be a safe service. In addition to being 'Covid-secure', being safe in the Covid crisis includes having the correct levels of trained staff in place to meet children and young people's needs safely and being continuously mindful of online safety as we deliver learning through virtual learning environments.

Our schools and college will continue to face staffing challenges going forward for several reasons. These include staff continuing to self-isolate due to being deemed Clinically Extremely Vulnerable, staff isolating awaiting a Covid-19 test because they are symptomatic, staff having to self-isolate through the track and trace system and our own staff having to take dependency leave due to having to be at home if their own child is asked to self-isolate. We will do everything in our power to ensure continuity of service for our pupils and learners. However, we must also risk assess daily to ensure we can operate safely.

The children and young people who attend our settings are some of the most vulnerable in society. They thrive in settings where there is a predictable timetable, they have developed a rapport with their staff teams, have staff trained in working with them around medication and behaviour that challenges, and understand what works and what doesn't work for that child or young person. They also need staff who can communicate effectively with them as not all our children and young people communicate verbally, and their expressive skills are not as highly developed as their receptive skills. We must take all of this into consideration as we plan for the educational needs of every child and young person in our settings.

Education in our settings and learning from home

As a specialist setting for vulnerable children the Government asked that we remain open to all of our children and young people. From January 2021 to February mid-term we reverted to the approach we used in the first lockdown period in March 2020. This allowed us to offer a sustainable model moving forward and some certainty in uncertain times. In line with Government guidance, we will now work to bring all children and young people back into our settings from March 8. This will look different for each setting and the Head of School/College will have been in touch with parents/carers about the approach. Moving forward we will only offer remote learning to CEV pupils/learners and for any child or young person who is required to self-isolate due to bubble closures.

We recognise that this pandemic has turned the world upside down for many of our pupils and 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 and learners and their families to put in place strategies to support their education.

Asymptomatic testing

The roadmap out of lockdown also includes changes to the asymptomatic testing regime that we are currently conducting on each site. Schools and colleges have flexibility to consider how best to deliver testing on a [phased basis](#) from March 8. We will be moving to home testing for our staff, and for those pupils and learners who want to test at home. No pupil or learner will be denied access to our schools/college should they not wish to be tested.

For our pupils and learners:

Asymptomatic testing will be conducted twice a week, three to five days apart. Testing is voluntary. The result is within 30 minutes. Not all our pupils and learners will be able to tolerate tests. There are a few reasons for this:

- Firstly, the test is invasive – it requires a nose and throat swab (although the latest guidance allows for a double nose swab). This will be distressing for many of our pupils/learners.
- Secondly, the guidance is that students should self-administer the test. This would not be possible for many of our pupils/learners. Therefore, we ask that if a young person (aged 11 or over) expresses a wish to self-test that parents/carers support this process at home. We will send tests home, with clear instructions.
- Thirdly, children and young people over the age of 16 would need to give informed consent. For many of our young people giving consent will require a Mental Capacity Assessment. This is a lengthy and time-consuming process.

Rapid lateral flow testing for households and bubbles of school pupils and staff

From March 1 2021, if you're a member of a household, childcare bubble or support bubble of staff or a pupil you can get a twice-weekly test:

- through your employer if they offer testing to employees
- at a local test site
- by collecting a home test kit from a test site
- by ordering a home test kit online

Schools and colleges are **not** responsible for distributing or administering these tests to families. The gov.uk website has a facility to check your postcode to [find local test sites](#), if you cannot travel to a test site, home testing kits can be ordered [here](#).

For parents

What will our approach be?

- We will continue to operate bubbles and work hard to ensure bubble 'fidelity'.
- We will test staff twice a week
- If your child is sick for any reason, we ask that you do not send them into school or college
- If your child/young person is deemed to be CEV they must not come into school or college.
- If your child is symptomatic with any coronavirus symptoms² they must self-isolate and you must not send them into school/college. You might like to administer a PCR test at home³ and we can arrange for a test kit to be sent home to you. You can administer the test⁴, send it off and isolate your child until you get the test result. If the test comes back as negative, you can send your child back to school as long as they have been temperature free for 48 hours and are not required to self-isolate for any other reason.

Processes in our schools and college in relation to symptomatic staff, pupils and learners

The processes set out below might vary very slightly in our settings but the overall approach will remain the same.

Part A: Symptomatic pupils/learners

What we do when a child or young person presents as symptomatic in our schools or college:

- Immediately move the child or young person to the identified designated room in the building;
- Ask the member of staff accompanying the child or young person to wear a face mask, gloves and plastic apron;
- Ring the parents/carers and request that the child or young person is collected immediately;
- Inform the placing LA that the child or young person will be learning from home until a test is administered;
- Contact the families of those children/young people in the bubble to advise them to isolate should they become symptomatic;
- Ask the parents of the affected child/young person to have them tested and let the school/college know of the outcome. We recognise that not every child or young person will be able to have a test, and in these cases the pupil/learner will be asked to self-isolate;
- Should the test result come back positive (or a test is not taken) we will take advice from our local Public Health England and send pupils/learners and staff in that bubble home to self-isolate and follow up with others who might have had peripheral contact to self-isolate.
- Be clear with parents/carers of the length of time for self-isolation;
- Ensure the day cleaner cleans spaces the person has been in contact with;
- Designated room cleaned down once vacated;
- Deep clean areas used by affected staff, pupils and learners.

Part B: Symptomatic staff

What we do when a staff member presents as symptomatic in our schools or college:

- Quarantine/ isolate them in the identified designated room in school/college until they can go home
- Check when their symptoms started;

² Persistent cough, temperature, loss of taste or smell.

³ It may be helpful to share the [visual story](#) developed by Ambitious about Autism to explain the home test.

⁴ Ambitious about Autism developed a [guide for parents on how to administer an at home test](#).

- Check who they've had contact with within their bubble (staff and pupils/learners) over the past three to five days;
- Tell the affected staff member to take a test;
 - Should the result come back negative, we advise self-isolation is no longer needed (unless of course they show new symptoms or have been directed to self-isolate by NHS test and trace) and they return to work;
 - Should the result come back positive we will send pupils/learners and staff in that bubble home to self-isolate and follow up with others who might have had peripheral contact to self-isolate;
 - We may check in with those self-isolating to monitor their symptoms and if needed, (ask them to) follow up with people they've had contact with.
- We will take advice from our local Public Health England representative;
- Ensure the day cleaner cleans spaces the person has been in contact with;
- Designated room cleaned down once vacated;
- Deep clean areas used by affected staff, pupils and learners.