

Updated Covid-19 position statement January 2022

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.

Our response to the Covid-19 pandemic is guided by the mission and values of our charity and by information, advice and guidance for education providers issued by the Government, UK Health Security Agency, Health and Safety Executive and other key bodies. When taking account of the guidance, our first consideration is the safety and well-being of our pupils, learners, staff and wider community.

When the new Omicron variant was identified in November 2021, initial guidance was issued to schools and colleges. This guidance was [updated](#) on 2 January to support the return to school and college after the festive break.

This position statement considers the latest guidance and changes being made in our settings. We will continue to monitor the situation closely, especially staffing levels, and act accordingly.

Our key principles

Our decision making is guided by a set of principles, which are:

- We put the safety of our pupils, learners and staff at the forefront of all we do;
- We follow Government guidance but take into account the additional vulnerability of our pupils, learners and staff;
- We work in partnership with pupils/learners, parents/carers, local authorities, and other agencies on an ongoing basis.

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:

- Having updated risk assessments in place for pupils, learners and staff who were previously deemed to be clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV);
- Having updated risk assessments in place for each setting;
- Continued wearing of masks in communal areas for staff and in classrooms and communal areas for those pupils and learners who can tolerate it;
- Having plans in place to support ongoing education for our pupils and learners, if there are occasions when they need to self-isolate at home or we do not have the levels of trained staff in place to meet their needs safely, due to staff absence related to Covid-19.
- Having robust hand-washing and respiratory hygiene in place, including CO2 monitors;

- Having enhanced cleaning arrangements;
- Having the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) in place;
- On-going engagement with the NHS track and trace system; it is important to note that 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 identify pupils, learners or staff member who are close contacts with infected individuals.

If your young person has symptoms of COVID 19 then they must isolate and take a PCR test regardless of vaccination status. This includes those who have an official NHS exemption letter, or any other evidence of exemption. If the PCR test is negative, then fully vaccinated learners (who have had a minimum of two vaccinations) and learners with official exemptions can return to college but will be required to take daily lateral flow tests for 7 days. Those learners who are unvaccinated will be required to isolate in line with Government guidance.

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 cause 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

Our key priority is to keep pupils, learners and staff safe. This is particularly important given the transmissibility of the Omicron variant and that we have pupils, learners and staff members who were previously deemed clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable. In addition, many of our pupils and learners are not able to test and have not yet accessed the vaccine, due to their special needs.

Testing

We ask all parents/carers to do their best to test children aged 5 years 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 on our website.

Guidance for children under 5 attending our settings

Children under 5 are not being advised to take part in daily testing of close contacts. If a child under 5 is a contact of a confirmed case, they are not required to self-isolate and should not start daily testing. If they live in the same household as someone with Covid-19 they should limit their contact with anyone who is at higher risk of severe illness if infected with Covid-19 and arrange to take a PCR test as soon as possible. They can continue to attend an education or childcare setting while waiting for the PCR result. If the test is positive, they should follow the [stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection](#)

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 and boosters, is most effective way of keeping everyone safe and ensuring we can remain open.

Being identified as a close contact

- **Pupils and learners** deemed a close contact are asked to undertake a lateral flow test. For those unable to tolerate a LFT we accept the results of 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 pupils and learners aged 5 years – 18.5 years old** deemed a close contact, can take a LFT and if negative can return to school. However, they must continue to test for 7 days from the date of notification of them being a close contact.
- **Unvaccinated learners aged over 18.5 years old**, deemed a close contact, are required to self isolate for 10 days, unless they are deemed exempt. If deemed exempt there is the expectation to test for 7 days from the date of notification of them being a close contact.
- **Symptomatic pupils and learners** must undertake a PCR test. They can return to school or college if the test is negative. If the test is positive they must self-isolate. From Monday 17 January, people who are self-isolating with COVID-19 will have the option to reduce their isolation period after 5 full days if they test negative with a lateral flow device (LFD) test or saliva test on both day 5 and day 6 and they do not have a temperature. The first test must be taken no earlier than day 5 of the self-isolation period, and the second must be taken the following day. All test results should be [reported to NHS Test and Trace](#). If the result of either of their tests is positive, they should continue to self-isolate until they get negative results from two LFD tests on consecutive days or until they have completed 10 full days of self-isolation, whichever is earliest. Anyone who is unable to take LFD tests or anyone who continues to have a temperature will need to complete the full 10 day period of self-isolation.

Piloting saliva tests

The charity has purchased saliva tests to pilot this approach with pupils and learners who cannot tolerate a LFT or PCR test. We ask parents and carers to read the instructions carefully to minimise wastage as, unlike LFT and PCR tests, they are not provided free by the Government and are costly. We do not charge parents/carers for these tests. ***To reiterate we only supply saliva tests to pupils/learners who, up to now, have been unable to tolerate LFT/PCR tests.***

Face masks

Unless exempt, staff will continue to wear face masks in communal areas. They will not wear masks in classrooms, when working directly with pupils and learners unless it is part of their individual risk assessment.

The guidance published on 2 January states that secondary aged pupils should wear face masks in classrooms. This does not apply to pupils with special educational needs. However, if pupils/learners, supported by their parents/carers, make the choice to wear a face mask in communal areas and/or classrooms we will support this.

The guidance relating to dedicated school and college transport states that children aged 11 and over should wear a mask. Again, the exemptions for pupils/learners who cannot tolerate this applies.

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

Vaccination and boosters

There is strong evidence that vaccinations, coupled with booster jabs, are reducing the chances of severe illness. We support the vaccination and booster programme and have actively encouraged pupils, learners and our staff to be vaccinated.

Vaccines are now being made available for children aged 5-11 with certain health conditions and we ask that parents/carers support their child to be vaccinated if possible. More information and resources can be found [here](#).

We know that some pupils/learners will find it difficult to access the vaccine. Please access resources [here](#) and also get in touch, if we can help further.

Bubbles/social distancing

We are currently not working in bubbles or practising social distancing. However, there might be a need to revert to these working practices should there be an outbreak in a school or college and we need to implement contingency plans. We will work with the UK Health Security Agency to decide how to proceed.

Symptoms

If a child or young person is symptomatic, they must not be sent to school or college. This is important for all members of our community. We need to ensure we do everything in our control to manage infection levels.

Symptoms include the well-documented covid symptoms of:

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

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

- Headaches
- Stomach ache
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

Initial research indicates that the symptoms of the Omicron variant present as a common cold.

Holidays and travel

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. A pupil/learner will not be able to attend school or college during a quarantine period.