

Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Dear Parent/Carer,

## **Re. Welcome to Spring Term 2022**

Best wishes to all St Edward's Academy families for a very Happy New Year. I hope that you had a lovely Christmas holiday and a very enjoyable start to 2022. Staff returned to school yesterday and we've had a very productive two INSET days in preparation for what I trust will be a most successful Spring term.

As we start the Spring term, schools face continuing restrictions due to the current very high numbers of Covid-19 infections and the rising levels of hospital admissions across the country. We are, however, grateful that we are not in the same position as schools across the country faced this time last year when the second national school closure was announced. We are very much looking forward to inviting students back to school tomorrow and Friday.

## **The start of Spring Term – January 2022**

The DfE has once again instructed schools to conduct Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) for all students at the start of the new term. Schools have been invited to employ a staggered start to the Spring term to allow for all students to be tested and admitted safely. It is hoped that this will help to stop the spread of Covid-19 following the school holidays.

Thank you for completing the Covid-19 testing permission form earlier this academic year. We will continue to use the previous lateral flow tests permissions throughout this academic year. Should you wish to withdraw permission for your child to have a lateral flow test, please email [hope@steds.org.uk](mailto:hope@steds.org.uk) to let us know. If you have previously withdrawn permission, we may call you to confirm this is still the case for the January testing.

The Spring Term resumed on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022. Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> January have been staff INSET days. Our staggered start to facilitate lateral flow testing will take place during Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> and Friday 7<sup>th</sup> January.

The timetable for the staggered start to term follows:

	Thursday 6th January	Friday 7th January
<b>Year 7</b>		Term begins at 8.30am
<b>Year 8</b>		Term begins at 8.30am
<b>Year 9</b>		Term begins at 10.30am
<b>Year 10</b>	Term begins at 8.30am	
<b>Year 11</b>	Term begins at 9.30am	
<b>Year 12</b>	Term begins at 10.30am	
<b>Year 13</b>	Term begins at 10.30am	

After taking the lateral flow tests, each group will remain in the Webster Hall for the beginning of term assembly. This will allow the lateral flow test results to be processed. Students will resume learning as soon as the assembly is over and the negative test results have been received.

Once we have completed the first round of tests onsite this week, we urge all families to use lateral flow tests with everyone in the family twice a week. We have provided sufficient lateral flows tests to last for this half term and will distribute more as necessary.

As well as regular testing, we ask that families look out for any symptoms of Covid-19 and book a PCR test should these symptoms arise. The main symptoms of Covid-19 are:

- a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

A number of additional symptoms are now commonly known and associated with a possible case of Covid -19, including headaches, muscle aches, runny noses, sneezing, lower back pain and night sweats. There are other signs of the virus that have been reported, linked to the Omicron variant. These include nausea, hair loss, conjunctivitis, coughing, a fever, and a slight loss of smell and taste. The loss of smell, though, is more associated with the Delta variant than with Omicron. If in any doubt, please test.

New DfE guidance states that schools should strongly encourage individuals to take part in LFD testing onsite (or at home once they have completed their isolation period for a prior infection). even if someone has tested positive for Covid-19 within the last 90 days. This appears to contradict previous guidance not to test staff or students within 90 days of a positive test so I wanted to provide further information on this.

To clarify the issue, the best advice is available on the *Stay at Home guidance* regarding when to take a PCR or LFD test (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>). If you have previously received a positive Covid-19 PCR test result, you are usually advised not to take another PCR test within 90 days of this result. You should only have a PCR test within 90 days of a previous positive PCR test if you develop any new symptoms of Covid-19, if you have a positive LFD test result, or if you are required to take a PCR test upon entry into the UK.

The 90 day period primarily relates to the PCR test (as it is looking for the RNA of the virus, so is more sensitive to the presence of live virus). The LFD rapid tests are looking for the proteins on the virus outer coating and are good at identifying people with a high viral load who are more likely to pass the virus on to others before they become symptomatic. So, if a pupil is outside of any isolation period from having the virus themselves, they can continue to participate in regular twice-weekly LFD testing and complete the testing on return to school. I hope this provides some clarity but please do email [hope@steds.org.uk](mailto:hope@steds.org.uk) if you have any questions about this.

At school we will be reminding students of the need for vigilance about:

- hand hygiene - frequent and thorough hand cleaning should continue to be regular practice
- respiratory hygiene - the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach to any sneezing continues to be very important

We expect students and staff to wear face coverings in communal areas throughout the school (unless they are exempt for medical reasons). Following the Government's advice on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> January, secondary aged pupils are also expected to wear face coverings in classrooms until at least 26<sup>th</sup> January. Please remind your child to bring their St Edward's blue facemask to school from their first day (additional school facemasks were given out at the end of last term).

We are only allowing essential visitors to attend the site. Visitors will be agreed by a member of SLT. Any agreed visitor to the school will be expected to wear a face covering while onsite. Agreed visitors will be invited to lateral flow test prior to entry to the site.

Contact tracing with close contacts are identified and contacted via NHS Test and Trace. Children over the age of 5 and up to 18 years and 6 months and fully vaccinated adults (who have had 2 doses of an approved vaccine) who are identified as a contact of someone with Covid-19 do not have to self-isolate and are strongly advised to take a lateral flow test every day for 7 days and continue to attend their setting as normal, unless they have a positive test result. Students with special educational needs identified as close

contacts will be supported by the school and their families to agree the most appropriate route for testing (including, where appropriate, additional support to assist swabbing).

Adults who choose not to get vaccinated will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact of someone with Covid-19. All adults and children that have a positive Covid-19 test or are told to isolate by NHS Test and Trace, should self-isolate. This means not leaving home because you have or might have Covid-19. This is a legal requirement.

If someone tests positive, the self-isolation period includes the day symptoms started (or the day of the test if there weren't any symptoms) and next 10 full days. This will need to continue for longer if symptoms emerge or do not go away. The self-isolation can end after 7 days if rapid lateral flow tests on days 6 and 7 of the self-isolation period (with the tests at least 24 hours apart) are both negative and there is not a high temperature.

If anyone in the school develops Covid-19 symptoms, however mild, they will be sent home and they should follow public health advice. Not all coughs will be Covid-19.

As with other public services, we are concerned at the extent of possible staff absence this term due to the impact of Covid-19. We will do all we can to maintain school onsite every day. I must say that I am worried about the pressures on staffing and the lack of availability of additional temporary staff. With that in mind, it is possible that we may need at times to move for a short period to remote learning for specific students. We will not do this unless we absolutely have to take this step. In extreme cases, and as a last resort where all other risk mitigations have not broken chains of in-school transmission, the school may be advised to introduce short-term attendance restrictions, such as sending home a class or Year group. Remote learning would then be provided for all pupils well enough to learn from home. Onsite provision will, in all cases, be retained for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.

A reminder that we have reverted back to our regular practice of no coats in the building. Last term we completed works on the boiler system, meaning these are working much more efficiently and, even with the requirements for windows open, rooms are now warm enough to allow for coats to not be worn and students remain comfortable. Please remind your child of this.

I hope this letter provides a useful insight for parents/carers on the expectations on schools and their communities. We very much look forward to welcoming students back to school for the beginning of the Spring term.

With my best wishes



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