



St. Thomas More High School

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1st December 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

On Saturday 27 November, the [Prime Minister announced](#) new temporary measures following the emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in the UK. The new measures have been introduced as a precaution to slow down the spread of the variant while more information is gathered. DfE has also updated the [guidance](#) for all education settings.

Earlier on 8 October 2021, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) issued further guidance titled “*Schools and COVID-19 Current Position*” with interim actions effective immediately to support COVID-19 outbreak management in schools. We have not yet had to employ additional measures as a result of our cases and continue to keep this under review.

As you are aware, since our return in September we have not altered our control measures which continue to include:

- Maintaining our enhanced cleaning schedule of frequently touched surfaces throughout the school day and fortnightly ‘fogging’ of our classrooms and large communal areas including the Canteen, Sports hall, Assembly Hall, Sixth Form Study area and Concourse.
- Maintaining additional entrance and exits and one-way routes around school to ease and reduce congestion in the corridors.
- Monitoring ventilation and ensuring fresh air circulates throughout the school.
- Continuing to encourage good hand hygiene and the use of hand sanitiser.
- Maintaining staggered lunch breaks to reducing mixing across year groups
- Asking students and staff to continue with LFD testing at home twice a week and facilitating onsite testing for anyone who wishes it on a Monday and Thursday morning.
- Allowing students and staff to wear face coverings.

I believe this has had a major impact on keeping the number of COVID cases in school extremely low.

In our planning for the remainder of this term, we have decided with regret, to cancel our Carol Service at the end of term and will move to hosting parents evenings virtually in the new year as per the [calendar](#) of events. We will write to parents again after Christmas with further details.

I hope that we can continue to keep the number of cases very low and ask you to read and consider the further guidance detailed below.

Testing

We continue to encourage staff and students to test twice weekly using lateral flow device (LFD) tests. Testing continues to play a vital role in keeping COVID-19 out of schools. We distributed test kits to students again this week and ask that you ensure you have enough tests to be able to **test on or before return to school on Wednesday 5th January 2022**. Please report your twice weekly test results to [Report a COVID-19 rapid lateral flow test result - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). In the case of a positive test result please also report these to school [Student COVID Test Results \(office.com\)](#)

In school we will increase access to LFD testing in response to outbreaks or in areas of high prevalence. **From next week we are increasing our on-site testing facility and will be able to offer daily LFD testing** during form time, so that we can facilitate testing for students and intervene rapidly to break chains of transmission in the run up to the Christmas break.

Face coverings

The guidance regarding the wearing of face coverings has changed in the last few days in various settings. As a result of these changes face coverings should be worn in communal areas, unless they are exempt. Please note that 'communal areas' doesn't include classrooms. Pupils or students (in year 7 or above) should continue to wear face coverings on public and dedicated school transport, unless they are exempt. If you and your son/daughter decide you do wish to use this preventative measure, then please ensure they have at least two masks on them each day they come to school and that these face coverings are cleaned/replaced every day. Please could you also ensure they wear their face covering correctly as per [this information video](#). The wearing of face coverings is not mandatory in school at this current time.

We are *not able* to offer disposable masks to students but you may wish to consider purchasing fabric face coverings that can be collected from the school office. Payment can be made via <https://login.schoolgateway.com/>

Contact tracing and isolation

The [current guidance on contact tracing and isolation](#) remains in place. In addition to these, any suspected or confirmed close contacts of the Omicron variant will be asked to isolate for 10 days regardless of vaccination status or age. You will be contacted directly and told to isolate.

Test & Trace Support Payments

In the local authority we are not able to award Test & Trace support payments to parents of children who have been unable to attend their education setting due to the school closing/staff shortages. The child/parent needs to have tested positive or been asked to isolate by NHS Test & Trace in order to qualify for the payment. The details of conditions for applying are listed here: [Financial Support : Test and Trace Support Payment – A guide to Test and Trace – Southend-on-Sea Borough Council](#)

Vaccination

All eligible staff and students aged 12 can take up the offer of the vaccine, including boosters.

To book a vaccination, please visit: [Book or manage a coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination – NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#).

As I have throughout, I continue to take a pragmatic approach to supporting you all as primary educators of your children and urge you to consider all the information and guidance above. We continue to review our control measures fortnightly in school and work with UKHSA, the Department for Education (DfE), the Director of Public Health and local health protection teams.

Whilst the immediate health risks of COVID-19 infection to children and young people are low, the impact on attendance, mental wellbeing, resilience and educational disruption continue to be held in fine balance by school leaders. We thank you for your continued support and understanding throughout this challenging time.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs G Ackred
Headteacher