



The Oak-Tree Group of Schools

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Group Managing Principal

Mr Matthew Hagger B.A. (Hons), M.Ed., PGCE

29 October 2021

Dear Parents

Re: Covid-19 Procedures

I hope you have had a restful half term and that your children have been able to have a break from the norm after an intensive start to the new academic year.

We were pleased to see a little more normality during the first half of the Autumn Term for the first time since March 2020. Children did not have to bubble, trips have restarted and we are planning a host of Christmas performances, residential visits, Young Voices at the O2 for all Years 5 & 6 and even a June 2022 Summer Ball. We were delighted to be able to welcome you back into the buildings for drop-ins, coffee mornings and parents' evenings, and this face-to-face contact has been so valuable to re-establish the close working relationships that we have always enjoyed.

Department for Education Plan

As you will be aware, the government's approach to Covid-19 in schools is to maximise children's access to education. We are told that children are very unlikely to become seriously ill with a Covid-19 infection, but they do need to self-isolate if they are infected. However, whilst self-isolating they miss out on the benefit of in-school education so it is therefore extremely important that we try to limit the spread of Covid-19 in school to maximise attendance at all times.

Please be assured that if children need to self-isolate during term time we will always set work for them to complete through our online systems. We will not want children to fall behind, but live Zoom lessons will not be possible as the staff will be teaching the classes who are in school.

Increasing Positive Cases

As you will have seen in the media, positive Covid-19 cases rose sharply just before we broke up for half term with reports of as many as 200,000 school children isolating due to positive Covid-19 test results just before the holiday.

For our part, the last two weeks of term saw an increasing number of cases across the Group, with many more children and staff affected. I notified the relevant year groups each time there was a case so that parents could monitor their children and look for the normal symptoms. Half term certainly came at just the right time to break the cycle of infection. Although cases appear to have stabilised over the last few days, and depending on who you believe, there could be a more challenging second half of the Autumn Term ahead.

When infected, older senior pupils tended to take longer to recover from new persistent coughs, general tiredness, headaches and high temperatures. However, we saw that younger children showed either no symptoms or only had mild cold-like symptoms when they tested positive. This made it very difficult to control the spread of the virus as we saw younger children unknowingly infect staff and any older children around them. Many of the staff who tested positive were quite unwell.

We will continue to monitor the spread of the virus in our schools, but please bear with us as we head deeper into the term as we may well need to put in place temporary staffing measures if staff need to self-isolate for 10 days due to infection.



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130 High Road, Buckhurst Hill
Essex IG9 5SD
020 8504 1133

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Company no: 0783067



Coopersale Hall School

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Lateral Flow Testing for Primary Children

For the last year or so, all staff and senior pupils from Year 7 upwards have been testing twice weekly using Lateral Flow Tests provided by the Department for Education. As a result of this preventative testing routine, asymptomatic pupils or staff who could otherwise have spread the virus to the school community have self-isolated instead.

Throughout the pandemic, regular household testing has been encouraged by the government. I have had many conversations with parents who have been testing regularly and who have been surprised that a Lateral Flow Test has generated a positive result despite the lack of symptoms with their child. In this respect, the Lateral Flow Tests are doing their job.

Although not part of the Department for Education's current planning, our local authority would now like to strengthen this advice for primary age children and is requesting that, if you are not already doing so, you undertake twice-weekly Lateral Flow Tests for children over two years. This will ensure that as much asymptomatic infection as possible is picked up and will help schools to continue to operate at full capacity by minimising the spread of infection.

Lateral Flow Tests will not be provided by the Department for Education for primary children. However, you can collect test kits as follows:

- from your local pharmacy using one of the new collect codes which can be downloaded [here](#). You can then hand this into your local pharmacy, who will provide you with test kits.
- from your local library.
- online through the link [here](#).

If a positive result is returned, your child will need to seek a confirmatory PCR test and isolate for 10 days according to national guidance. If the PCR test is negative, your child can return to school if they are well enough to do so. Please use our usual covid@ email address to let us know when there is a positive case.

More information about lateral flow testing can be found [here](#).

Symptoms of Covid-19 and Isolation

If your child has any of the now extended Covid symptoms such as:

- severe headache
- sore throat
- extreme fatigue
- high or increasing temperature
- new, continuous cough
- loss of taste or smell

then you should take a Lateral Flow Test as soon as possible. If this is positive, you should obtain a PCR, advise the school and then continue isolating for 10 days as required if this is positive.

Although not government advice, we would suggest that if any family member tests positive at home, at the very least the whole family tests with Lateral Flow kits as soon as possible. You might also like to consider arranging for PCR tests to be taken with siblings in the family remaining at home until the results are received. This may prevent further spreading in school and at home to other family members. We will always arrange for suitable work for home to be provided.

If a child has any of these Covid symptoms in school, please expect us to isolate the child and contact home for collection in line with the Department for Education's procedures for schools.



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Outbreak Management Plan and Contingency Planning

We will continue to monitor any cases in our schools and will react accordingly in line with our Covid-19 procedures set out on our central website [here](#). The website includes our regularly updated Risk Assessment and Outbreak Management Plan.

Due to the number of cases nationwide and the impact on the various helpline teams, the reporting requirements to the Department for Education and Local Authority have changed since we started back in September. Nevertheless, we will continue to work with them to adjust our Covid arrangements if there is a sudden substantial increase in the number of positive cases in a class or group in the same 10-day period.

At the point of reaching a threshold, we will first review and reinforce the testing, hygiene and ventilation measures already in place. If required, we will put in place our Contingency Plan for the 10 day period where there are simultaneous multiple cases, including such measures as:

- assist NHS Test & Trace to identify close contacts who need to take a PCR test
- require face coverings to be worn in school by relevant groups of pupils (for seniors), staff or visitors
- reintroduce bubbles to reduce mixing between groups
- cancel or postpone educational visits, live performances, events, open days etc
- reduce mixing within school of particular groups
- pause activities such as singing or assemblies for relevant groups
- limit visitors to the premises.

The government has asked schools to endeavour to keep any measures to the minimum number of pupils possible and for the shortest amount of time possible. It is unlikely that a Contingency Plan will be implemented for the whole school as we will be aiming to target specific classes or groups in which there is an outbreak.

Any measures affecting education will be under regular review and will be lifted as soon as the evidence supports doing so. Attendance restrictions will only ever be considered as a last resort, so we will only move back to remote home learning in more extreme circumstances if specifically directed by the government.

Control Measures

We will continue to reinforce the following:

- **Ensuring good hygiene for everyone**
This includes maintaining all sanitising stations around the premises and reinforcing the importance of frequent and thorough hand cleaning.
- **Maintaining excellent cleaning regimes**
Our cleaning teams' hours will continue to be extended to ensure that all hard areas and touch points are properly sanitised each evening in addition to their normal duties. In addition, cleaning will be increased during the day for areas used by groups in which there has been a substantial increase of positive cases.
- **Keeping occupied spaces well ventilated**
We have taken steps to ensure that fresh air flow is available in the classrooms and offices throughout the premises and that there is sufficient ventilation. We are aware that it is a balancing act to increase ventilation while maintaining a comfortable working temperature, and this will prove more challenging as the colder winter months draw closer.
- **Following public health advice at all times**
This includes following the measures below, continuing to encourage asymptomatic Covid-19 testing for staff and pupils, with confirmatory PCR tests for those with a positive Lateral Flow test result.



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Communication

We will continue to call or email parents who have notified us that a child has tested positive. As well as finding out how the child is, this will be to check the timeline of the onset of symptoms in order to trace possible close contacts at school.

Parents of a group or class will be informed by email when there are two or more cases in that group so that you know to monitor carefully your child. We will also let you know if a sudden substantial increase of positive cases within a group requires the implementation of our Contingency Plan.

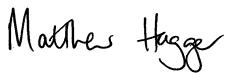
Our new-found freedom has already led to a number of positive cases over half term with many children isolating having tested positive after mixing freely with others over the course of the break. Thank you to all of those families who have let us know that their children have tested positive – I hope they are better and that the symptoms were not too severe.

We now need to ensure that we keep the children in school for as much time as possible by following the government guidelines and public health advice. Please do test your child(ren) before they come back on Monday and let us know through the covid@ email address if there is a positive result.

We are looking forward to restarting next week. Let's hope we can keep the children in school for as long as possible.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely



Matthew Hagger
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