

28<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear parents/carers,

I am writing to update you all following the Prime Minister's statement on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January in which he announced that it will not be possible to resume face to face teaching immediately after half-term and that instead it is hoped that it will be safe to commence the re-opening of schools from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March. The Prime Minister clarified that schools and education settings will be given at least two weeks' notice for a return to face to face education. We will continue to update you as we receive specific and definite information about resuming face to face teaching for all pupils.

It was confirmed that schools and colleges will remain open to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers after February half-term. All other pupils will continue to receive high quality remote education at home. This is in line with the wider national lockdown measures to help to minimise the spread of the virus and respond quickly to the new variant.

Early Years provision will continue to remain open throughout and will continue to allow all children to attend full time or their usual timetabled hours. This includes Early Years registered nurseries and childminders, maintained nursery schools, as well as nursery classes in schools and other pre-reception provision on school sites.

You will have also seen from the news and recent Government announcements that schools continue to be asked to be at the forefront of measures in support of the national effort to limit the transition of the COVID-19 virus, especially given the new strains that have emerged.

Our leaders and staff worked consistently over the holiday period and then at the beginning of term to respond to the announcement, on the 4th January, of the decision to close schools to the majority of pupils. We are now being vigilant to ensure that appropriate safety measures are constantly adhered to and risk assessments reviewed to protect both the children and staff who are currently attending school in person.

Government advisors and scientists report that as many as 1 in 3 people nationally may be asymptomatic carriers of COVID and despite taking personal safety measures, may be contributing to the spread of the virus across communities. Therefore, following on from testing

procedures in secondary schools, primary colleagues are now being asked to engage in the roll out of Lateral Flow Device testing. The full government rationale and advice about this can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-asymptomatic-testing-for-staff-in-primary-schools-and-nurseries>

Schools are receiving their first supply of kits over the next few days and we would like to take this opportunity to explain how this may impact on you as parents and carers.

As soon as we are set up, our staff will take self-swab test kits home and carry out their LFD tests twice a week. The LFD test will give a result in around 30 minutes. Staff will then report their result to NHS Test and Trace as soon as the test is completed. Staff will also share their result with school to help with contact tracing.

Staff participation in this testing is voluntary. It is hoped and expected that the vast majority of staff, who volunteer to take part in the testing, will test negative on their home LFD test and will come into to school as usual and continue to abide by our current protective measures. If, however, a member of staff tests positive on their LFD test they will need to self-isolate immediately in line with the stay-at-home guidance. They will then arrange a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test to confirm the result.

The leaders of St Nicholas Owen Catholic MAC schools have agreed that in the interest of providing assurance and minimizing risk of further infection, all close in-school contacts of any member of staff who tests positive on their LFD test will be asked to stay away from school until the PCR test result is confirmed. Unfortunately, this may mean that we will need to contact you at short notice to ask you to keep children at home

If the PCR test for the member is positive then the self-isolation period for all will have already begun. If the PCR test is negative then the bubble will re-open immediately and all close contacts can return to school, safe in the knowledge that a potential infection was avoided.

We feel that this approach is in the best interests of our school and wider communities and would ask you for patience and support as we respond as effectively as possible to these current challenges.

By engaging with these voluntary tests we are supporting the nationwide efforts to reduce the spread of the virus and allow the return to face to face teaching for all pupils. We will continue to share any information with you as you as we receive it. If you are unclear about the contents of this letter, have concerns or specific circumstances that you would like to discuss then please contact the school by phone or email.

Yours sincerely

*Suzanne Horan*

Catholic Senior Executive Leader