



We are called to be the hands and face of Jesus as we learn, love and grow together

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Dear Parents and carers

Happy New Year!

First of all, may I wish all of our families and staff a Happy New Year. We pray that 2022 is a year of renewed hope, good health, sustained happiness and strengthened community. I understand that many of our pupils, families and staff have experienced the direct impact of Covid outbreaks on their Christmas break. I do hope, however, that everyone managed to spend some special time with family and friends over the holiday period, even if it wasn't able to be quite as extensive as we all initially hoped for. Clearly, Coronavirus will continue to impact upon our lives for some time moving forward. I hope that this letter and the accompanying updated School Risk Assessment will put your mind somewhat at ease as we plan for our return on Wednesday 5th January 2022.

Updated Government Guidelines

The Department for Education emailed all Headteachers yesterday morning at 7am with an update on expectations for schools as they plan their return. I have used the DfE's guidance, along with that of Herts County Council, when updating our school Risk Assessment today. This is attached but is likely to change over the coming days as more advice is issued. I will aim to keep everyone informed as any new additions are made to this document.

Current Practice

The majority of guidelines issued yesterday do not apply to primary-aged pupils and as such, there are no significant changes to our practice at St Vincent de Paul School. We implemented aspects of our outbreak management plan in of the Autumn Term and I have made the decision to keep some of these practices in place at the start of the Spring Term. These mainly revolve around assemblies and whole school mixing and to this end, assemblies will either be digitally delivered or blended for the foreseeable future. Where possible we will continue to limit contacts between different year groups by continuing to stagger lunches and break times, making use of all available outdoor space.

We will also continue with our 'soft start / end' to the school day. As such pupils may arrive anytime between 8.45 and 8.55 am. The main gates will close at 9am. At the end of the day pupils from reception to Year 6 can be collected anytime between 3.05 and 3.15pm. Afternoon nursery finishes at 3.30pm and collection may occur anytime from 3.20pm.

We will be continuing with the current request that any parents / carers entering the school grounds or visiting school wear a face covering (unless exempt). We would also appreciate no families being on site before 8:45am (unless attending breakfast club). If your child is a lone walker please make sure they are leaving at an appropriate time and not arriving before 8.45am. This will mean pupils will be able to go straight into class with no lingering on the school site. Please do not remain on the site at the end of the school day as this encourages gathering and reduces the ability to socially distance. We will of course keep this under constant review as we all long for a time when we can be more sociable at the start and end of the school day.



We are **not** currently planning to reintroduce the one-way outdoor system. However please avoid entering by the back gate at the busiest of times and use the longer route around the building if you are exiting via the front gate at busy time (both the back gate path and a narrow stretch of the path adjacent to the staff room remain key pinch points). We may have to reconsider the one-way system if congestion occurs or if cases increase significantly.

Positive Cases and Isolation

From 14th December 2021 all children aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months and those adults who have been fully vaccinated, who are identified as a close contact of a positive case of COVID-19 by NHS Test & Trace (whether Omicron or not) should take a daily lateral flow test (LFT) for 7 days. If the daily LFT test evidence a negative result they may attend school on that day and continue testing on subsequent days during the set period. Should they develop COVID symptoms, or the LFT evidences a positive result, then a confirmatory PCR (lab processed) test should be taken.

From 22nd December, changes came into force relating to the isolation period for confirmed positive Covid cases. The previous ten-day period of isolation has now been **reduced to seven days if a negative Lateral Flow test result is evidenced on day six and day seven**. The first test must be taken no earlier than day six and the two tests must be taken 24 hours apart. A government produced flow chart in relation to the isolation requirements is include in Appendix 1 to this letter.

Anyone who is unable to carry out a lateral flow test should complete the full ten-day isolation period.

We will continue to log positive cases in school and use the information provided by you to track absence and update the local authority, when appropriate. For this reason, please do let the school office know if your child is not going to be in school and the reason for the absence (absence@stvincent.herts.sch.uk). If your child's absence is Covid related, please also complete our online form which helps us to monitor school wide cases (<https://forms.office.com/r/uZpmbRWNae>). The office team will continue to follow up any unexplained absences on a regular basis so providing full information on symptoms etc helps reduce the number of phone calls being made each day.

Remote Provision

Pupils who are not attending school for authorised Covid related reasons and who are well enough, will be able to access remote provision (in the form of daily work slides) via Google Classroom This can be accessed by logging in to the following link: <https://classroom.google.com/>. User names and passwords remain the same as last year. If you are unsure, please contact the school office.

We do have a number of devices that we can loan should your child not have access to a device during an extended isolation period. Please contact the school office for further details. During a period of extended isolation, your child's teacher will make contact to make sure that you have everything needed for the time away from school. If a child is off school because they are generally unwell, this provision should not be accessed.

Staffing

The government has made it possible in this latest set of guidance to switch to remote provision for a class or group of pupils should a school not be able to adequately and safely staff the teaching in school. This will be for as short a period as possible and, of course, will very much be a last resort.

I am already aware of some staff who need to isolate; all staff will take an LFT test on Tuesday which will allow me to plan for any further staff absences. We will attempt to cover any absences through access to supply teachers (currently rather limited) and redeployment of other school staff wherever possible. In some instances, we may need to temporarily merge two classes together. This would only happen following a thorough risk assessment.



Continued vigilance to signs and symptoms

This remains imperative to the safe and efficient operation of the school. Although the current Omicron variant appears to be less dangerous, particularly to those who are fully vaccinated and booster vaccinated, a number of our staff and pupils have vulnerable family members who need our full cooperation in order that they are further protected. Our primary aged children are also not vaccinated, and although for most children the impact of Omicron is mild, this is not the case for all.

Health matters aside, the isolation requirements in relation to positive cases are likely to make staffing (and in-person teaching) incredibly difficult at times. As such, being vigilant and careful to signs and symptoms will help us to protect staffing and therefore protect in person education for your child.

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a high temperature; and or
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot, for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours; and or
- a loss or change to sense of smell or taste – this means they cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Additional symptoms that **may be early warning signs of COVID-19** in children include:

- upset stomach;
- headache;
- sore throat; or
- unusual fatigue

If your child has any of the main symptoms, they should isolate and arrange a PCR (lab processed) test. LFT tests are not permitted to be used for symptomatic individuals. If the result returned is positive, please follow the routine advised in appendix one of this letter. If negative, your child may return to school if they are well enough.

Lateral Flow Testing

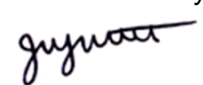
Many of us have become used to regular Lateral Flow Testing, particularly over the Christmas period to protect our extended families. Staff will continue to test twice weekly to protect our community. If you have access to Lateral Flow Tests, you may wish to test your child (providing they are over 5 years old) before they return to school. This, of course, would be a voluntary measure for your own peace of mind. I am aware that access to LFT tests is not easy currently and, as such, this may not be possible for everyone.

Current positive cases

If your child is currently positive with COVID please do email absence@stvincent.herts.sch.uk with their isolation dates and complete the online form (<https://forms.office.com/r/uZpmbRWNaE>) so that we might amend the register accordingly prior to the school term and your child's teacher can make any necessary contact.

I look forward to welcoming everyone back to school on Wednesday 5th January 2022. Please do not hesitate to make contact should you have any concerns.

Yours sincerely

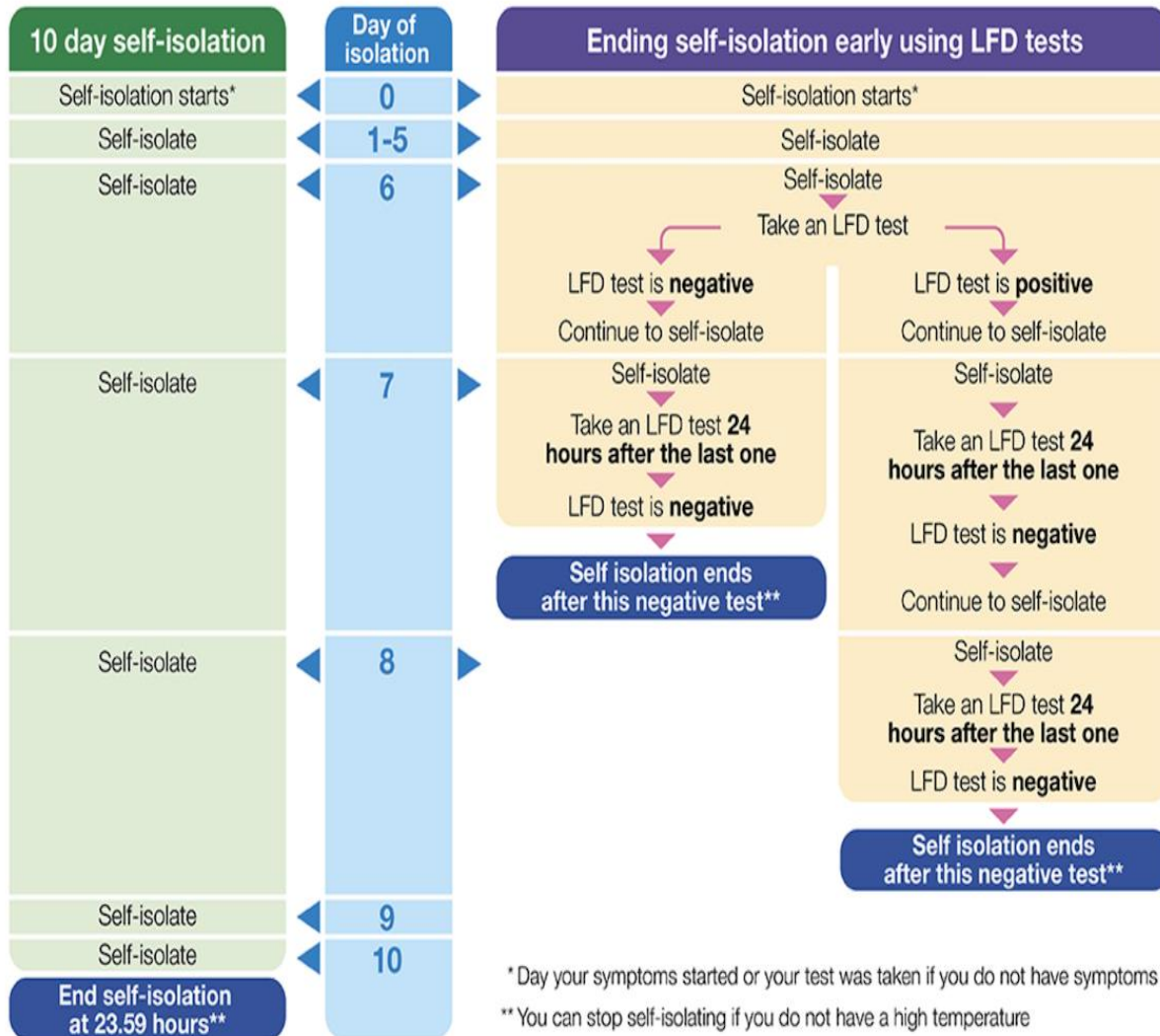


Jon White
Headteacher



Appendix 1: Government Changes to Isolation Protocols

Examples of when to end self-isolation if you have had COVID-19 symptoms or have received a positive COVID-19 test result



This means that if, for example, your symptoms started at any time on the 15th of the month (or if you did not have symptoms but your first positive COVID-19 test was taken on the 15th), you may take daily LFD tests from the 21st of the month. If your LFD test results are negative on the 21st and 22nd, and you do not have a high temperature, you may end your isolation period after the negative test result on the 22nd of the month.

