

Dear Parents/Carers

I am writing to you in order to address **frequently asked questions (FAQs)** from both the Academies Parent Forum and individual parent/carers.

I would like to thank you all for your support. Working together we have ensured that we continue to deliver quality provisions to our students both in school, and remotely for those self-isolating.

I attended an IMT (Incident Management Team) meeting on Thursday 26th November with representatives from Public Health England (PHE), The Essex & Southend Contact Tracing Service (ESCT), the NHS, and the Local Authority. The meeting was to review the current situation within the academies and agree actions moving forward.

The conclusion of the meeting was that the academies should remain open and that the control measures in place are good practice in line with the DFE full guidance.

Frequently asked questions

Who informs the academies of a positive case?

The Academies are not informed directly by the NHS of positive cases; we rely on families reporting to us in a timely manner.

How does Track & Trace work in school?

For clarity I would like to explain in more detail how the *Track & Trace* process operates within schools. I am in daily contact with Essex & Southend NHS Track and Trace.

Upon receiving notification of a positive case:

- We always act on receipt of any information regarding a positive case.
- When a positive case is reported to the academies, we contact Public Health England (PHE) and The Essex & Southend Contact Tracing Service.
- We then work in partnership with Public Health England (PHE) and The Essex & Southend Contact Tracing Service, following their advice and guidance.
- Part of the Track & Trace process involves gathering information from those that have tested positive in order to identify close contacts (as defined by the Government Guidance). In school this could be lunch time friends, who they walk to and from school for example.
- From Friday 27th November, at the Lower Academy, we will self-isolate the whole class if a positive case is identified within that class. We have been assured by PHE that we do not need to revert to a remote learning strategy for whole year group bubbles at this time.
- If the person who has tested positive is asymptomatic (has displayed no symptoms) then those that had contact 48 hours before the day of the test will need to self-isolate.
- Track and Trace is a 'live' process and occasionally we receive further information from those involved after we have initially spoken with them. When this happens, we act upon this information in the way detailed earlier.
- All decisions regarding who has to self-isolate are made in partnership with The Essex & Southend Contact Tracing Service.

Who are close contacts?

The definition of a close contact, defined by the government is;

A 'contact' is a person who has been close to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 anytime from 2 days before the person was symptomatic up to 10 days from onset of symptoms (this is when they are infectious to others). For example, a contact can be:

- people who spend significant time in the same household as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19
- a person who has had face-to-face contact (within one metre), with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, including:
 - being coughed on
 - having a face-to-face conversation within one metre
 - having skin-to-skin physical contact, or
 - contact within one metre for one minute or longer without face-to-face contact
- a person who has been within 2 metres of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes
- a person who has travelled in a small vehicle with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or in a large vehicle or plane near someone who has tested positive for COVID-19
- sexual partners

How long should my child self-isolate for?

The self-isolation period is for 14 days from the day they were last in contact with the person who tested positive for coronavirus.

Why isn't it always 14 days?

The isolation period is therefore not always for 14 days, it depends on how many days have elapsed since the last contact.

Who tells my child they need to self-isolate?

This information will be communicated directly to our students via a senior leader. The students are collected from class by either myself or a Deputy Headteacher.

To date at the Lower Academy I have spoken to all those that have been present when the decision for them to self-isolate has been made. When we inform students they have the opportunity to ask questions about the process and are given information regarding:

- the self-isolation period
- what self-isolation means
- the symptoms to watch out for
- remote learning
- next steps
- return dates

Who decides if the school remains open?

Simply put the academies would decide to revert to remote learning if we could not operationally open the sites safely (a shortage of teachers for example). If the number or frequency of positive cases was a concern then PHE would recommend that we revert to remote learning.

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The conclusion of the meeting was that the academies are safe to remain open and that the control measures in place are good practice in line with the DFE full guidance.

Can you tell me who has tested positive?

In terms of the identities of those that have reported positive cases we have a duty to protect privacy.

In terms of the number of cases we have endeavoured to inform each year group bubble via email/letter when we have had a reported case. Our priority in terms of communication is to ensure that those that are directly affected are informed in the first instance.

At the Lower Academy we have experienced a number of student cases. The cases have been reported to PHE and working in partnership we do not need to revert to a remote learning strategy for whole year group bubbles at this time. From Friday 27th November at the Lower Academy we will self-isolate the whole class if a positive case is identified within that class

At the Upper Academy we have had a single student case in Year 10 and 11 and 12. Again, the cases have been reported to PHE and working in partnership we do not need to revert to a remote learning strategy for whole year group bubbles at this time.

Both academies remain open and fully operational.

Providing a safe and high quality education for all of our students is our primary purpose and we will continue to do that. Students required to self-isolate have access to our remote learning programme that includes lessons recorded by our teachers.

If my child has to self-isolate how will they learn from home?

The day after a student is informed to self-isolate they will receive a call from a senior leader to discuss how they will access the academy pre-recorded lessons and other online resources they need for their remote learning period. This call will also address any other support needed such as accessing devices and free school meals.

My child is isolating and has mocks this week. Will they have a chance to sit the mocks?

Yes. We will arrange catch-up sessions for this during week commencing 14th December.

Is it safe for the students to sit exams in the exam halls?

We sent a letter to Year 11 on 20th November outlining the safety measures in place for exams. We have run public exams at the Upper Academy this term.

We have control measures in place in line with government guidance;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series/public-health-arrangements-for-autumn-exams>

For this mock examination series, we have additional control measures in place in line with our risk assessment including:

- Students have been allocated the same desk for all exams
- All necessary equipment will be provided in a named clear pencil case on each desk - this equipment must be left on the desk for use in all exams
- Student belongings must be kept to a minimum as storage space is limited
- Mobile phones will not be collected in - instead these must be switched off and placed in student school bags along with any other unauthorised items before being seated
- Some start times have been adjusted to ensure student bubbles are not crossing over on exit

Should the provisions of children who live with extremely clinically vulnerable people be considered?

The Academies follow the DFE guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools#attendance>

Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves, should still attend school.

The advice for pupils who remain in the clinically extremely vulnerable group is that they should return to school from 2 December at all local restriction tiers unless they are one of the very small number of pupils or students under paediatric or NHS care (such as recent transplant or very immunosuppressed children) and have been advised specifically by their GP or clinician not to attend an education setting.

Can I send my child to school while awaiting a test result?

No.

What are the symptoms of Covid-19?

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

For most people, COVID-19 will be a mild illness. However, if you have any of the symptoms above, stay at home and arrange to have a test.

What if my child gets symptoms of coronavirus?

If you get any symptoms of coronavirus (a high temperature, a new, continuous cough or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste) while you're self-isolating:

- get a test as soon as possible
- anyone you live with must self-isolate until you've been tested and received your result
- anyone in your support bubble should self-isolate if you've been in close contact with them since your symptoms started or during the 48 hours before they started

My child was displaying symptoms but now feels better – can they come back to school?

Anyone displaying symptoms of temperature, new continuous cough or change/loss of sense of taste/smell should self-isolate and seek a test.

If the test is positive – self-isolate for 10 days (household 14 days).

If negative they can return to school. As long as they haven't been deemed a close contact of someone who is positive (14 days isolation).

If the child has not been tested but feels better within the 10 days they still cannot return to school. If they had symptoms they need to isolate for the full 10 days or have a negative test result

Why can students mix at lunch and break times?

We continue with staggered breakfast, break and lunch times on each site. Year group bubbles go to breaks and lunch at different times. Break and lunch will last for 30 minutes, with bubbles having access to the school canteen or restaurant at this time.

All students are expected to make use of outside space, unless raining. Social distancing should be encouraged, where possible, for those who live in separate households.

Face coverings are to be worn in communal areas during these times unless eating.

Students can bring their own lunch to school in a lunchbox, but sharing of food should not take place. Food should be consumed in the restaurant. Students can only mix within their year group bubble. They do not have access to students within different bubbles.

Once again thank you for your support and especially for the positive messages we have received from families. Those messages really raise spirits and inspire our teams.

Kind regards

Gary Smith

Headteacher
The Basildon Academies