



## The Federation of St Francis Special School Lincoln and Lincoln St Christopher's School

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Dear Parent/Carer,

22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021

### **RE: Lateral flow tests information from the DFE**

I am writing to keep you updated regarding information I have received from the DFE this week. The information in italics is what I have received:

#### ***Message to education leaders from the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson***

*I am writing to you as school and college leaders to thank you for your flexibility and resilience during this challenging period. I am continually impressed and immensely grateful for all the work you have done in response to the challenges presented by the pandemic.*

*During this period, leaders and staff have stepped up in so many ways. The role you play is vital in providing vulnerable children and young people, and the children of critical workers, access to on-site education and the best quality remote learning for the majority of our students.*

*School and college leaders are playing a key role in setting up COVID-19 testing. Testing remains a vital part of our plan to suppress this virus, and the widespread rollout of regular testing using rapid lateral flow tests is already proving beneficial in finding people with coronavirus before they develop symptoms.*

*We have consistently been guided by experts, and as part of our testing approach we rolled out daily contact testing in schools on the advice of NHS Test and Trace and Public Health England (PHE).*

*Both NHS Test and Trace and PHE have now reviewed that advice, and concluded that, in light of the higher prevalence and rates of transmission of the new variant, further evaluation work is required to understand the impact of daily contact testing, instead of self-isolation for those who have been in contact with a case, to make sure it is achieving its aim of breaking chains of transmission and reducing cases of the virus in the community.*

*In light of that assessment, we are pausing daily contact testing in all but a small number of secondary schools and colleges, where it will continue with detailed evaluation to inform any future resumption and to make sure nobody in the remaining settings is put at any risk. Regular testing of staff should continue and will increase to twice weekly as further reassurance and to break chains of transmission during this period.*

This means students who have been in contact with a positive case either inside or outside of school will continue to have to isolate for 10 days as was previously the case. Lateral-flow testing will no longer be able to replace this isolation period.

As you will be aware we test our staff currently every Monday and at the moment have very little students who are accessing the lateral flow test due to the needs of the students in school at the moment. Therefore for us, there isn't much change in our current system.

You will see that the government recognise the '*in light of the higher prevalence and rates of transmission of the new variant*' that we are doing everything we can in school to minimise the transmission. This means minimising the amount of staff and students that are on site at any one time. I know that for many the challenge of home educating your child/children is difficult and we are doing everything we can to make home learning as personalised as possible and relevant to your child.

You may have SEND workers contacting you asking if you would like your child to be in school. We all agree that we would love for all the children to be back in school however it is clear there is still a lot that is needed before we can have all the students return and therefore I have no choice but to prioritise the most vulnerable and therefore if you haven't been offered a place in school yet it is unlikely we will be able to do so over the next few weeks unless something significant has changed in your home circumstances. We currently have 94 students accessing in school provision, which is 41% of our students.

I know that some are looking ahead to half term to ascertain if we will remain open over half term. We haven't been given any directive on this so at this stage it is my intention to close for half term.

In addition the media continues to speculate as to if schools will remain closed after February half term. I have no evidence at this stage to say that this is the case however we are obviously working closely with the DFE and local authority to assess if our student return date will be longer than the 15<sup>th</sup> February.

I am so sorry that I can't give you more clear and concrete information, I wish I could. I can assure you as soon as I have any information I share it with parents as swiftly as possible so you are kept up to date.

A reminder that our staff are all here to support students and families, please don't hesitate to contact.

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We will continue to support our staff, pupils and school community in any way we can. I want to thank the staff team for their fantastic work over the last week to ensure that we provide the very best we can in these challenging circumstances. Please stay safe and look after each other and do not hesitate to contact us if you need any support.

Yours sincerely,

Kyna Adkins

*Kyna Adkins*

Head teacher