



Pensby High School

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Headteacher: Mr K Flanagan

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Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to outline how we are preparing to return week beginning 8 March 2021. A second letter will follow shortly with appointment times for the first round of lateral flow tests, a link to a video describing the process and further information as we move forward.

We are going to work on the basis that the more we can do around prevention, the more successful we will be in keeping our students in school and reassuring both you and your children that the school environment is as safe as it could possibly be. I know we have had stop starts before, I know that we have had to send students home as close contacts and I cannot promise that this will not happen again, but we can do our very best together to try to minimise any further damage to our children's education. To that end we are going to introduce a staggered testing process and a staggered start, and we will not start face-to-face teaching in school until we have tested everyone we can in the school community at least once. We have a small staff team of testers, but we are reliant on volunteers for the bulk of the testing capacity and we are matching availability of testers to testing slots this week. We have parents, friends of parents and volunteers moving around leave, taking holiday and putting off other commitments. I have to say the willingness of others to help, has lifted me in the last few weeks, thank you.

We will test every member of the community that has given consent from Monday 8 March 2021 through to the end of the school day Wednesday 10 March 2021. During this time teaching staff will stay offsite and they will run all their lessons via Teams, there will be no teaching onsite.

I cannot ever guarantee that everyone onsite is COVID free, but the only means I have at my disposal to offer anything like this assurance is the lateral flow test. If we test everyone before we start, then everyone in our community can feel and believe that we are doing everything in our power to keep people safe and most importantly get our children learning again. We have lost a year to COVID. At my age that's a 1/50th of my life and it is far too big a proportion to have lost; but for a Year 7 it is almost a 1/10th of their lived experience, for the last two exam cohorts, it is a rite of passage taken away. We need to get school open and stay open.

So, we will then offer a time to you for your child to come to school and be tested, for the first of the two tests we are hoping to do within the first week. We will start with Years 10 and 11, followed by all other year groups and I am hopeful that we will be able to complete some of the second tests for these year groups during lessons 3&4 Wednesday 10 March.

All staff will be tested after 2.20pm on Wednesday 10 March.

We will then bring all students and all staff back on Thursday 11 March at the start of the normal school day. We will extend the pastoral time on that morning to encompass the whole of lesson 1. This will allow for students to have any questions they have answered, for staff to cover the systems in school and most importantly to allow for a chance to just chat with their friends in person.

I know that this means further time at home and I realise that it presents difficulties in getting students here for their test for some families, but we will pick up outstanding tests on Thursday morning at the start of form time and hopefully these will be few in number, and therefore tested within the extended pastoral time.

Teaching will begin lesson 2. Second and third tests will be taken from lessons.

We have already had questions from parents around wearing of masks, about the process for the tests themselves, the reliability of the tests and how home testing will work. Hopefully the video available in a few days will show you the process around testing in our school.

I know that the tests are not perfect, but they are part of a range of measures schools are taking to mitigate risk. I cannot argue about their scientific viability; I read Economics and Politics at university, but I do know that something is better than nothing and with everything together I believe that schools are far safer places than some of our worst fears project upon them. The tests are not mandatory, but we are a community and I would hope that we would all want to work together. In addition to the school based tests in the first two weeks of our return, we will continue with year group bubbles, with lunch and break now being spent outdoors as this really does seem to be the biggest mitigation possible. We will continue with requests to clean hands on entry to lessons, dining halls and with enhanced cleaning going on through the day, particularly in shared areas. We have now been instructed to ensure masks are worn in all communal spaces and all areas where social distancing is not possible, in reality that means the vast majority of our classrooms as well. This is an instruction and we need to follow it. I know that a small number of parents have already asked with regard to this and I understand that there may be some reluctance with regard to this. I do not want to wear a mask all day, I think that the mask makes my job more difficult, particularly dealing with children that are upset or challenging. I would never ordinarily choose to wear a mask, but these are not ordinary times and I wear a mask when requested, because it is a simple step I can take to protect my community. Unless there is a medical exemption, we all need to wear masks unfortunately.

As to home testing, I am not clear at this stage what this will look like, how kits will get to us as parents or I how I will arrange this for my three children. I am as eager as you are to hear more detail, but I am hoping that when you watch our video, you will see how relatively easy it is to follow the testing process. I would hope that it will be a similar if not easier process at home.

Finally, I would ask all parents to remember that you know your children better than anyone else. If your child shows any coronavirus symptoms or you have any concerns do not send them into school and seek a test via the local authority website. The lateral flow testing is aimed at trying to identify asymptomatic cases and is not a substitute for the testing procedures that are already established via the local authority test centres.

As soon as we confirm the numbers of volunteers, we will start to offer testing times and make further contact.

Yours sincerely



Mr K Flanagan
Headteacher