**St Thomas More Catholic High School**

**Covid Contingency Framework January 2022**

**Summary**

The contingency framework describes the principles of managing local outbreaks of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in school, covering:

• the types of measures to be prepared for

• who can recommend these measures and where

• when measures should be lifted

• how decisions are made

**Introduction**

The government has made it a national priority that education and childcare settings should continue to operate as normally as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures may be necessary in some circumstances, for example:

• to help manage a COVID-19 outbreak within school

• as part of a package of measures responding to a Variant of Concern (VoC) or to extremely high prevalence of COVID-19 in the community

• to prevent unsustainable pressure on the NHS

**Baseline measures**

The Department for Education’s Operational Guidance sets out the measures that all education settings should have in place to manage transmission of COVID-19 including:

1. All students have been invited to take one on site Covid test on their return to school.
2. Thereafter, staff and students should continue to test twice weekly at home, with lateral flow device (LFD) test kits, 3 to 4 days apart. Testing remains voluntary but is strongly encouraged.
3. Those who test positive should isolate, take a confirmatory PCR test, and continue to isolate if the result is positive. Students who are isolating will have access to remote learning.
4. Under-18s, irrespective of their vaccination status, and double vaccinated adults will not need to self-isolate if they are a close contact of a positive case. They will be strongly advised to take a PCR test and, if positive, will need to isolate. They do not need to isolate while waiting for the test or the result so can continue to attend school as normal. They are also strongly encouraged to take daily LFD tests for 7 days.
5. 18 year-olds will be treated in the same way as under-18s until 6 months after their 18th birthday, to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated.
6. School will continue to ensure good hygiene for everyone, maintain appropriate cleaning regimes, keep occupied spaces well ventilated, and follow public health advice on testing and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.
7. School will continue with strong messaging about signs and symptoms, isolation advice and testing, to support prompt isolation of suspected cases. School will also continue to encourage vaccination uptake for eligible students and staff.

**Principles**

**Prioritising education**

The overarching objective is to maximise the number of students in school and minimise any disruption, in a way that best manages the COVID-19 risk. In all cases, any benefits in managing transmission should be weighed against any educational drawbacks.

Leaders will endeavour to keep any measures to the minimum number of groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible. Leaders will keep all measures under regular review and lift them as soon as the evidence supports doing so. Measures will not be considered in isolation, but as part of a broader package of measures.

Attendance restrictions will only ever be considered as a last resort.

**Collaboration**

Leaders will work with North Tyneside Public Health, the Local Authority, Bishop Bewick CET leaders and other schools in North Tyneside and the Trust to share information and seek guidance and advice on school level, local level and regional level issues.

**Roles and responsibilities**

The Local Authority and North Tyneside Public Health are responsible for managing localised outbreaks. They will play an important role in providing support and advice to school leaders.

Leaders will report confirmed Covid cases in school to North Tyneside Public Health and seek advice on connected cases that may indicate an outbreak in school. Decisions about any actions and measures to implement in school will be made by school leaders.

**When school will consider extra action**

The following will only apply after the initial on site test has taken place on students’ return in January.

Extra action may be necessary if the number of positive cases substantially increases. This is because it could indicate transmission is happening within school. The thresholds, detailed below, will be used as an indication for when leaders will seek public health advice.

Whichever of these thresholds is reached first:

• 5 students or staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period; or

• 10% of students or staff who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period

This could include:

• a group of students in a form class or individual subject class

• a friendship group mixing at social times

• a sports team

•a group in an extra-curricular activity

**Actions that will be considered**

When the above thresholds are reached, we will review and reinforce the testing, hygiene and ventilation measures already in place, including:

• any activities that could take place in alternative, larger spaces or outdoors including exercise, assemblies, or classes

• any ways to improve ventilation indoors, where this would not significantly impact thermal comfort

• any one-off enhanced cleaning focussing on touch points and any shared equipment

We will seek additional advice from North Tyneside Public Health if we are concerned about transmission. Public Health may also give advice reflecting the local situation. This may include advice that local circumstances mean that the thresholds for extra action can be higher than set out above. If they judge that additional action should be taken, they might advise school to take some or all of the other measures described in this document.

**Additional action that could be advised by Public Health**

If Public Health have assessed that transmission is likely to be occurring in school they may advise extra measures such as:

* strengthened communications to encourage pupils and students to undertake twice weekly rapid asymptomatic home testing and reporting
* reinstating on-site rapid LFD testing for a 2-week period to encourage uptake of twice weekly testing
* increased frequency of testing

They may also recommend the actions listed under other measures in the contingency framework, or other proportionate measures to support continuing face-to-face education.

In extreme cases, and as a last resort where all other risk mitigations have not broken chains of in-school transmission, Public Health may advise introducing short-term attendance, such as sending home a year group (as they could for any workplace experiencing a serious infectious disease outbreak).

High-quality remote learning will be provided for all students well enough to learn from home. On-site provision will in all cases be retained for vulnerable students and the children of critical workers.

Where they have advised settings to take extra measures, Public Health will work closely with their regional partnership teams and keep the situation under regular review. They will inform school when it is appropriate to stop additional measures, or if they should be extended.

**Testing**

All students and staff will be strongly encouraged to undertake twice weekly testing at home. We will retain the capacity for small scale on site testing for any students who are unable to test at home. While the large scale test site will be stood down it could be recommissioned if necessary.

In response to a school or local outbreak we will consult with North Tyneside Public Health on the need for more frequent home testing, or, in exceptional circumstances, on the reintroduction of large scale asymptomatic on site testing. In considering this we will consider how on site testing could be implemented in a way that does not negatively impact the education of our students.

From Tuesday 14 December, a new national approach to daily testing for contacts of COVID-19 was introduced whereby anyone not legally required to self isolate is now strongly advised to take a rapid lateral flow device (LFD) test every day for 7 days or until 10 days since their last contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 if this is earlier. If any of these LFD tests are positive they should self-isolate in order to protect other people.

**Face coverings**

Students and staff will be asked to continue wearing face coverings in corridors and other indoor communal areas such as the assembly hall, when they return in January. We consider this to be a proportionate measure due to the removal of bubbles for lessons and the resulting increase in both movement around the school site and mixing of different year groups. As before, any staff or students who are unable to wear face coverings will be exempt. This will be reviewed at least twice every half term.

In response to a school or local outbreak we will consult with North Tyneside Public Health on the need for reintroducing face coverings in classrooms for specific groups of students, half/whole year groups or all students and staff. In all cases any educational and wellbeing drawbacks in the recommended use of face coverings will be balanced with the benefits in managing transmission.

No student will be denied education on the grounds of whether they are, or are not, wearing a face covering.

**Shielding**

Following expert clinical advice and the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, people previously considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) will not be advised to shield again.

Individuals previously identified as CEV are advised to continue to follow the guidance on how to stay safe and help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Individuals should consider advice from their health professional on whether additional precautions are right for them.

Should shielding be reintroduced then we will adopt the approaches that we used previously:

• any staff will be supported with an individual risk assessment including the ability to work from home if appropriate

• all young people under the age of 18 have now been removed from the SPL but, in exceptional circumstances students who are unable to attend school will be supported by remote learning

**Other measures**

**Residential Educational Visits**

For 2021/22 residential educational visits will only be planned when we are confident that they can go ahead safely and without additional impact on student or staff attendance e.g. isolation on return from an overseas visit. We will liaise with our insurers (the RPA) and with North Tyneside before planning any residential visits to assess the financial and other risks of cancellation to school and families. Any decision to cancel a planned residential visit will only be made after consultation with the RPA and North Tyneside.

There will be no foreign visits planned for the academic year 2021/22.

**Open Evenings and Transition Days**

Open evenings and transition days are an important way that we support Year 6 and Year 11 students and their families. For 2021/22 we will plan to hold such events in school in a way that is safe for staff, students and parents. If cases in school or the local community are high at the time of an event we may need to postpone or cancel the event and hold a virtual event instead.

**Parental Attendance in School**

We will continue to prioritise communicating with parents by telephone or video call but recognise that face to face meetings in school will sometimes be necessary. These meetings will take place in line with the Covid risk assessment at the time.

We will plan to hold a mixture of face to face and remote parents’ evenings but again will be ready to hold them all remotely should it be necessary.

**Live Performances in School**

We know that live performances in school are both enriching for students and their families but also play an important role in some courses such as Music and Performing Arts. Only small scale live performances will be initially planned for 2021/22 and the ability to live stream performances will be built into the plans wherever possible, in case an event can not take place with a live audience.

While we expect that the above measures would be implemented in the individual context of St Thomas More we understand that North Tyneside Public Health may also advise that they are implemented in schools across the Local Authority.

**Attendance Restrictions**

High quality face-to-face education remains a government priority. Attendance restrictions will only ever be considered as a short-term measure and as a last resort:

• on public health advice in extreme cases where other recommended measures have not broken chains of transmission within school; or

• across an area, on government advice in order to supress or manage a dangerous variant and to prevent unsustainable pressure on the NHS.

In all circumstances, priority will continue to be given to vulnerable students and children of critical workers to attend school.

Where measures include attendance restrictions, we understand that the government may advise on any other groups that should be prioritised, for example Year 11 or Year 13 as they are preparing for public examinations or Year 7 as they are the youngest students in school.

**Remote Education**

We will continue to provide high quality remote learning for students if:

• they have tested positive for COVID-19 but are well enough to learn from home; or

• they are part of a group of students for whom attendance has been temporarily restricted

On-site provision will, in all cases, be retained for vulnerable students and the children of critical workers. If we have to temporarily stop onsite provision on public health advice, we will discuss alternative arrangements for vulnerable students with the local authority.

**Education Workforce**

If restrictions on child, pupil and student attendance are ever needed, leaders will determine the workforce required onsite and if it is appropriate for some staff to work remotely. In doing this we will have regard to the guidance on clinically extremely vulnerable people.

**Safeguarding and Designated Safeguarding Leads**

If attendance restrictions are needed, all staff should continue to be vigilant and responsive to any safeguarding concerns.

Where necessary we will review our child protection policy so that it reflects the local restrictions and remains effective. At least one of the school’s DSL or deputy DSLs will be available on site at all times. However, it is recognised that there may be operational challenges to this.

In such cases, there are 2 options to consider:

* a trained DSL (or deputy) can be available to be contacted via phone or online video, for example working from home
* sharing trained DSLs (or deputies) with other schools (who should be available to be contacted via phone or online video)

Where a trained DSL (or deputy) is not on-site, in addition to one of the 2 options, a senior leader will take responsibility for co-ordinating safeguarding on site.

**Vulnerable Students**

As during previous lockdowns pastoral staff will work with social workers and other professionals to identify which vulnerable students should be prioritised to continue to attend school.

Where vulnerable students are absent staff will follow up with the parent or carer, working with the local authority and social worker (where applicable), to explore the reason for absence and discuss their concerns.

Where it is agreed that a vulnerable student will not attend on site provision a named member of staff will maintain regular contact with the student and parent or carer. The focus of the contact will be the welfare of the student and ensuring that they are able to access appropriate education and support while at home. Any welfare concerns will be raised with senior pastoral leaders; any concerns about access to and completion of remote education will be raised with senior curriculum leaders.

If we have to stop onsite provision on public health advice, staff will discuss alternative arrangements for vulnerable students with the local authority.

**Transport**

School transport services will continue to be provided as normal where any students are attending school.

**School Meals and Food Vouchers**

School meal options will be available for all pupils who are in school and meals will be free of charge to all students who meet the benefits related free school meals eligibility criteria.

Schools will continue to provide Food Vouchers to students who are eligible for benefits related free school meals and who are not attending school, including if they have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves.

**Educational Visits**

Any attendance restrictions will be reflected in the visits risk assessment and leaders will consider carefully if the educational visit is still appropriate and safe. Only students who are attending school should go on an educational visit. Staff will consult the health and safety guidance on educational visits when considering visits.