

September 2021 Opening at St Mary's Catholic Primary School & Nursery

– Important Information for Parents

Dear parents, carers,

We are looking forward to the start of a new school year. We hope and pray that we can get through this one with far less disruption than we have had during the last two school years. In line with the Government's road map, its plan to ease restrictions in England cautiously, the Department for Education (DfE) produced updated advice to schools earlier last week.

The DfE's stated priority is for schools '*to deliver face-to-face, high-quality education to all pupils. The evidence is clear that being out of education causes significant harm to educational attainment, life chances, mental and physical health.*'

We continue to update our risk assessments and contingency plans based on the DfE and Lancashire County Council (LCC) advice; they are dynamic and will evolve over time as we learn lessons and face new challenges. This process builds that shared understanding of how we are working to keep our children, staff and community safe and well and also to enable our children to return to enjoy their education at St Mary's as fully as they can.

We know that the pandemic is not yet over, so the return to school will not be a case of 'back to normal.' That said, many of the restrictions and measures that were in place during the last school year have been lifted or have been modified for the time being.

As a school, we are going to retain some measures (probably more than are required) until the end of the first half term and review them at that point. This is because the effect of the return to school on virus transmission is still an unknown quantity. Data from Scotland suggest that the increase in COVID infections there, particularly amongst young people, has been driven by the recent return to school.

I have presented the information about our September opening in the form of frequently asked questions (FAQs).

1. Does my child have to attend school in September?

Yes. School attendance is again compulsory from September 2021

2. How will we keep your child safe?

We are following the guidelines set out by the Department for Education. We will be putting measures in place to keep our community as safe as possible (look out for updated risk assessment published on website over the next couple of weeks for details). Please note we cannot make school a risk-free environment and cannot guarantee that school will be virus-free but we will do our very best to do so.

3. What are the main control measures?

- ✓ **Anyone with symptoms of COVID, however mild*, must stay at home** until a negative PCR test is obtained or until period of self-isolation has come to an end. *17.08.21 DfE guidance.
- ✓ **Keeping children in consistent groups.** The requirement to keep children in 'bubbles' has been removed. That said, in practice, at St Mary's and at

other single-form primary schools, children generally mix only with children from their classes. However, your child might also be part of another small, consistent group with children from other year groups for example in phonics groups and in Breakfast/ After School clubs.

- ✓ **Ensure good hygiene for everyone, including:**
 - **Frequent handwashing.** Members of school community will be required to wash their hands regularly during the course of the school day.
 - **Good respiratory hygiene.** Members of school community will be asked to use a tissue if coughing and sneezing and to dispose of tissue in a lidded bin - 'Catch it. Bin it. Kill it'
- ✓ **Enhanced cleaning of the school** by cleaning staff and of frequently touched surfaces by all staff throughout the day.
- ✓ **Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.**

4. Are the measures taken by school reversible?

Yes. If we are advised by LCC Director of Public Health, we may need to 'step up' or 'step down' some or all of the measures we had in place during the last school year. However, closing the whole school, or sending whole classes home should be a last resort.

5. When will my child be required to self-isolate and when will they not need to self-isolate?

Your child **will need to self-isolate** if they have either: COVID symptoms, however mild, a positive LFD test or a positive PCR test.

Please note: *Under-18s, irrespective of their vaccination status, [therefore our children] 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.*

This means your child can still attend school and **will not need to** self-isolate if a close contact, e.g. a household member or classmate, tests positive but we would ask you to arrange a PCR test for them.

If a member of your child's class has symptoms or tests positive, your child may still attend school as long as they have no symptoms and do not test positive themselves.

It will now only be in extreme cases, and as a last resort, where LCC's Director of Public Health may advise us to introduce short-term attendance restrictions such as sending home a year group.

6. What happens if my child develops COVID 19 symptoms away from school?

The main symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are a high temperature, a new, continuous cough and a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste.

Parents/carers must notify school *immediately* if their child is displaying symptoms of Covid-19, **however mild***, and follow the PHE “Stay at Home” guidance and arrange to have a test. When an individual develops COVID-19 symptoms or has a positive test, pupils, staff and other adults should follow public health advice on when to self-isolate and what to do. (* DfE guidance).

They should not come into school if they have symptoms, have had a positive test result or other reasons requiring them to stay at home due to the risk of them passing on COVID-19 (for example, they are required to quarantine). The guidance sets out that the person with symptoms must self-isolate for at least 10 full days and should arrange to have a test to see if they have coronavirus (Covid-19).

7. What happens if my child develops COVID symptoms in school?

If a pupil displays symptoms, **however mild***, they will not be permitted to remain in school. The pupil will be taken to the KS2 outdoor Quiet Area (which is sealed off) and where there is PPE. The supervising adult will put on PPE as appropriate, if they cannot keep a two metre distance or if they do not feel comfortable without. (* DfE guidance).

You will be contacted to collect your child, who will be taken to entrance via outside of school to meet you. As stated above the child and the child’s household should self-isolate and arrange to have a test.

8. What happens if my child has a positive LFD (lateral flow device test) result?

Staff and pupils with a positive LFD test result should self-isolate in line with the stay at home guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

They will also need to get a free PCR test to check if they have COVID-19. Whilst awaiting the PCR result, the individual should continue to self-isolate.

If the PCR test is taken within 2 days of the positive lateral flow test, and is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD test and the pupil can return to school, as long as the individual doesn’t have COVID-19 symptoms.

If the PCR test is positive, they must self-isolate for 10 days after the day of the test or the start of the symptoms – see self-isolation guidance.

9. What happens following a negative test result?

School will ask parents and staff to inform them immediately of the results of a PCR test. If the test gives a negative result, <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/what-your-test-result-means/>. Children do not need to self-isolate and can return to school as soon as possible if the test is negative, as long as:

- they feel well – if they feel unwell, they must stay at home until they’re feeling better. If they have diarrhoea or have suffered from vomiting, they must stay at home until 48 hours after they have stopped.

10. What happens if the number of positive cases substantially increases in school (possibly indicating transmission is happening in the school)?

The DfE has provided advice indicating a threshold for when we should seek public health advice if we are concerned. For us this is going to mean if there are three or more children, pupils, students or staff in a class, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period. We will be advised to take extra measures including:

- whether any activities could take place outdoors, including exercise, assemblies, or classes
- ways to improve ventilation indoors, where this would not significantly impact thermal comfort
- one-off enhanced cleaning focusing on touch points and any shared equipment

We may also be advised to:

- Strengthen communications to encourage pupils to undertake twice weekly rapid asymptomatic home testing and reporting
- Temporarily reinstate face coverings for staff and visitors in indoor and/or communal spaces.
- Increased frequency of testing

Restricted attendance for whole classes would be a last resort.

11. What will happen to my child's education if they need to self-isolate?

We will continue with our remote education policy (see website) if your child is required to self-isolate because they have tested positive for COVID-19 but is well enough to learn from home; or attendance at school has been temporarily restricted.

Obviously, if your child is poorly, we would not expect them to complete work. However if your child is well enough to do school work remotely your child's teacher will provide work for them.

12. What must I do if we have recently returned from a country which requires a period of self-isolation or quarantine on return?

If your child has recently returned from a country which requires them to self-isolate, the child must self-isolate for the advised period.

13. What is school's role contact tracing?

School is no longer involved directly in contact tracing.

Tracing close contacts and isolation

From September, education school will be moving away from contact tracing for single cases to an outbreak management approach.

Cases and their contacts will now be followed up by NHS Test and Trace.

*Close contacts of a positive COVID-19 case in England aged under 18 years and 6 months and/or those fully vaccinated **are exempt** from the legal duty to self-isolate.*

Instead, NHS Test and Trace will advise close contacts to take a PCR test

14. What will my child wear (uniform) and what should they bring to school?

Full school uniform must be worn each day. Children must bring a coat in case of rain or cold weather. Windows and doors will be left open during the school day, so as we move into the late autumn and early winter where the weather becomes cooler, children can bring an additional warm item of clothing to wear in class. This seemed to work very well last winter.

School bags may be brought to school but in many cases, there is really no need. I would encourage children not to bring them if they do not have to. Children should bring either book bag or reading folder into school. Children can bring their water bottle and packed lunch to school. These are to be taken home each night.

If you have not yet collected uniform and would like to do so, please contact the school office by email or by phone on the afternoon of Thursday 2nd September.

15. What about PE Kits?

For the first half-term at least, we are going to continue what we were doing last year. During the first week of term your child's teacher will let you know which day(s) of the week your child will be doing PE. Children should come to school wearing their PE kits: white T-shirts and black/ blue shorts on those days and not their school uniform and remain in those kits for the rest of the day.

16. What about food and drink?

Our school hall is one of the least well-ventilated rooms in the school so for the first half-term at least, we will continue with the systems we had in place last year. Nursery and Key Stage 1 school meals will be taken in the hall in different sittings and Key Stage 2 dinners will be taken in classrooms. Children who have packed lunches should bring them to school in their lunch box. Children may bring a healthy snack.

17. Can I call into the school office to drop something off?

For the time being, we want to keep the numbers of visitors to school to a minimum.

If you need to bring in a forgotten lunchbox for example or if you need to take your child to a medical appointment. Please call or email us first.

18. Can I meet my child's teacher in school?

Please do not try and meet/ speak with the class teacher at the classroom door to pass on messages, we need to keep entrances clear and avoid gatherings there. If you need to contact the class teacher please do so via the school telephone or *Class Dojo*. If you require a face-to-face meeting, please contact the class teacher or the school office. Although we think it is now possible to meet face-to-face we will need to keep this under review.

19. Are Breakfast and After School Club running as normal?

Yes.

Although there is no longer a requirement to keep children in bubbles, for the first half-term, we are going to continue, where practicable, to maintain distances between different age groups e.g. infant and junior. Parents will need to drop-off and collect from the front entrance. We will keep this under review.

20. What are the pick-up and drop-off arrangements?

Because evidence suggests that the risk of virus transmission outdoors is relatively low, we are neither going to continue with the one-way system nor the staggered drop-off times nor the requirement for parents/ carers to wear face masks on the school grounds.

Therefore, please now either use the Walgarth Drive entrance or the Warton Place entrance for pick-up/ drop-off. Please do not use the car park entrance [except for Breakfast and After School Club].

There is now no longer a staggered start and finish to the school day. We are reverting to dropping off from 0845-0855 with registration at 0855. The school day will end at 1515 for pick-up.

Parents/ carers are **no longer required to wear masks** on the school site. We do require parents and visitors to wear masks if they come into the school building.

21. What about our new Reception class starters?

Please refer to the group information documents that were in your welcome pack giving details of your child's start date. Any problems, any questions or if you no longer have these documents please contact the school office on Wednesday and we'll do our best to help you.

22. What about Nursery new starters?

Your child will start nursery as per your allocated sessions. Again, any questions, please contact the school office from Wednesday next week.

23. What about use of public transport?

The government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law but expects and recommends that they are worn in enclosed and crowded spaces where you may come into contact with people you don't normally meet. This includes public transport.

24. What if my child or a member of our household is 'clinically extremely vulnerable?'

The DfE advice is: *All clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) children and young people should attend their education setting unless they are one of the very small number of children and young people under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their clinician or other specialist not to attend.*

25. What will happen with school events or extra-curricular clubs?

School events have changed dramatically over the last 18 months with many meetings taking place virtually and many of our usual events being unable to take place in the normal way.

As we move through the autumn term, we will be keeping you fully informed of any school events and clubs we are able to hold. I hope everyone understands that at this point we are not in a position to outline any specifics of extra-curricular clubs or key events and we will do this upon the return of school in September.

I realise that you may have many more questions. I hope that this at least answers some and gives you the information you need about the return to school next week. I have also attached to this letter a leaflet produced by the DfE about the September opening and here is a web address for a blog entitled, *Back to School – What you need to know*, produced by the DfE called the Education Hub:

https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2021/08/24/back-to-school-what-you-need-to-know/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Smyth