

To: all parents/carers

20 January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Mass lateral flow testing in schools

As you will be aware, we intend to begin mass testing for Covid-19 in school from this week. Initially, this will be for staff working in school supporting on-site learning for vulnerable and critical worker children, as well as for those students themselves. This testing remains voluntary and all those involved with testing this week have been contacted to complete a questionnaire to accept or refuse the testing.

Over the last week, there has been considerable media coverage around the use of lateral flow devices (the test kits provided) in schools, their purpose and their accuracy, so I wanted to write to you to advise you of the information we are working from and our rationale for our use of these devices.

Lateral flow devices (LFDs) are designed to allow a quick return of results, approximately 30 minutes, to confirm a positive or negative outcome for Covid-19 testing. The use of these devices in school should allow us to quickly identify and isolate those colleagues and students who test positive for the virus as well as allowing other members of our community to feel reassured that their exposure to the virus is minimal.

The evidence suggests that LFDs are most effective (90%+) at detecting positive cases of Covid-19 in sufferers with a high 'viral load', which is when the disease is most contagious. It is less effective for those with a low 'viral load', but these sufferers are also less likely to infect others.

In the media last week, it was reported that the UK's regulator for these devices, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), had not approved them for use in mass testing in schools (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/14/regulator-refuses-to-approve-mass-covid-testing-schools-in-england?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other). However, on Friday, the Government responded to this to reassure schools that the regulatory body does not need to approve the use of LFDs in schools as the testing is classed as 'assisted testing'.

From our perspective, as the safety of these devices is not being questioned, we believe it important that we provide our community with the opportunity to receive weekly testing in order to help identify asymptomatic cases of Covid-19 within school. This will help us to keep everyone as safe as possible. In line with the latest guidance that we have received from the Department for Education, we will not be conducting serial testing for close contacts of positive cases over a 7-day period as previously advertised, and, as before, these students and colleagues will be required to isolate for a period of 10 days following contact. This measure proved effective for us last term in avoiding an outbreak where individual cases occurred and we are therefore cautious to change this.

Lateral flow testing at Taverham High will begin tomorrow (21 January) for staff and students in school and will continue on Monday 25 January. After both sessions we will conduct a full review of the process and the findings of our reviews will be presented to our governing body on Thursday 28 January. This will allow us to ensure that our management of the process is as effective and safe as possible.

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Finally, whilst we strongly recommend that, when the time comes, all members of our school community sign up for lateral flow testing in school, I want to reassure you that anyone who does not give their permission for this will be treated no differently to their peers.

If you wish to find out more about the mass testing guidance for schools, please see the relevant areas of the Government website at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/asymptomatic-testing-in-schools-and-colleges>

Please do not hesitate to contact the school if you have further queries.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Yassin', written in a cursive style.

Gareth Yassin
Deputy Headteacher