



21st December 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope you are well and almost ready for Christmas.

I write to you today on the back of the Government's latest advice; that secondary schools in England are to introduce a staggered return to school until Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January. The Government have made this change to support their decision in implementing mass testing programmes across schools nationwide.

In light of this announcement, on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January, only students within the following groups will return to school-based learning:

- **Our most vulnerable students** – parents will be contacted by a member of the team on 4<sup>th</sup> January to outline provision.
- **Children of critical workers** - please fill in [this form](#) by 11am on 4<sup>th</sup> January if you wish to use this provision.
- **Students in Year 11** – these students will follow their normal timetable.

**All other students will learn remotely for the first week of term, from Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> – Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January, returning to school-based learning on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January.**

Whilst away from the classroom students must stay at home and learn remotely and are required to attend all their lessons – including morning registration, which is a vital welfare check. Students should log onto Microsoft Teams during their normal allocated lesson times to receive work from their subject teachers. If you wish to **borrow a laptop** (wifi required), or collect a **physical work pack** for students without digital access, or need to **change your child's password**; please fill in [this form](#).

We appreciate that this change is short notice, but it is essential that we continue to closely follow all Government guidance on COVID-19 in order to safeguard our students, staff and wider school community.

In addition to making plans for lateral flow testing, as announced by the government late last week, The Portsmouth Academy has been selected to take part in a saliva testing programme. This is a non-invasive test which can be administered by the child themselves. More details on testing is attached in a briefing note.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the school office from 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.

We look forward to seeing your child, either at school or online in the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs R Grey

Principal – The Portsmouth Academy

## **Information on the Hampshire and Isle of Wight COVID-19 Saliva Testing Programme**

The following briefing note provides you with a brief overview of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight COVID-19 saliva testing programme, including information on how the programme fits alongside the Government announcement this week on mass testing in secondary schools.

### **About the programme**

The HIOW COVID-19 saliva testing programme aims to benefit our local communities by reducing the transmission of the virus. It offers weekly testing to asymptomatic pupils, students, staff and contractors in secondary schools, FE colleges and universities as well as other health and social care settings.

It is a Government funded programme, which follows a successful pilot in Southampton, where pupils and staff in four schools and at the University of Southampton were tested on a weekly basis. The pilot showed, along with other extensive studies, that saliva testing is effective in identifying people who are infectious and are most likely to transmit the disease. It is easy to do, with samples collected at home and dropped off at school, and is not invasive.

### **How does the Government announcement about mass-testing affect the programme?**

Following their announcement on the 15th December, stating that every secondary school and college will have access to rapid coronavirus testing from January, the government released guidance on the 18<sup>th</sup> December which showed the differences between the two approaches to testing are:

- The government testing programme focusses on providing daily tests over a seven day period for pupils, students and staff who have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive. This will be combined with weekly testing, all using lateral flow devices to provide test results. Lateral flow tests take place in school/college and involve collecting nasal swabs undertaken by the school and college workforce, with individual results available within 30-45 minutes. From the beginning of January, schools and colleges will be provided with testing kits including personal protective equipment (PPE).

- The HLOW testing programme provides **on-going weekly testing for pupils, students and staff who are asymptomatic** using a saliva test. Results are available within 24 hours and often within 12 hours. Anyone who has a positive test is contacted by text in the first instance by text and this is followed up within 24 hours by a call from a health professional. Staff are contacted directly, and pupils through their parent or guardian, with the school or college also notified. Schools in the pilot phase reported that pupil attendance did not fall below 94 per cent and that staff absence rates were low, enabling teaching to continue.

Both tests have been shown to be effective identifying the virus. Clinical evaluation has confirmed the accuracy of the HLOW test, which is particularly suitable for providing on-going testing because it is easy to use, non-invasive and can be done at home. The pilot demonstrated that high levels of engagement can be achieved in schools and that no false positives were reported.

Both tests aim to reduce the need to self-isolate, improve attendance and ensure wherever possible face to face teaching continues. It is likely that during the spring term schools and colleges may use a blended approach of both the on-going weekly test provided by HLOW and lateral flow test when there has been a close contact with someone who has tested positive.

## **Next Steps**

The Portsmouth Academy will work closely with HLOW and PHE to ensure that both styles of testing are rolled out within school as quickly and as efficiently as possible. The following will need to be in place prior to this:

- Staff, pupil and parent training on the saliva testing programme.
- Staff recruitment for administering the lateral flow testing; for volunteers, all necessary safeguarding checks will need to be in place prior to starting the programme.
- Suitable accommodation for the lateral flow testing to take place in within school to be identified and set up accordingly.
- Staff training on how to administer lateral flow testing.

As you can see this is a complicated piece of work and there are some challenges to overcome prior to the testing being able to be rolled out in full. TPA is committed to ensuring staff and student safety around COVID-19, whilst still maintain a high quality educational offer and standards.