

12th March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

At the end of what has been a very busy week for our testing team, I just wanted to take the opportunity to share some information with you. Following the communication about some positive student test results this week, we have received a number of interesting questions linked to the process. In the circumstances, I thought it would be helpful to share some key messages with everyone. The questions and answers can be found at the end of this letter. I do hope you find this helpful.

Although we would all have hoped that the testing programme would only produce negative results, I do not think it is surprising that having now completed over 3,600 tests, we have found some 'asymptomatic' positive cases. This information has enabled us to take positive action to help keep our students, staff and the wider community safe. It is certainly good news that in all cases the students who have tested positive have all been fit and well with no ill effects.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate our students. They have behaved impeccably during the testing process and their support has been really appreciated by our testing team. We know this is a very unusual process for them to be following and they have really impressed the staff who have carried out the testing.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss any aspects of our testing programme, or other risk reduction measures, if you would find it helpful. In the meantime, we will keep working with all our students and staff to implement the recommended measures to help minimise the risk of transmission.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely

Mike Hoffmann
Associate Principal

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Some questions that have been asked:

What happens when a student tests positive?

When a student tests positive they are informed and taken to a 'safe' area in the medical room. Their parent/carer is contacted immediately so that they can be collected and all members of the household are immediately informed so that they can take the necessary action of self-isolation. We do our very best to provide positive reassurance to any student who has tested positive.

Which authorities have to be informed about a positive test result?

We have to inform the Department for Education, Public Health England, Dorset Council and Aspirations Academies Trust. The final decisions about the appropriate action are made in consultation with a team leader from Public Health England.

What does 'contact tracing' mean'?

In addition to informing the household of the student testing positive, we also have to identify which students may have been exposed to a risk of transmission because they have been in close proximity (within 2 metres indoors) to the positive student and for a prolonged period (15 minutes or longer). Information from the student who has tested positive and from class seating plans, is used to help make these decisions.

Who decides which students need to self-isolate?

This decision is taken after the contact tracing process has been completed and we liaise with our staff in order to check our information. The information is shared with a colleague at Public Health England and, after discussing our process of investigation and answering questions, they advise us on the appropriate action to take.

Why were Year 10 all instructed to self-isolate?

Unfortunately, there were multiple positive cases in Year 10 on Wednesday. The students affected belong to different friendship groups and are in many different teaching groups. In Key Stage 4 there are many GCSE Option subjects and with additional settings, the students mix with many more students during the course of a school week. After the contact tracing had been carried out on all of the positive cases, the scale of the potential transmission meant that Public Health England advised a full closure of the Year 10 'Bubble' as the best action required to keep the students, staff and wider community safe.

Why were Year 7 not all instructed to self-isolate?

In Year 7 there was just one single positive case identified. In Years 7, 8 and 9 the students are taught for much greater periods of time in one teaching group. On this occasion the contact tracing was able to identify the students who were deemed to be at risk of transmission due to proximity and we were advised by Public Health England that the appropriate action would be to instigate self-isolation for these students only.

What if the student subsequently tests negative in a PCR test or another lateral flow test?

The latest advice is that if someone does produce a positive lateral flow test then they do not need to follow this up with a subsequent PCR test. If someone does take a subsequent PCR test at a testing centre, that produces a negative result, we have been specifically advised by the Department for Education and Public Health England that the actions that have been put in place following the positive lateral flow test must remain in place for the full 10 day period. Neither the student or those who have been asked to self-isolate, will be permitted to return to school before then. The same is true if a student takes a further lateral flow test at home. Even if it is negative we are not allowed to change the actions that have been put in place following the positive test. We know that this might be very frustrating and we have double checked the advice with Public Health England, but we have to follow the process.

Why can I not be informed who the student was that tested positive?

This is strictly confidential information and we are prohibited from sharing the names of any positive cases. We understand that we cannot prevent speculation, but I would add that this can be unhelpful and can cause others significant anxiety. We were aware of some online speculation on social media in the Autumn Term that was not only incorrect, it caused genuine upset to some people involved. If you have any individual concerns about your child and their potential risk of transmission, please contact Budmouth Academy and we will be happy to discuss this with you.

What will happen after the 3 in school tests have been completed?

We will be issuing home testing kits to all students who have requested them. These will be issued when the student takes their final test with our team in the Sports Hall. The guidance that comes with the home testing kits is very clear and includes the action that must be taken if a test produces a positive result. This includes informing the school immediately so that we can carry out our in school contact tracing processes.

Can we trust the results of the lateral flow tests?

We are aware that there has been some speculation about the accuracy of the different tests that exist. Our team is only concerned with conducting the tests safely and accurately and in the way they have been trained to and we cannot speculate about their accuracy. A link to the latest Department for Education analysis regarding the accuracy of the lateral flow tests that was published on Wednesday 10th March, is below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-analysis-of-lateral-flow-tests-shows-specificity-of-at-least-999>

Why are we informed each time there is a new positive case, if the student is not in the same year group as my child?

The guidance from the Department for Education and Public Health England says that we must inform all parents on any occasion where a positive test has been recorded in the school.

Why has my child not been asked to self-isolate when their friend has? If my child has been in contact with another student who was in close contact with a positive case, should they not be asked to stay at home as well?

We understand this can be confusing. However, the contact tracing only refers to students who have been in **personal direct contact** with the student who has tested positive. It does not apply to the sort of 'chain reaction' effect of having been with someone else who was with the student who tested positive. It is the same reason why other family household members can carry on as normal even when their child has been asked to self-isolate at home due to having been in close proximity to a student who has tested positive.

If my child has been wearing a mask then why are they required to self-isolate if they have been in contact with someone who has recorded a positive test?

This is a very good question and one we have also double checked with the relevant authorities. However, it remains the case that even if the students are wearing a face covering, this does not override the instruction under the track and trace protocol that they have to self-isolate. We understand how frustrating this is and hope that wearing the face covering will have reduced the risk of any transmission.

I am worried that my child may have been in contact with a student who has had a positive test result but they have not been asked to self-isolate?

Please get in touch with us and share the name of your child and your concern. We are not allowed to share the details of the student who has tested positive, but we will be happy to re-look at the contact tracing process with any details you can share.

Why are some local schools scheduled to finish their testing programme earlier than Budmouth?

The schools in our local area have a very different context to Budmouth. We have approximately twice the number of students than either All Saints and Wey Valley and we are four times bigger than the secondary phase at Atlantic Academy. This obviously has an impact on the speed with which we can conduct the testing safely. Having 7 year groups, and not 5, means that the logistics of running the programme over a 5 day school week are more complicated. We are working within the appropriate guidelines. There are other schools in Dorset even bigger than Budmouth who have only just completed their first test. It is for this reason that we decided to conduct the initial test before the Monday 8th March and enabled our student to return to school on time.

Is it safe for my child to come to school?

This is a perfectly natural question to ask. We know that sharing information about positive test results will cause some anxiety. The facts are that the rate of infection for Covid-19 is falling significantly both nationally and in Dorset. This is obviously really good news. At Budmouth we continue to follow all the same procedures that have been in place since September 2020. In addition to these, we have also followed the government recommendation of asking students to wear face coverings in indoor areas. The difference now is that we are mass testing students to detect possible 'asymptomatic cases'. This process was not in place before the 8th March reopening of schools and so we do not know what the test results might have shown had we been asked to do this sooner.