

Position Statement

Our approach to return to school/college in September 2021

Ambitious about Autism, and our Schools Trust, run TreeHouse School, The Rise School and Ambitious College serving around 300 children and young people across London and the Home Counties.

Since March 2020 when the first lockdown was announced we have been guided by our values, mission and by information, advice and guidance for education providers issued by the Government, Public Health England (PHE), Health and Safety Executive and other key bodies. When taking account of this guidance, our first consideration is the safety and well-being of our pupils, learners and staff.

On 17th August the Government published [guidance](#) to support the return of children and young people with SEND back into full time education from September 2021. The new guidance focuses on how we need to learn to live with Covid and sets out the plans to safely return all children and young people to education in September 2021.

Our key principles

Since the first lockdown our schools' and college's decision making has been guided by a set of principles. We have adapted these principles as the situation and Government guidance has changed¹. Our key principles are:

- We will continue to put the safety of our pupils, learners and staff at the forefront of all we do;
- We will follow Government guidance but, taking account of the vulnerability of our community of pupils/learners and staff, we will have a cautious approach to the start of the academic year and keep our position under review;
- As we always do, we will work hard to have a 'Settled September' to support transition back to the settings for pupils, learners and staff. To achieve this, we will have phased returns for all our pupils and learners.
- We will work in partnership with placing Local Authorities and parents and carers on an ongoing basis around our Covid plans.

Running a 'Covid Secure' school or college

The pupils and learners who attend our settings need specialist support tailored to their needs. They thrive in settings with a positive and supportive culture that prioritises their needs, safety and wellbeing, where the environment has been adapted and staff are trained and skilled in meeting their needs. They need personalised support to enable them to adapt to changes in routines or environment.

Our staff also benefit from a positive and supportive culture, experienced and competent leadership, a safe and secure environment and opportunities to learn and develop.

This is our priority as we welcome and support pupils, learners and staff back to their school and college. Things will be different, as we continue to manage the risks posed by Covid-19, but our values and aims remain the same.

It is critical that our schools and college are 'Covid Secure' which includes:

¹ Our Position Statement first published in March 2020 has been updated throughout the pandemic. Version 2 was published on 12 May 2020, Version 3 on 8 July 2020, and Version 4 on 19 August 2020, Version 5 on 5 November 2020 and Version 6 on 14 December 2020, Version 7 on 4 January 2021, Version 8 on 3 February 2021, Version 9 on 12 February 2021, Version 10 on 1 March 2021 and Version 11 on 14 May 2021.

- Having updated risk assessments in place for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) pupil/learners, staff;
- Having updated risk assessments in place for our buildings;
- Continued wearing of masks in communal areas;
- Having the correct levels of trained staff in place to meet pupils/learners' needs safely;
- Having robust hand-washing and respiratory hygiene in place;
- Enhanced cleaning arrangements;
- Engagement with the NHS track and trace system; it is important to note that under the new guidance schools/college no longer are responsible for track and trace. However, we would be failing in our duty of care if we did not act when we deem a pupil/learner or staff member a close contact and ignored the fact;
- Having the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) in place as needed;
- Having well thought out plans in place for pupils/learners and staff who are symptomatic or have tested as positive.

Advice for parents and carers

We ask all parents and carers to work with us to balance the risks of managing Covid-19 alongside returning all pupils and learners back to education in September.

We recognise that this pandemic continues to turn the world upside down for many of our pupils, learners and their families; and routines and arrangements have been disrupted significantly which will have caused anxiety and distress. The return to school and college after the summer break may be causing further anxiety. Our schools and college will listen to concerns and work in partnership with pupils/learners and their families to put in place strategies to support a successful return to education.

Staying safe

As a school/college, our key priority is to stay safe, provide education in-person (as much as possible) and remain alert to rising infection levels. This is particularly important because we have staff members and pupils/learners who are clinically extremely vulnerable and returning to learning/work for the first time since March 2020.

As a result, if we have a positive case in the school/college and identify pupils/learners as direct contacts then we will ask parents/carers to work with us to do the following to keep everyone safe:

- If the pupil/learner is fully vaccinated, then they can continue to attend school/college in person
- If the pupil/learner is not vaccinated, but can take a PCR test, which is negative, then they can continue to attend school/college in person
- If the pupil/learner, regardless of age, is not fully vaccinated and cannot undertake a PCR test then we will ask them to receive education at home for 10 days from the date they had direct contact with a positive case

We will review this process at the end of September and in the meantime will continue to work with pupils and families to reduce anxiety around vaccinations and testing to ensure as many children and young people as possible can access both.

Masks

Unless exempt, staff will continue to wear masks in communal areas. They will not be wearing masks in classrooms, when working directly with children and young people unless it is part of their individualised risk assessment.

If your son/daughter has been wearing a mask and you want them to continue to do this, we are happy to accommodate this. We will review our guidance on mask wearing at mid-term.

The guidance relating to dedicated school and college transport states that children aged 11 and over should wear a face covering.

Staff will also be asked to follow the TfL guidance on mask wearing when commuting in and out of work.

Vaccination

There is strong evidence that vaccination is reducing the chances of severe illness.

We support the vaccination programme and have actively encouraged our staff to be vaccinated. Now that everyone over the age of 16 is eligible for the vaccine, we ask that you support your child to be vaccinated if you can.

In addition, children aged 12–15 years who are on the learning disability register are eligible for a vaccination. More information and resources can be found [here](#). Please do get in touch with your GP to book.

Students/learners who are vaccinated will not need to self-isolate when identified as a close contact.

We know that some learners will have anxiety phobias regarding needles, and we'd love to support in any way we can. Please access resources [here](#) and also get in touch if we can help further.

Bubbles/social distancing

From the start of term we will not be working in bubbles or practicing social distancing. However, there might be a need to revert to these working practices should we have an outbreak in the school/college. We will work with Public Health England, as we have throughout this pandemic, before we make these decisions.

Testing

All staff will be tested at the start of term and they will continue to test from home twice a week. As other restrictions ease, we need to ensure as many members of the school/college community as possible are testing. This, along with vaccination, is most effective way of keeping everyone safe and ensuring we can remain open.

We are asking all parents/carers to do their best to test children aged 11 and above twice weekly – on a Sunday evening and Wednesday evening and share the results with us, just like our staff do. This will be a lateral flow test, which we can send home or you can get free in your local pharmacy. Once again, we have produced resources to support and explain this to your child/young person, you can find them [here](#).

Symptoms

If your son/daughter is in any way sick in the autumn term, please do not send them into school or college. This is important for all members of our school/college community. We need to ensure we do everything in our control to manage infection levels. This includes the well-documented covid symptoms of

- Loss of sense of taste or smell
- Continuous cough
- Temperature

but also extends to the symptoms that are presenting with the Delta variant of

- Headaches
- Stomach ache
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

At the start of the term our risk assessments will be updated and you will be able to access them on the school/college website.

If your child is unwell with Coronavirus symptoms or has been directed to self-isolate (e.g. through NHS track and trace), they must not come into school or college.

If your child develops Coronavirus symptoms or is unwell at school or college, you must collect them as soon as possible.

Where pupils/learners are not able to attend their setting, due to clinical and/or public health advice, the school or college will support their parents/carers to provide learning and support virtually.

Parents/carers should plan their holidays within school and college holidays and avoid absences during term time. In planning holidays, parents/carers are asked to note the [Government's travel guidance](#) on potential quarantine requirements for entering other countries and returning to the UK. Your child or young person will not be able to attend school or college during a quarantine period.

Contingency planning

Our plan for our schools and college is that in September 2020 all our children and young people will return to education in person. Our schools and college take children and young people from 30 of London's Local Authorities and our staff live across London, and in the outer London areas. To allow us to plan for potentially rising infection levels we will develop specific contingency plans for each of our settings.