

14 December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

COVID-19 mass testing of students and staff at Furness Academy

I am writing in an attempt to answer a few of the questions that were raised following the letters that were sent out on Friday 11 December, regarding the mass testing of staff and students at Furness Academy.

For your reassurance, I can confirm that this is a Public Health initiative working with Cumbria County Council and schools. The part that schools play will be to provide the appropriate space for the testing, to support with communication and to provide support with the coordination of the testing on the ground. Some staff have volunteered to undergo training to help support our students with administering the test so that they feel more comfortable with a familiar face. My understanding at present is that four will be required. The licencing, governance and full health and safety of the process is the responsibility of Public Health and the County Council and we will work to their agreed protocols.

I would like to reiterate for parents and students that testing is not compulsory and consent will be required from parents. Consent will be sought via a consent form which the student will bring to school when they come for their test. The test is totally voluntary and can be stopped at any time.

Over the weekend, a view expressed via e-mail was that the testing was pointless because the Lateral Flow Method only identified 60–80% of positive cases and the test was only valid on the day it was taken and, therefore, any individual who tested negative could be infected the following day. Whilst both of these points are true, my view is that this argument misses the point of the mass testing. The average incidence of COVID-19 asymptomatic infection is currently considered to be 0.007%. This means that in our school community of just under 1,300 staff and students, there could be 10 positive asymptomatic cases. The concern from Public Health is that over the festive break when more households will mix that this number will increase. This means that, potentially, we could have more asymptomatic cases coming into school after the holiday and, therefore, an increased chance of an outbreak within school and increased rates of transmission in family homes and then possibly in other workplaces. If we are serious about reducing the rate of infection within our community and the subsequent impact this could have on vulnerable individuals and our Health Service, then by identifying positive cases and limiting their and their household's interaction with other people will help. Whilst the Lateral Flow Test may not identify them all, any that it does will be one less opportunity for this virus to spread to others.

Given the continued impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our daily lives and the sacrifices that we have all already made, then this simple test to identify whether we are spreading the virus without knowing it will be useful. The test swab process itself will take less than 30 seconds and whilst there may be momentary discomfort, it is a very small price to pay to know that we are playing our part and not unknowingly passing the infection to our friends, family and work colleagues.

That said, it is voluntary and not compulsory for anyone to have a test and students who have not had the test will be expected to be in school from Thursday 7 January.

We are still working on the practical details regarding the timings of the testing arrangements for students in January and these will be provided to you later this week, along with a parental consent form and further details regarding the remote learning.

If you have any further questions or queries, please email me at masstesting@furnessacademy.co.uk.

I am aware that those of you who have enrolled with the laptop scheme are understandably frustrated that the delivery scheduled for November has been significantly delayed. I share your frustration and we are busy negotiating in the background trying to find a solution. Thank you for your continued patience and I will be writing to you all personally later this week.

And finally, I can confirm that the non-uniform day scheduled for Friday 18 December is now to be held on **Thursday 17 December** – £1.00 donation to be shared between St Mary's Hospice and the Poppy Appeal.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S.P. Laheney', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Simon Laheney
Headteacher