

Date: 5th January 2021

Dear Head Teacher

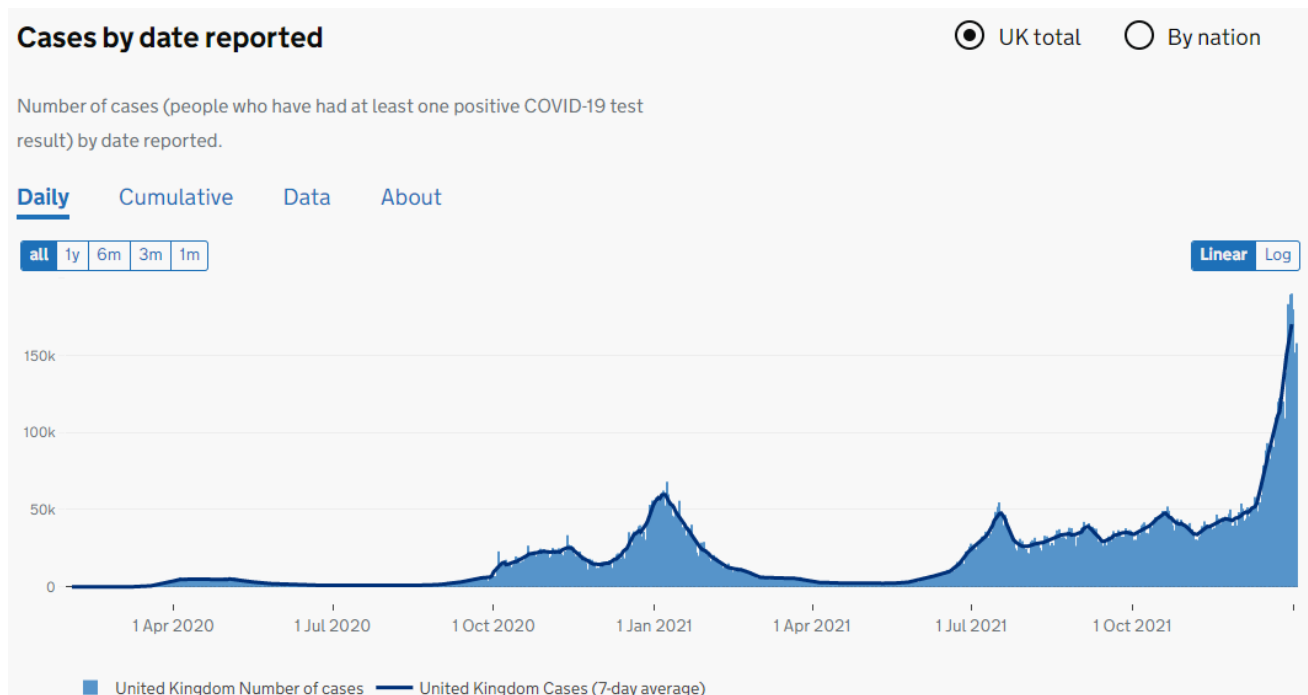
Re: Update on Public Health Measures in Schools

I hope you are all well, staying safe, and have been able to have as restful a Christmas period as possible.

I am sending this comms to update you in relation to the Omicron variant of COVID-19, both nationally and in Wigan, as well as to summarise some of the changes that have recently been announced in respect of schools guidance, and to try and answer some of the recent queries received from schools. Please note that the situation continues to be extremely changeable at present, and there could very well be further additional changes to national guidance. As ever, I will do my best to try and keep Wigan schools updated.

Update on Omicron, nationally and in Wigan

As of 3rd January 2022, there were 157,758 cases of COVID-19 identified in the UK, down from the 189,846 cases identified on the 31st December. However, this will not have taken into account testing over the weekend and bank holiday period. The 7 day average from the 31st December is 169,997 cases in the UK, at a prevalence rate of 1525.9 per 100,000. As you can see from the graph below, this represents a significant increase in recent weeks, and is a clear result of the emergence of the more transmissible Omicron variant.



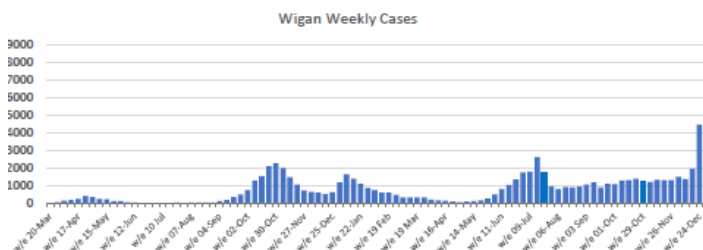
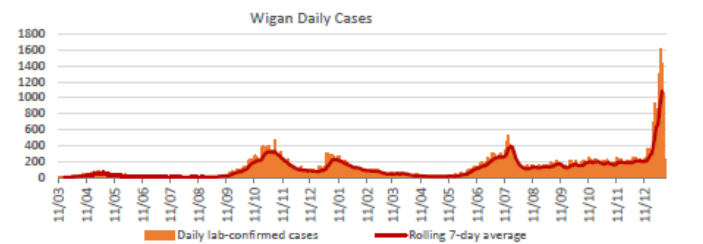
The rate of COVID-19 in Wigan has increased significantly over the holiday period, and currently stands at a rate of 2,303.5 cases per 100,000 individuals, which is by far the highest rate at any point in the pandemic.

Cases

Wigan

Total Cases: **79199**

Rate per 100,000: **23948**



Greater Manchester

	Latest 7 days*	Latest 7 days Rate per 100,000*	Over 60s weekly rate**	Total Cases	Total Rate per 100,000
Wigan	7618	2303.5	1268.5	79199	23948
Salford	5681	2162.6	1172.9	65333	24870
Stockport	6273	2132.2	1041.1	68158	23168
Tameside	4611	2030.2	1348.2	53610	23605
Trafford	4730	1990.9	1131.1	57035	24007
Rochdale	4173	1865.8	1081.0	53146	23762
Oldham	4363	1836.1	1152.9	55391	23310
Manchester	10029	1804.6	1233.7	133253	23978
Bury	3380	1772.3	1113.3	44860	23523
Bolton	4920	1706.9	855.8	64222	22280

Table sorted on latest 7 days rate

Comparators - rate per 100,000 population

	Latest 7 days*	Total
Wigan	2303.5	23948
Greater Manchester	1958.3	23671
North West	1944.5	22699
England	1562.2	20174

Most recent 4 days' data are likely to change due to reporting delays

Consequently, we are starting to see linked impacts and pressures from the high case rates in relation to health, social care, and public sectors, and key infrastructure. It can take up to 2 weeks for the impact of cases to become apparent, so what we are experiencing at present is likely to be a result of pre-Xmas Day transmission, with further increase in case rates to come over the next two weeks. The next two weeks is likely to be challenging for us here in Wigan, in relation to the number of cases and additional pressures in schools, especially as we start seeing increases in contacts between pupils following the return to school and a resultant spread of cases into the younger age groups. I acknowledge the likely pressures in relation to staffing absences as well as from managing the communication and relationship with a range of parents and assure you that the local health protection system will do its utmost to support you during this challenging time despite also experiencing pressures from a range of other settings that we support.

The Government has also taken a range of steps nationally in response, and colleagues and I have also taken additional local action to support as well.

- A clear focus on the roll out of the booster vaccine – almost 35m people in the UK have received a booster or 3rd vaccine since 30th September. In Wigan, as of 2nd January, 48% of residents had received their booster vaccine (75% having received their first vaccine dose, and 70% having received their second vaccine dose)
- LFD testing availability – although there have been clear and well-reported challenges with testing availability recently, the Government has recently invested in making additional LFD tests available, with 900,000 LFD tests now available daily via the home testing delivery route, up from 300,000 a few weeks ago, 8.5m tests being made available to pharmacies this week, 100,000 additional PCR booking slots available per day since mid-December, and the retaining of separate supply routes for schools ahead of the return to schools. I do understand that demand is currently extremely high, but am hopeful the additional investments into the system should help stabilise this issue over the next few weeks. I am also assured that the DfE is currently looking into the provision of LFD test kits for primary school pupils via schools. Colleagues in Wigan have also worked throughout the holiday period to ensure that frontline staff can access test kits in order to keep vital services running.
- Amendments to national isolation requirements – from the 22nd of December, if you've tested positive or have symptoms, you can [stop self-isolating after 7 days](#) instead of 10 days, if you get 2 negative lateral flow test results on day 6 and 7.

- Advice to people to work from home, if they can
- Reviewed the access requirements to u16s vaccinations. Children aged 12 to 15 can now get their second vaccine dose if it's been more than 12 weeks since their first vaccine dose, and the Government has recently accepted the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation that a primary course of vaccination should be offered to children aged 5-11 years old who are in a clinical risk group, or who are a household contact of someone who is immunosuppressed

However, encouragingly, whilst we now know that Omicron is significantly more transmissible than previous variants of COVID-19, we know that the booster vaccine provides a good level of protection against serious illness and death, and I stress the importance of staff becoming [vaccinated](#) or receiving a [booster dose](#). It is also extremely important that people take the necessary precautions to keep themselves safe, which are outlined in more detail at [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), as well as following the robust safety measures that school leaders have instilled in schools.

Changes to Schools Guidance

We have collated information from:

- UKHSA briefing 2022/001, date 2/1/2022, which was received today (enclosed for your information)
- Letter from Secretary of State, dated 2nd January (enclosed)
- DfE email to schools, dated 2nd January 2022
- [Schools Operating Guidance](#), updated 2nd January 2022

The DfE Contingency framework has not yet been updated. However, I would advise schools to update their Risk Assessments as a result of the additional learning on the Omicron variant and the updated national guidance. As part of this, schools may wish to clarify at what point they may need to move to remote education or take additional measures to maintain face to face education.

A summary of changes to school guidance is provided for your information in Appendix One. This also includes where local Health Protection has reviewed and provided helpful additional advice on specific points. I however acknowledge that there are a number of queries we have received for which there is not yet an answer available, and I can confirm that I have today, on your behalf, raised these queries direct to UKHSA and DfE. I am awaiting a response and will circulate this when this has been received. Furthermore, at the time of writing, the Government has confirmed that, from 11th January, asymptomatic individuals testing positive on a LFD will temporarily no longer require a follow-up PCR test. Again, we will provide further information on this, including any implications for schools, when we have it.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Kate Arden MBChB MSc FFPH
Director of Public Health

Enc.

- UKHSA briefing 2022/001 (enclosed for your information)
- Letter from Secretary of State (enclosed)

Appendix One: Further Information for Schools on the Return to School, January 2022

Testing on Return

Since January 2021, regular asymptomatic testing in schools has been in place to break chains of transmission of COVID-19 in education settings and support public confidence in children returning to school. This helps through the early identification of cases which then allows us to minimise onward transmission. The current case rates of COVID-19 are extremely high and following potential increased social mixing over Christmas it is important that we maximise uptake of testing on return to schools.

All secondary schools have therefore been asked to prepare to offer all pupils one LFD test onsite at the beginning of the spring term (January 2022). The schools testing clinical SOP for assisted test site (ATS) testing has been updated to reflect this change, and can be found via the DfE ATS [Google platform](#) (SOP link [here](#))

Pupils should then be encouraged to take a test at-home between three and four days after the initial test onsite. Following this, they should continue regular twice weekly testing at home. Staff in early years, primary, secondary, FE and Universities and students in HE and FE have been provided with home test kits to enable them to test at home before their return in January. They should take one self-test at home either the evening or morning before they return in January, and then continue to test twice weekly at home thereafter.

Individuals can participate in regular LFD testing for asymptomatic infection detection with LFD once they have completed their 10-day isolation period (or if released early from isolation with two negative LFD tests) for their prior infection.

Change in schools Testing Eligibility following previous COVID infection

Previously, the guidance for mass asymptomatic testing in schools using LFD has advised that individuals who are within 90 days of a positive PCR should not be tested with an LFD, on the basis that PCR tests can continue to detect RNA from COVID-19 beyond an individual's period of infectiousness.

However, in periods with a high prevalence of infection, LFD tests have a very high positive predictive value. What this means is that where we have a lot of cases, as we currently do in England, the vast majority of positive tests will be true positive tests. UKHSA has advised that, as LFD tests correlate with infectiousness, they are unlikely to pose a problem if used within the 90-day period after an individual has recovered from an infection.

To identify potential reinfections with Omicron before the return to school in January, the clinical Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for mass testing has therefore been amended to allow all individuals to participate in routine asymptomatic infection detection with LFD once they have completed their 10 day isolation period for their prior infection. Individuals who have left self-isolation on day 7 following two negative LFD results are advised to wait until they have completed the full 10-day period before participating in routine LFD testing.

This applies to all staff and eligible students participating in mass testing on return to school. The guidance for other groups who participate in regular asymptomatic LFD testing is kept under review and any changes will be communicated accordingly.

Isolation Periods

Symptomatic/Positive Individuals

The national position continues to be that symptomatic individuals should self-isolate and follow the '[Stay at Home](#)' guidance, which includes arranging to take a PCR test as soon as possible. This includes those who do not have symptoms, but have a positive PCR test.

However, a recent change has been made to the isolation period that enables individuals to end their self-isolation period before the end of the 10 full days, providing that certain conditions are met, which are demonstrated via the below text and graphic.

You can stop self-isolating after 7 days if you do a rapid lateral flow test on days 6 and 7 of your self-isolation period and:

- *both tests are negative*
- *you did both tests at least 24 hours apart*
- *you do not have a high temperature*

If you do a rapid lateral flow test on day 6 and test positive, wait 24 hours before you do the next test.

However, if you stop self-isolating on or after day 7, it's important that you take steps to reduce the chance of passing COVID-19 to others. This means you should:

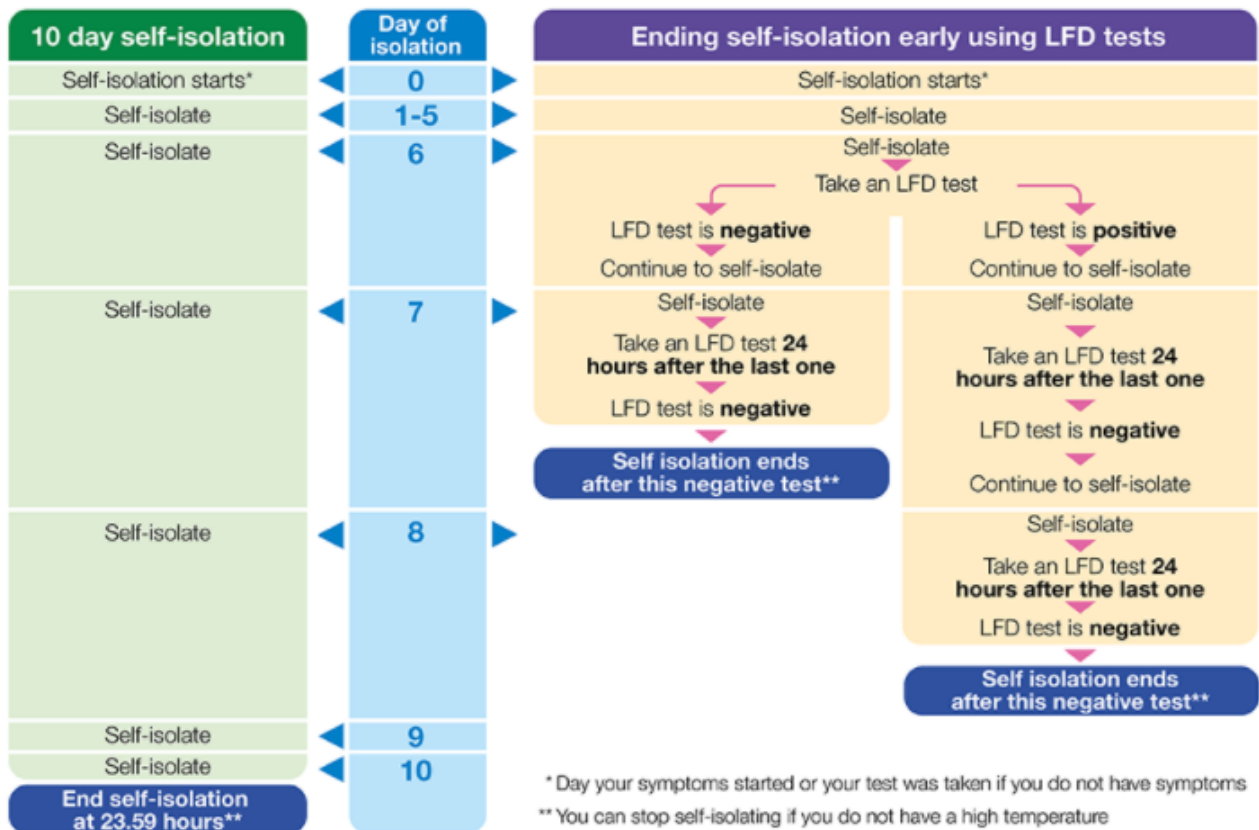
- *work from home if you can*
- *wear a face covering in shops, on public transport and when it's hard to stay away from other people – particularly indoors, in crowded places or where there is not much fresh air*
- *limit contact with [people at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19](#)*
- *follow advice on [how to avoid catching and spreading COVID-19](#)*

You can stop self-isolating after the 10 days if either:

- *you do not have any symptoms*
- *you just have a cough or changes to your sense of smell or taste – these can last for weeks after the infection has gone*

If you have a high temperature after the 10 days, or are feeling unwell, keep self-isolating and seek medical advice.

Examples of when to end self-isolation if you have had COVID-19 symptoms or have received a positive COVID-19 test result



We have queried whether children could attend school on Day 7 following a second negative PCR test with the DfE Helpline, and although there isn't specific guidance for this instance, the general guidance the DfE Helpline have is that individuals are able to cease self-isolation immediately following the second negative test on Day 7. Furthermore, we have queried with the DfE Helpline what schools should do if there are any issues with staff being able to access LFD tests to support their release from self-isolation, and the advice was to ring 119. Individuals may also be able to pick up a LFD home test kit via Wigan Council's [community pick up sites](#).

The presence of negative tests in consecutive days will be an indicator that an individual is no longer infectious. However, colleagues have also sought to clarify with the DfE Helpline how schools can best support individuals leaving self-isolation following negative LFD tests on days 6 and 7 given the importance placed in the guidance on individuals taking additional steps to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. When an answer is available, I will ensure this is provided to you as soon as possible. In the meantime, I would advise that you update any individual risk assessments you have in place for staff and pupils that were previously Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or who are pregnant, and take these risk assessments into account when considering how children and staff leaving self-isolation before Day 10 can be safely admitted back into school.

The 2nd January email from DfE stated 'Health and social care workers, including those working in education settings, should follow guidance for their sector on taking LFD tests on day 8, 9 and 10. For more information, visit [COVID-19: management of staff and exposed patients or residents in health and social care settings](#)'. As the requirements in this guidance are different to the requirements in the 'Stay at Home'

guidance, there may be some potential for confusion here, however our conclusion is that the above information in the 2nd January email from DfE is likely to specifically relate to any health or social care workers who are working in an educational setting, rather than mainstream education staff.

We have had some queries from schools in relation to how to police this to ensure that children do not incorrectly return to school before the 10 days of their isolation are up. In response to this, we would generally advise:

- Having a conversation with the parent to gather further information on the circumstances. The national guidance states that individuals should report their results after each test. Confirmation of this reporting may provide additional reassurance, should the parent be able to provide this.
- If children are still unwell/symptomatic (beyond that of loss of smell/taste, which can persist for a few weeks after infection), then they should not attend the setting. If they still have a high temperature or are otherwise unwell, the parents should be advised to seek medical advice

As per the [Schools Operating Guidance](#), 'if a parent or carer insists on a pupil attending your school, you can take the decision to refuse the pupil if, in your reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Your decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice'.

Close Contacts

Close contacts of confirmed cases continue to be required to self-isolate unless they are exempt from self-isolation, which includes fully vaccinated individuals (2 doses of Pfizer, AstraZeneca, SpikeVax/Moderna, or 1 dose of Janssen vaccine), and those individuals aged below 18 years, 6 months.

If you are aged 5 years and over and have been identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19, you are not legally required to self-isolate, however, you are strongly advised to:

- take an LFD test every day for 7 days, or until 10 days since your last contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 if this is earlier
- take this daily LFD test before you leave the household for the first time that day

Children under 5 are not being advised to take part in daily testing. If a child under 5 is a contact of a confirmed case, they are not required to self-isolate and should not start daily testing. If they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 they should limit their contact with anyone who is at higher risk of severe illness if infected with COVID-19, and arrange to take a PCR test as soon as possible. They can continue to attend an education or childcare setting while waiting for the PCR result. If the test is positive, they should follow the [stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection](#).

Household contacts (e.g. siblings)

My previous recommendation that schools ask all household contacts of positive cases to carry out LFD testing still applies, which is supported by the guidance (from the [Schools Operating Guidance](#)):

adults who are fully vaccinated and all children and young people aged between 5 and 18 years and 6 months identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 are strongly advised to take a LFD test every day for 7 days and continue to attend their setting as normal, unless they have a positive test result. Daily testing of close contacts applies to all contacts who are:

- *fully vaccinated adults – people who have had 2 doses of an approved vaccine*
- *all children and young people aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, regardless of their vaccination status*

- *people who are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons*
- *people taking part, or have taken part, in an approved clinical trial for a COVID-19 vaccine*

Children under 5 years do not need to take part in daily testing of close contacts. Pupils with SEND identified as close contacts should be supported by their school and their families to agree the most appropriate route for testing.

Face Coverings

From 4th January 2021, there is now a national recommendation that in those schools, colleges and other settings where pupils in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn in classrooms and teaching spaces. This does not apply in situations where wearing a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity, for example in PE lessons. This will also be a temporary measure, and will be reviewed on 26th January, in line with the rest of the 'Plan B' measures. This is in addition to the previous recommendation that pupils (Year 7 and above), staff and adult visitors should wear face coverings when moving around the premises outside of classrooms, which continues to be in place. This is in all settings, however EY children and children in primary schools are not currently being asked to wear face coverings.

Pupils in these schools must also wear a face covering when travelling on public transport and should wear it on dedicated transport to and from school.

DfE has said that they would not ordinarily expect teachers to wear a face covering in the classroom if they are at the front of the class, to support education delivery, although settings should be sensitive to the needs of individual teachers. Please note that there are transparent face coverings available which may be beneficial in relation to communication barriers, and the [Schools Operational Guidance](#) provides further advice (page 8) here. Please also note that there may be some pupils who are exempt from wearing a face covering, and the Operational Guidance also provides some additional information here, including exempt groups.

Ventilation

In addition to CO2 monitors that are in regular use in schools, the Department for Education is also making available up to 7,000 new air cleaning units for areas where quick fixes to improve ventilation are not possible, such as being able to open a window, to help improve ventilation in schools, colleges and early years settings. The DfE has provided [information](#) on how schools can apply for the units, although we understand that distribution of these units is being focused on schools where the CO2 monitors have identified issues, and that there will also be a marketplace to support schools to purchase these units directly.

DfE advice regarding retaining face to face education

In the 2nd January 2022 email, the DfE has stated:

We recognise that the high rates of COVID-19 may cause difficulties with the availability of staff. Our shared priority is to keep education settings open and children and young people continuing face-to-face education. Where workforce issues arise, you may wish to use existing teaching, temporary and support staff more flexibly where required to ensure your setting remains open, whilst ensuring that you continue to have appropriate support in place for pupils with SEND. As pupils do not need to be kept in consistent groups, you may wish to consider combining classes.

I recognise the complexity and challenges schools will face where there are workforce issues, however would generally not recommend the use of combined classes at the present time, where cases are extremely high in Wigan.

Clearly, any decisions taken in respect of additional steps necessary to maintain face to face education will need to be taken on a case by case basis. I would strongly recommend that classes are not combined in circumstances where:

- There are known instances of COVID-19 cases in the class(es) where the positive individual has attended the setting within the last two days
- There are a high number of confirmed cases in the setting, and multiple classes have seen confirmed cases in the last 10 days.
- There are concerns about the ventilation in the classroom setting
- There is insufficient resource to carry out enhanced cleaning linked to the merged class should this be required.
- There are previously clinically extremely vulnerable staff or pupils linked to the class(es).

Any schools considering the combination of classes should therefore seek further public health advice before doing so.

Public Health Measures

The baseline 'control' Public Health measures in schools, as set out in the [Schools Operating Guidance](#), remain the same i.e., good hygiene, cleaning regimes, keeping occupied spaces well ventilated, and following public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of Omicron. In addition to these, there are a number of additional baseline measures schools in Greater Manchester are advised to have in place, as set out in the GM Covid-19 Educational Case Management Support Pack, and the GM Schools Covid-19 Prevention and Outbreak Management Framework, both of which are enclosed with this letter for your benefit.

Although the GM documents were developed when Delta was the predominant variant of COVID-19 in the country, they follow best practice in relation to health protection, and will therefore continue to provide some assistance to schools in relation to the Omicron variant. Both GM documents will be reviewed in forthcoming weeks and I will ensure updated iterations are shared with you when available.