Extended data 2

Vignettes of individual school’s experiences with PCR-based SARS-CoV-2 rapid point of care testing.

“It has been undoubtedly helpful to have point of care PCR testing in our School. We have found since half term from the 2nd of November until the end of term 15th of December we were able to save 674 teaching hours by releasing those boarders who had close contact with an unwell pupil back to class. Unwell boarding pupils who did not have a COVID 19 positive test were allowed to convalesce at home with parents. This gave positive feedback from parents”.

“Unwell staff who care for vulnerable family members were particularly relieved to have rapid testing on site. In general, I believe having rapid accurate testing on site gave all our school community and families greater confidence and peace of mind to allow the school to function as fully as possible during these difficult pandemic times”.

“We have used the SAMBA II in our boarding school setting. It has been really helpful in keeping the school running. During the Autumn term we operated a system of year group bubbles based in individual boarding houses. When we had a suspected case, the whole house would isolate and do remote lessons from their boarding house until we had a negative test result. Prior to rapid point of care implementation at our school, in one case where testing was slow this was four days of remote lessons. The SAMBA II meant that the isolation period was reduced to 2 hours. We were fortunate to have no positive cases in the School but the use of SAMBA II kept everything running smoothly”.

“Before lockdown when pupils were seeking to travel abroad to return home to locations where a negative PCR test was required, we tested all these pupils on our SAMBA machine. We then knew within 30 mins if they were positive, which gave us time to plan how to handle any required self-isolation. As all this was taking place in the final few days of term it was important to not be surprised by someone testing positive on the last day. It also meant that we were confident in letting pupils leave school who were using the airport testing as if they were negative with us we were confident they would be negative at the airport and so would be able to travel rather than have to work out how to get them back from the airport if they turned out to be positive”.

“We used the SAMBA machine to test pupils who had to self-isolate at school and had to isolate in a shared dorm with other contacts. We used the machine to test these pupils so anyone who might be positive could be isolated from this small, closed group”.

“The machine has helped us to identify a small number of positive cases during the first term. Over the first term, the vast majority of results were negative and so students were released back into education far quicker than if they had had to wait for an NHS test. It also meant that boarding students could be tested at school, rather than putting a staff member at risk to transport them to a testing site. For pre-flight testing was valuable so that we knew students were negative before they travelled to the airport”.