



Councillor Danny Thorpe
Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich

Tuesday 15th December 2020

Dear Headteachers,

As I'm sure you are aware, yesterday I received a directive from the Government that all Royal Greenwich schools must remain fully open until the end of term. While I cannot agree that this is the right choice for schools, I also cannot justify spending public funds on fighting the decision in the courts. Consequently, I have no choice but to ask our schools to keep their doors open to all students rather than just continuing with online learning.

I'd also like to thank you all for your patience throughout this situation. I know that many of you made significant changes to your plans and have cancelled school meal provisions etc to prepare for online learning. I appreciate that you will now have more work to do to reverse these actions – please let us know if we can do anything to support you.

My request to close schools was made with the best of intentions. Having spoken to a number of Royal Greenwich headteachers at the end of last week, the feedback was that many of you had experienced the worst week of the pandemic so far. Numbers across the borough and London were rising and immediate action was required to address this.

My weekly briefing from our team about the situation in our schools was grim. Officers advised me that new cases in Royal Greenwich “are significantly higher than we have recorded on previous weeks, an approximate 40-50% increase”. At that time, there were 3,670 children in self isolation and 314 teaching staff.

Based on this data and the need to act quickly, we decided that asking schools to move into a different model of delivery for the final few days of term was the right thing to do.

That information continues to worsen.

On Monday, an additional 498 children went in to self-isolation and the latest data we have showed a further rise in numbers. The figures showed that in Royal Greenwich, our rates of infection were increasing more quickly than the London average and we were 12th out of 32 London boroughs in terms of the infection rates. Further evidence that immediate action to reduce the spread could be justified. As you will be aware, London goes into Tier 3 at midnight tonight.

Late on Monday afternoon, the Secretary of State issued a legal direction for us to revoke our request to you to close, requiring you to remain fully open until the end of term on Thursday.

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While I do not believe this is the right thing to do, this is a legal decision by the Secretary of State and we therefore need to comply. My interest has been solely driven by getting the best outcomes for Royal Greenwich, not a legal wrangle with the Secretary of State. Based on the information I had before me, I believed that this was the correct course of action for our borough.

I know that each of you has a range of circumstances that you are managing locally and want to say how sorry I am that trying to get the best outcome for Royal Greenwich has escalated in this way, and that both myself and the director remain completely committed to supporting all our schools in the best way possible.

On Monday, we secured a substantial change in our local testing arrangements, one that will extend the access available to children and families across the borough. The Department of Health & Social Care has today agreed that any borough resident can access a COVID-19 test, whether they are showing symptoms or not. This is a real step change from the current position and one that will benefit all of us locally.

Royal Greenwich parents and carers who would like to access a test either for themselves or their children are able to access a number of testing sites across Greenwich.

These sites are situated at:

1. The O2 Arena car park on Greenwich Peninsula
2. The University of Greenwich Avery Hill Campus - Southwood
3. Aberly Street Car Park in Plumstead
4. De Vere Devonport House Car Park in Greenwich Town
5. Charlton Athletic Football Club Car Park

You can also order a home testing kit to be sent to your home and posted back for processing

A separate letter to parents is attached which includes information. I would be grateful if you could disseminate it. We are working hard with public health colleagues to ensure more testing is available to support a safe start to the school term in January.

Politics is far from easy, and the last few months have been extremely challenging for all of us. I am enormously proud of the incredible work we've done as a borough in responding to the Covid challenge and our schools have been at the heart of this response. One of the most depressing things about the past 24 hours has been the noise some have made about school status and the role of the local authority.

I am absolutely clear that both myself and the Council have a duty to work with the whole Royal Greenwich family of schools to get the very best for our children and young people. We can only hope that 2021 will be a better year for all of us.

With best wishes,



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