



Councillor Danny Thorpe
Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich

Dear Parents,

Most children have been unable to go to school for more than five months, so I am delighted to welcome all children, young people and staff back into our schools to resume their studies after what has been an incredibly challenging time since the schools closed back in March. A huge amount of effort has gone into creating a safe work and study environment for your children and the staff who will look after them and it's great to have everyone back, carrying on their education and continuing to build the skills they need for the future.

During lockdown, it was amazing to see so many young people and families pulling together to help the community and support the NHS, but nothing is going to make up for the missed education and lost memories with friends, and I don't doubt that young people will be feeling the repercussions from this global pandemic for many years to come. This is why it is so important for every young person in Royal Greenwich to go back to school now and not get left further behind, and why we are working so hard to ensure it remains safe to do so.

I know that this is an anxious time for many of you and I want to reassure you that the staff in every school in Royal Greenwich have been working tirelessly over the past few months to make sure that your children are as safe as possible. An in-depth risk assessment has been completed by every school - in partnership with staff, the Council and unions - to make sure the best safety measures are being adopted.

It's so, so important that every child resumes their education now, which is why we are working so hard to provide them with the safest possible environment. As you know, London now has a much lower rate of COVID-19 than many other areas in the UK, and Royal Greenwich has consistently had a lower rate of infection than other London boroughs, which is still the case now. Indeed, at the time of writing, we have the lowest number of new cases in London, with only 6 confirmed last week across the whole borough. The chances of catching COVID-19 in Greenwich are extremely low, but I need all of your help in the coming weeks and months so that remains the case.

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It is **vital** that we all work together to keep our children, school staff and each other safe moving forward and pay attention to the individual safety requirements for each school. Indeed, lives literally depend on it. I'm asking each of you to make sure you have talked to your children, of all ages, about the importance of washing their hands regularly whilst at schools. Good hygiene is the key to keeping this virus under control, and I need you to please remind your children of this on a daily basis.

I know that the recent confusion around facemasks has unsettled many people, and it is deeply frustrating that the Government were so mixed in their messaging. So, I want to tell you what we have agreed as the Greenwich position, and ask for all of your support in making this happen.

Following discussion with heads in Greenwich schools, I am **recommending** that pupils in Year 7 and above wear face coverings in corridors and communal areas, as a precautionary measure, but please check in with your school for their specific rules as each unique school layout will call for a different approach.

All schools will have a strong focus on handwashing and cleaning, and they will use additional measures, such as staggering key times and making changes to the timetable, to restrict groups from mixing. It is **absolutely essential** that the unique rules for each school are followed and I urge you to regularly check your child's school website for details and updates.

As a former teacher, I know that many staff and pupils would have still come to school if they felt a little under the weather before the pandemic, but **this is no longer acceptable** and increases risk of infection for everyone around you. If you or your children become unwell and are experiencing any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19 (such as a high temperature, new and continuous cough and/or loss or change of smell and taste), it is **vitaly important** that your child does not attend school and that you inform the school, self-isolate at home, and book yourself or your child in for a test as a matter of urgency. There are more details about what to do if you or your child have COVID-19 symptoms on the [NHS website](#).

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Many more of you will be walking, cycling or scooting to school and we have been working hard in recent months to make the journey safer and healthier through our School Streets programme, which is going to see more roads outside schools closed to motorised vehicles at pick up and drop off times. You can find out more about this at royalgreenwich.gov.uk/schoolstreets.

Travelling by foot isn't an option for everyone, so TfL will be introducing 230 extra buses and designating some existing regular buses as 'School Services' at peak times to help make journeys easier and reduce the impact on other users. These will be clearly signed and be prioritised for use by school children - running at full seat capacity, in line with UK Government guidelines. The plan is for these measures to be in place until at least the end of October but this could change so please check tfl.gov.uk/reopeningforeducation for updates. Any young people travelling who are over 11 will need to wear a face covering on all forms of public transport, including any taxis or private hire vehicles, and in stations. If they are exempt on medical grounds, they should carry their exemption card on journeys.

Finally, I want to address the UK Government's disgraceful intention to suspend free transport for under 18s as part of the TfL bailout. I recognise that this will have a hugely detrimental impact on poorer families living in the borough who will be left even more out of pocket through this reckless decision. I want to assure you that Royal Greenwich is opposed to this course of action and we are working hard to bring about yet another U-turn on a terrible decision that will have a significant impact on families across the borough. Our young people are also taking action to stop this from happening. If you want to support them, go to cpag.org.uk/dontzapthezip to find out more.

Please do get in touch if you have any questions and can I thank you in advance for all of your help in keeping this virus under control in Greenwich.

Best wishes,

Danny

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