



Councillor Danny Thorpe  
*Leader, Royal Borough of Greenwich*

Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Dear parents, carers and families across Royal Greenwich,

Yesterday the Council received a directive from the Government that schools in the borough must remain fully open until the end of term. While I cannot agree that this is the correct choice for our schools, I also cannot justify the use of public funds to fight 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.

Having spoken to a number of Royal Greenwich headteachers at the end of last week, the feedback was that they had experienced their worst week of the pandemic. Numbers across the borough and London were rising rapidly and immediate action was required to address this.

Additionally, on Friday the weekly figures were 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 to online learning 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 12<sup>th</sup> out of the 32 London boroughs in terms of the infection rates across the city. Further evidence that immediate action to reduce the spread was 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 for schools to close, requiring them to remain fully open until the end of term on Thursday. 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. It is important to state that each school is in a unique position at this time, and your headteacher will advise of you the arrangements for the remainder of the week.

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My motivation has never been about a legal battle with the Government, as frankly we all have enough to do. Based on the information I had before me, I believed that this was the correct course of action for Royal Greenwich.

I also want to let you know that today 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 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.

The online booking system to make an appointment can be found at [gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test](https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test). If you have any problems accessing the system, you can call 119 for assistance; lines are open from 7 am to 11 pm.

When you make your appointment, you will be asked why you are seeking a test. Please select the category which states that your local council has asked you to be tested.

You should be offered an appointment at a testing centre near to where you live at the earliest opportunity and I sincerely hope that as many of you as possible will consider getting a test. Identifying those people who have the virus but are not showing any symptoms will be essential, and further work is underway so that we can strengthen testing arrangements across Royal Greenwich, so we are ready for the start of 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. We will continue to do so in the weeks and months ahead.

With best wishes,



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