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Ref: HF/DK/KR
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Dear Parents/Carers

Can we start by thanking you for your efforts through these incredibly challenging times. You have worked tirelessly to support our children in maintaining their engagement in learning

As we all look forward to the reopening of schools to all pupils next Monday (8th March) we wanted to write to ask for your help with the return being successful for all children.

Attendance at schools is once again mandatory from the 8th March. For Primary Schools all pupils should be back from 8th March. For Secondary Schools all students will start to return from 8th March, with individual schools determining their plans for return during the week commencing 8th March. This is to enable all students in Secondary Schools to receive three Lateral Flow Tests to be taken in school before they move to the home testing programme. We would remind parents to ensure that they have provided consent for their children to have these tests as this is crucial to opening our schools safely. Children in Primary Schools do not need to undertake regular testing, but all staff in Primary Schools are offered twice weekly home tests to help keep Primary Schools safe. Staff in Secondary Schools are also undertaking regular testing.

All pupils in Special Schools are also expected to return on 8th March (except for those designated as clinically extremely vulnerable). Assistance with Travel will resume its pre-lock down operating for all pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan who are safe to return to school.

In all schools, children that are clinically extremely vulnerable will not be expected to return and teachers will be engaging directly with children, parents and carers to ensure effective remote education can continue for these children. Your school may ask to see the shielding letter sent to clinically extremely vulnerable children. Siblings of children who are clinically extremely vulnerable are still expected and encouraged to attend school.

Whilst it is good news that rates of Covid19 have reduced and children are returning to school, the pandemic has not gone away. **This means that from 8th March all settings will still be operating under Covid Risk Assessment arrangements.** In particular;

- Schools will still be operating with bubbles
- Some schools may have several staff working remotely as they are shielding.
- Many settings will operate staggered start and finish times.
- Staff in school will generally be wearing face coverings
- **Pupils in Secondary Schools are also expected to continue wearing face coverings from 8th March.**

Our schools are doing all they can do, with support from the Council, to make schools safe learning environments for our staff and young people.

As schools open more widely, please remember that it is highly likely that there will be further confirmed cases of Covid in schools. As before, this will necessitate those who have Covid and their close contacts self-isolating “immediately and for the next 10 full days counting from the day after contact with the individual who tested positive”. It is important to remember that this ongoing disruption is likely to remain for the foreseeable future, with the associated transition to remote learning as appropriate.

You will play a key role in the safer wider opening of schools. Please travel actively (walking, cycling and scooting) to school where possible to relieve pressure on the reduced capacity and service of public transport and avoid an increase in private car usage on the school run.

When you pick your child up from school, please ensure you observe social distancing and, unless you are exempt, wear a face covering. Face masks are available free of charge from Waltham Forest Council – to request them go to - <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/face-masks>

To assist you;

- We are deploying stay safe champions outside schools at busy periods to ensure social distancing is maintained.
- There are community testing facilities throughout the borough that you can access, regular testing will mean more positive cases within households are found and prevented from entering schools and colleges, helping to keep educational settings safe.
- Lateral Flow Tests for you and other family members are now available for pickup up from; Stanley Road car park, Leyton E10 7EQ, Linford Road car park, Walthamstow E17 3LS and Church Lane car park, Leytonstone E11 1HG. These sites are open every day from 1:30pm-7pm.
- If you are unable to go to a test site or collect test kits, you can also order free rapid lateral flow test kits to be sent to your home. Order online at: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

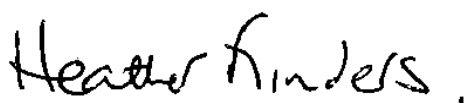
As schools continue to open to all children it is worth remembering that there will be no SATs in Primary Schools this year or GCSEs and A levels in secondary schools and colleges. Individual schools will be circulating their assessment arrangements later in the year. As a borough, we are co-ordinating a borough wide approach to support the transition from Primary to Secondary school. We will also be working closely with the wider school community as they access Government funded initiatives such as the Holiday Activity Programme which supports children on free school meals.

We urge all parents to engage with the Lateral Flow Testing that is available for themselves and their families as this will stop the spread of the virus and protect us all. We would also urge you to engage in the vaccination programme when you are contacted for your jab – if you would like to know more about the vaccine please visit - <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/vaccines-and-vaccinations>

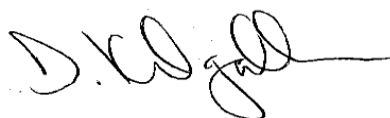
In conclusion, please remember that this is a critical period in the response to the pandemic. If your child has any symptoms of coronavirus you should keep them away from school and get them tested as a matter of priority. Testing for people with symptoms is available in the borough free of charge – for more information go to <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/testing-centres>

We don't underestimate how hard children and parents have worked during the past year due to the pandemic, but we all have a part to play in stopping the spread of the virus and getting all children back into the classroom. Schools, colleges and early years settings staff are working tirelessly so that our young people can get back to face to face teaching and see their friends and clearly, we all play our part to making this a success.

Yours faithfully



Heather Flinders
Strategic Director of Families (DCS/DASS)



David Kilgallon
Director of Learning & Systems Leadership