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Direct line: 020 8496 4147  
Ref: HF/KR  
Date: 14 December 2020

Dear Headteacher

It has become clear in the last few days that rates of COVID-19 are rising extremely rapidly throughout Waltham Forest and across London.

We now have some of the highest rates of COVID-19 anywhere in the country. In the last seven days 1,307 people have tested positive in our community. All areas of the borough have high rates of community transmission and this is consistent among all age groups. The rate of infection per 100k resident population in the borough stands at 406 and indicates we have entered a period of exponential growth. The latest data clearly shows that the rate of infection is doubling in Waltham Forest every 4 days.

**This is a critical time and necessitates immediate and decisive action to control the spread of the virus. I am recommending that all schools in Waltham Forest move to remote learning and remain open only to support the children of key workers and vulnerable children.**

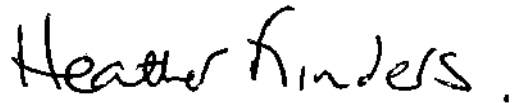
We are making this recommendation at this time due to the imminent school holidays and the Christmas period where we fear higher rates of transmission as families mix under the Government Christmas guidance. Given that cases are higher in children than in our general population, we feel that this is an important step in order to attempt to reduce the spread of the virus over the Christmas period.

The Department for Education are clear that they do not intend to use their powers to issue any widespread direction. It is for individual schools to make this decision. I cannot in good conscience stand by whilst the rate of infection rises at the rates we are currently witnessing without recommending that you consider the position of your own school. We must do what we can to stop the spread of the virus and I am firmly of the view that it is incumbent upon all schools to now take this step to prevent infections rates increasing further.

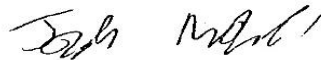
Community testing is going to be accelerated in the coming days. We are piloting testing within schools this week and are working to ensure we can build and accelerate this support so that schools can return safely in January.

Finally, I wish to express how much I value and respect the utterly extraordinary work you have done during this year. We will be in touch in due course to discuss about what more we can do to support the reopening of schools across the borough in January.

Yours sincerely



**Heather Flinders**  
**Strategic Director of Families**  
**(DCS/DASS)**



**Joe McDonnell**  
**Director of Public Health**