

Ask for: David Kilgallon
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Ref: DK/GK/KR
Date: 25 August 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Return to school in September

You will be aware that that the Government and Local Authority are keen that schools operate in as normal a way as possible from September. The Government in publicising their plans also recognise the role of local decision makers in terms of what control measures are necessary in a particular setting or group of settings.

In Waltham Forest I am sure we are all aware that Covid-19 rates are still high, children are about to return to school, and there is the normal change of weather in the Autumn with people spending more time indoors. It is therefore highly likely that Covid-19 rates will rise again.

Our schools are following the Department for Education “Schools COVID-19 operational guidance” that was last updated on 17 August 2021 in terms of preparing for the start of term. Alongside this, the Director of Public Health in Waltham Forest and other Council officers are providing local guidance and directives to support our schools. We are doing this to both maximise attendance at school whilst seeking to manage the anticipated upward pressures on infection rates.

For you as a parent or carer you should be aware that whilst schools will operate as close to normal as possible, school leaders with our endorsement and support, may be operating some local additional control measures. We are aware that each school is a unique setting so measures will need to vary across sites. So, for example, parents of reception pupils may be welcomed on site for their child’s first day, but may be asked to wear a face covering and encouraged to maintain social distancing from others whilst inside the school building. More generally we are minded that some Primary Schools may continue to operate keeping classes or year groups largely apart, there may continue to be some staggering of school start and finish times, pupils may be asked to adhere to seating plans and some staff may wear face coverings in communal areas, but not in the classroom. In our Secondary Schools we are expecting a broad and balanced curriculum to be offered without schools operating year group bubbles. It is also possible that some Secondary Schools may encourage staff to maintain appropriate social distancing from pupils where possible.

Finally, and possibly most importantly, I am sure you will have heard that schools are not expected to “track and trace” close contacts of pupils or staff that are found to have Covid-19. This function will now be fulfilled by NHS Test and Trace. We are still expecting you as parents or carers to inform the school if your child is found to have Covid-19.

Obviously where your child has Covid-19 they must continue to self-isolate as before, however siblings under 18 are not required to self-isolate and nor are you if you have had both vaccinations. For information we are still expecting schools to isolate pupils that have symptoms of Covid-19 and arrange for their safe collection. In Waltham Forest we are also encouraging schools to contact parents/carers of close contacts with a “warn and inform” letter that encourages pupils to have a PCR test and undertake some other reasonable controls that fall short of their child being asked to stay off school and self-isolate. This will be in addition to any track and tracing by NHS Test and Trace.

Thanks as always for your support. The challenge for us all this term is to have schools that are operating as close to normal as possible in a way that minimises the negative impact of Covid as far as we can.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Kilgallon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Kilgallon
Director of Learning and Systems Leadership