

Children's Services

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m/r Direct Dial 020 3045 3306
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The person dealing with this matter is Stephen Kitchman

Dear Parents and Carers,

Firstly, London Borough of Bexley, and all its Partner agencies including Police and Health colleagues, would like to thank all parents and carers for all their efforts in home schooling Bexley's young people. We would also like to applaud the huge efforts made by pupils and teachers to implement protective measures in preparation for all students returning to our schools.

This letter is being sent on behalf of both the London Borough of Bexley and the Safer Schools Partnership with our overriding goal to protect the livelihoods of its people in line with the Government's roadmap. This roadmap is a step-by-step plan to ease restrictions cautiously, starting with schools and colleges.

As part of the roadmap, step 1 will start with schools on 8 March with the successful return of more students to face-to-face education supported by a range of new measures to minimise the spread of COVID-19. Evidence from a study shows that infection rates in schools mirror infection rates in the wider community, suggesting schools are not the main driver of infections.

In addition to the already established rapid testing regime and regular testing of staff, there will be twice-weekly testing of secondary school and college pupils, initially with on-site testing and then home testing. All households with school children, members of their support and childcare bubbles, and those in related occupations will also be encouraged to get tested regularly. Rapid testing can be booked at Civic Offices by booking an appointment at <https://www.bexley.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/services-status/local-covid-testing-centres> or alternatively you can also walk in without booking during quiet times in the afternoons and evenings. Details of other testing centres can also be found through this link.

All students will begin to return to face-to-face education from 8th March with the following testing measures in place:

- all primary school staff will continue to take 2 rapid COVID-19 tests each week at home
- all secondary school and college students will take three COVID-19 tests as they return to the classroom from the 8 March at existing school testing facilities. Schools and colleges will have discretion on how to test students over that week to enable their return to the classroom. After the initial programme of three tests in school or college, students will be provided with 2 rapid tests to use each week at home.
- secondary school and college staff will also be provided with 2 tests to use each week at home as are university students on practical courses who need to access specialist facilities and equipment can return to in-person teaching and learning from Monday 8th March. Twice weekly testing will continue to be available for all on campus. As a precautionary measure - staff & students in secondary schools and colleges are advised to wear face coverings in all areas, including classrooms, where social distancing cannot be maintained.

The testing of staff and students ahead of their return to secondary schools and colleges, alongside strengthened safety measures, would reassure families and teaching staff that extra measures are in place alongside the existing bubble system, enhanced hygiene and COVID secure precautions.

Testing in education settings is already well-established. Those set up in secondary schools and colleges would remain operational for students who find it difficult to test themselves at home.

Public Health England continues to advise that the existing range of safety measures in place in education settings remains appropriate – including bubble groups, staggering start and finish times, increasing ventilation and hygiene, regular testing and maintaining distance between adults where possible.

Returning face-to-face education in schools and colleges is a national priority. We have always envisaged that schools should be the last to close and first to open, and we can make it happen.

There are some steps we would encourage parents and guardians to familiarise themselves with in order to keep your young people safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19. These include avoiding gatherings before and after school and planning routes in advance, you will find further guidance regarding safe travel to and from school at <https://www.bexley.gov.uk/news/safe-travel-and-school>.

School bubbles are designed to keep our children safe whilst in schools but **do not** extend to gatherings outside of the school environment and your children should be reminded of the need to adhere to social distancing before and after school. This is important if we are to continue to keep everyone safe.

Please remember the guidance is for those who can wear a mask (over 11 years of age unless exempt) to wear them when in public places such as shops, shopping centres and public transport. Bus services have been dedicated to school age children to reduce the mixing of age groups and young people are encouraged to use these services to and from school. More advice on this can be found at the link contained in this letter and Safer Schools Officers and Covid Marshalls will continue to engage with staff, children and parents around schools.

Following all these measures and continuing to create space, wearing a face covering (unless Exempt) and washing hands regularly will assist in ensuring that schools are safe environment for our young people and prevent the spread of the virus amongst our loved ones.

Together we can all help to fight the spread of this virus. We thank you in advance for your support and wish your children the very best with their continued studies.



Stephen Kitchman
Director of Children's Services