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Dear parents/carers,

Happy New Year and welcome back to what will be another challenging term in education.

Please be assured that all schools, with support from the Council, are doing everything possible to enable them to be open as normally as possible as the term starts.

Following Government announcements in the last few days, there will be some significant differences as term commences. Most significantly, in all secondary schools, staff and pupils are expected to wear face coverings at all times in school. This is in communal areas, such as corridors, as well as in classrooms. The Government said it will review this on 26 January 2022. In addition, whilst pupils in primary schools are not expected to wear face coverings, staff are expected to wear them within communal areas, but not inside the classroom.

As in many walks of life, with the current level of COVID in the community, it is likely that there will be staff capacity issues in our schools. Please be assured that schools are doing all they can to limit the impact of this. Despite all our collective efforts it is highly likely that at some point in the next term your child may be taught by someone other than their normal teacher, or that the normal routine of school will be subject to some last-minute adjustments.

In many schools there may be a need to ask classes or year groups to remain at home and participate in online learning due to staff absences. All schools will seek to keep this to a minimum and for as short a time as possible. Schools are also being asked to ensure there is ongoing on-site provision for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.

### Testing and Isolating

We can all play our part in ensuring the return to school is as smooth as possible. All children at secondary schools should be supported and encouraged to take lateral flow device (LFD) tests at least twice a week, and we also encourage all parents and carers to take these rapid tests twice a week as well.

In addition, all our secondary schools are hosting on site testing as part of the return to school. Please encourage your child to participate in this testing.

As the rules around isolation have changed recently, we wanted to explain how these now work for your children.

### **If your child develops symptoms:**

If your child has at least one of: a new continuous cough, a temperature, or a loss of taste/smell, then they must not attend school and must isolate, and you should arrange for a PCR test.

If your child is otherwise unwell (for example, sore throat, headache, fatigue) then they are not required to isolate and should attend school if well enough to do so, but we would still encourage you to test them, ideally with a PCR test.

### If your child tests positive:

A child who tests positive is required to isolate for 10 full days, from the day on which their symptoms started (or on which they took the test, if they don't have any symptoms). However, now if they are negative on 2 lateral flow tests, taken at least 24 hours apart, beginning on day 6, and do not have a high temperature, then they can end isolation after the second lateral flow test result, and return to their school **on the next day**. This is from Department for Education guidance – even if the test result is taken early on the morning of day 7, the earliest a child can return would be day 8.

10 day self-isolation	Day of isolation	Ending self-isolation early using LFD tests	
Self-isolation starts when symptoms begin or when the test was taken if you do not have symptoms	0	Self-isolation starts when symptoms begin or when the test was taken if you do not have symptoms	
Self-isolate	1-5	Self-isolate	
Self-isolate	6	Self-isolate and take an LFD test	
		If the LFD is <b>negative</b> , continue to isolate	If the LFD is <b>positive</b> , continue to isolate
Self-isolate	7	Self-isolate and take an LFD test <b>24 hours after the last one</b>	Self-isolate and take an LFD test <b>24 hours after the last one</b>
		If the LFD is <b>negative</b> , self-isolation can end and the child can return to school the following day	If the LFD is <b>negative</b> , continue to isolate
Self-isolate	8	Child can return to school if they do not have a high temperature	Self-isolate and take an LFD test <b>24 hours after the last one</b>
			If the LFD is <b>negative</b> , self-isolation can end and the child can return to school the following day
Self-isolate	9	Child can return to school if they do not have a high temperature	
Self-isolate	10		
Child can return to school if they do not have a high temperature	11		

*Example: Liah develops a new cough on Jan 10<sup>th</sup>, takes a PCR test the next day, and gets the results as being positive on Jan 13<sup>th</sup>. Jan 10<sup>th</sup> is day 0 – she must isolate for the next 10 days, so the last day of isolation will be Jan 20<sup>th</sup>, returning to school on Jan 21<sup>st</sup>. However, if Liah takes a lateral flow test that is negative on day 6 (Jan 16<sup>th</sup>), and another test at least 24 hours afterwards on day 7 (Jan 17<sup>th</sup>), she can stop isolating at that point and return to school on the following day (Jan 18<sup>th</sup>).*

**If your child is a contact of someone with COVID:**

If your child is identified as having been in contact with someone with COVID, they will not be required to isolate, and should still attend school as normal. However, they should take a lateral flow test every day for seven days before they come into school – this applies to both primary and secondary pupils. They may be asked to do this by NHS Test and Trace, or by their school. During this period, we also strongly suggest that they minimise social contact, especially with any vulnerable or elderly people, if possible.

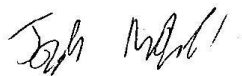
If someone living in your home has COVID, your child may still attend school, provided they do not have symptoms and have taken a lateral flow test with a negative result that day. However, if your school is undergoing an outbreak this guidance may change.

Our secondary schools will also be hosting further vaccination sessions this term and we can all play our part by ensuring we have our first, second or booster jabs when available.

In the meantime, details of the local testing and vaccination centres can be found on the council's website: <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/covid-19>.

Thank you for your continued patience and understanding.

Regards



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Director of Public Health



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