



Education Division
London Borough of Merton
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden SM4 5DX

Date: 16th December 2020

Dear parents and carers,

We wanted to take this opportunity to write to you, at the end of the autumn term, to take stock of what has happened for you and your children, and for our schools, over the past months of the pandemic.

We want to thank you for all the work that you have done to support your children in their learning, both as they have returned to face to face learning this September, and as they have tackled remote learning from home, with you as their invaluable support and guide.

We also want to thank headteachers, and to acknowledge the amazing work that they and their staff have undertaken to keep schools safe, and to ensure they continue to be excellent places of learning.

Finally we would like to share with you some of the plans that are in place to continue to keep Merton's families and school communities safe over the Christmas holiday period. As you will have seen, London has moved into Tier 3 as of today (Wednesday 16th December). We obviously understand how worrying this is for everyone, but we also want to acknowledge how following the new rules, and thinking about how we manage Christmas, will be important to continue to keep people as safe as possible.

THE AUTUMN TERM

Over the past term, schools across the country have been asked to open to all pupils. Merton schools have indeed done this. Leaders have worked tirelessly to ensure that their schools are as safe places as possible during the ongoing pandemic, and as positive cases have occurred within the community while continuing to support your children's learning and helping them catch up if needed following the first lockdown.

We acknowledge that for some families, keeping their children in school has been a challenge, especially given the wider message to stay at home during the second lockdown, but attendance in Merton schools for face-to-face education over this term has generally been very good.

We know how rigorously our school leaders have followed the national guidance to make their schools COVID safe. They have introduced bubbles, staggered starts and ends to the days, one-way systems, regular and enhanced cleaning, the wearing of masks in key parts of the schools, and opportunities to regularly clean and sanitise hands: to name but some of the things that have happened.

We also know how the need to keep to these 'bubbles' has meant that children have often not seen their friends in other year groups at play time as they normally would, and that staff

have not been able to work together and support each other through face-to-face contact. But these measures, regularly revisited, (with review supported by the Local Authority, Public Health England and the DfE, where needed), have ensured that our schools are as safe as they can be in the context of these challenging circumstances.

Despite all these measures it may be that your child has had to access the school's remote learning offer, because they have needed to self-isolate as a result of being a contact of a positive Covid case. On these occasions we are aware of the challenge this may present to parents and carers and are grateful for the support you offer both your child and their school in enabling them to access it. Merton schools have become skilful at delivering a remote learning offer when it is necessary to do so. From public health predictions, we know that it is highly likely that more remote learning will be needed in the coming term, and our schools are ready for this, to ensure that your child's education is as little interrupted as possible.

Thank you for all the support you have given to your children's school over the past term.

HOLIDAY ARRANGEMENTS

During the Christmas holidays, schools have been asked by Public Health England and the Department for Education to be available to support any contact tracing associated with positive Covid cases that come to light in the six days following the last day of face-to-face teaching.

This means that if your child tests positive for Covid, having developed symptoms within the 2 days after the last day at school, you should contact your school to let them know. Your school will then notify the parents of children who were in contact with your child during the relevant window.

Child develops symptoms	'Infectious window'	Final day of isolation
Saturday 19 th December	Thursday 17 th and Friday 18 th December	29 th December
Sunday 20 th December	Friday 18 th and Saturday 19 th December	30 th December

It also means that between the end of term and Wednesday 23rd December or Thursday 24th December (depending on when your school's last day of term is), you may be contacted by the school to ask that your child self-isolate for 10 days as a result of being an identified close contact of a positive COVID case. Please see the NHS guidance [here](#) for what to do if you are advised to isolate after being in contact with a positive case.

Below are examples of the timelines if your child has had contact with a positive case in school.

Classmate develops symptoms	'Infectious window'	Last contact with classmate	Final day of isolation for your child
Saturday 19 th December	Thursday 17 th and Friday 18 th December	Thursday 17 th December	27 th December
Saturday 19 th December	Thursday 17 th and Friday 18 th December	18 th December	28 th December

If your child develops symptoms during the 10 days of isolation, they should be tested, and if positive, another period of 10 days isolation should be observed from the first day of symptoms. As ever, the rest of the household will also need to self-isolate if anyone in it has symptoms or a positive test.

KEEPING SAFE OVER CHRISTMAS

We attach some guidance from our Public Health colleagues about how you and your family can keep safe over the Christmas holiday period.

Finally, we are very aware that there will be some 'big' exams after Christmas for many secondary age children: some of the BTEch exams will be taking place, and many others (including those in Years 11 and 13) will have mocks. We wish them the very best of luck!

In this year of great uncertainty, all Merton pupils have shown such resilience, courage, and fortitude. We are very grateful to them: they have been models to us all.

We wish you all a lovely break over the holiday period and here's hoping that 2021 brings peace and a better year for us all!

Yours faithfully,



Jane McSherry

Assistant Director for Education
and Early Help



Councillor Eleanor Stringer

Cabinet Member for Children's
Services and Education

Celebrating safely over the festive period

The festive period is an important time for many people of all faiths and none who come together over the holidays. Some new rules apply during these times and the information below is to support you when making plans to ensure you are able to follow these.

We must each continue to take personal responsibility to limit the spread of the virus and protect our loved ones, particularly if they are vulnerable. For many, this will mean that it isn't possible to celebrate Christmas in the way you normally would. Parents/carers should take the opportunity to **share some of these key messages below as appropriate with your children** and plans over the festive period to support stopping the spread of the virus.

From **Wednesday 16th December**, people living in London must follow Tier 3 rules (Further information available on this link [Local restriction tiers: what you need to know - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know))

From 23 December to 27 December,

- You may choose to form a 'Christmas bubble'.
- You can form an exclusive 'Christmas bubble' composed of people from **no more than three households**
- A Christmas bubble will be able to spend time together in homes, to attend places of worship, or meet in a public outdoor place.
- You can **do LESS than permitted**, so use judgement on whether to form a Christmas bubble if people are vulnerable
- You should **limit your contacts** with those you do not live with both before and after the festive period.
- If you do form a Christmas bubble, **you should not meet socially with friends and family you do not live with in your home or garden unless they are part of your Christmas bubble.**
- In all other settings, people should follow local restrictions in the tier in which they are meeting.
- If you have older children returning from university for the holidays, they are considered to be part the household to which they have returned (not as 2 separate households).
- **Think carefully about travelling and stay as local as possible.** You can **travel between tiers and UK nations** between 23 and 27 December for the purposes of meeting your Christmas bubble, however you must return home by 28th December.
- You can **consider alternative ways to celebrate Christmas or enjoy the holidays** such as the use of technology and meeting outdoors, without bringing households together or travelling between different parts of the country.
- If you do not form a Christmas bubble, you should continue to follow the guidelines for the area you are in.
- **Self-isolation rules still apply.** If you have symptoms or you or someone you have been in contact with tests positive, you should self-isolate and not form a Christmas Bubble.

Meeting your Christmas bubble Indoors – TIPS TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS

- Keep multiple windows (or a window and door) open to create airflow through the house.
- Clean all frequently touched surfaces after anyone uses them (e.g. taps toilet flush, light switches etc)
- Encourage frequent hand washing
- Try to avoid hugs, kisses and handshakes
- Don't share items like crockery and glassware
- Avoid sharing food and buffet style set ups
- Extra distance between settings will make sure everyone is comfortable and keeps people safe
- Avoid board games with a lot of pieces that need to be handled, replace them with talking games or quizzes.
- When gifting presents remember to wash hands before and after handling, as this will limit surfaces getting contaminated
- Consider wearing face masks where appropriate

From 28 December

- You **must follow the guidance for the tier in your area**. This will be Tier 3 for those in London. **Christmas bubbles will no longer apply**.
- If a member of your Christmas bubble tests positive for coronavirus or develops coronavirus symptoms between the 23 and 27 December, or up to 48 hours after members of the bubble last met, all members of the bubble must self-isolate as if they were members of the same household.
- In the two weeks that follow your last meeting with your Christmas bubble, you should reduce your contact with people you do not live with as much as possible.
- The Christmas relaxation of **meeting up rules does not extend to New Year's Eve**, you must follow the Tier rules for your area on where you can go and who you can meet, including on New Year's Eve. Your Christmas bubble will no longer apply.

Further information is available on the following link: [Making a Christmas bubble with friends and family - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family)

If you have any COVID 19 symptoms

You can only get a free NHS test if at least one of the following applies:

- you have a high temperature
- you have a new, continuous cough

- you've lost your sense of smell or taste or it's changed
- you've been asked to by a local council
- you're taking part in a government pilot project

You can also get a test for someone you live with if they have symptoms.

To book a test, you can access the national testing portal: www.nhs.uk/coronavirus or call **119**. There are 2 test sites in Merton and there is enough capacity so it should be easy to get tested.