



16 July 2021

Dear Bexley Head Teacher,

First may I thank you for all that you and your teams have done and are doing to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19, whilst at the same time continuing to provide our children and young people with education. You have been exemplary.

Secondly, I wanted to invite you to continue with the current COVID-19 control arrangements until the end of term, despite the announcement by the Prime Minister that the legal enforcement of most of these ends this coming Monday 19th July.

My rationale for making this recommendation is as follows:

1. Case rates in Bexley continue to rise exponentially, particularly in young people.
2. It is only for a short period; almost all Bexley schools will have broken up by next Friday 23rd July at the latest.
3. My education colleagues have had correspondence from the DfE which acknowledges that local decisions of this type may be made.
4. Whole bubble closure is simpler and safer at this point, than leaving it to NHS Test and Trace. It seems to me to be unrealistic to expect school pupils to be able to accurately recall who have been their close contacts during their infectious periods.

I am conscious that inevitably some parents will be disappointed, either because their children whose isolation is not due to end until Tuesday 20th or later cannot shorten this, or because you may ask a whole bubble to begin self-isolation on Monday or later. Additionally, NHS Test and Trace may attempt to contact parents or children anyway, as they are not aware that your school had decided to follow local advice to continue present arrangements. I am sure you will have factored these points into your planning and in the appendix 1 below, I have included a few suggestions on how we will collectively mitigate these risks.

I hope you welcome this advice and will act on my recommendations. Many other local authorities are making similar recommendations. If you have any questions or comments, please email me at c19phresponsecell@bexley.gov.uk

In September, I am expecting that Bexley will follow national procedures. This local approach is only recommended for this short period until the end of the current term.

For further local information about COVID-19 please visit:

<https://www.bexley.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19>

With thanks and best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Anjan Ghosh

Director of Public Health -London Borough of Bexley

Enclosed: Appendix 1 on risk mitigation

Appendix 1: Suggestions on how we will mitigate identified risks

1. That the following paragraph is included in all home-to-school communications and on school websites:

“You will be aware that the Prime Minister has announced a lifting of many COVID-19 restrictions to commence on Monday 19 July, including an end to the closure of whole “bubbles” whenever a student or member of staff testing positive has been in close contact with others during their infectious period. The Director of Public Health for the London Borough of Bexley has recommended on balance, that schools may prefer to continue with present arrangements, as this is safer and more practical. Acting on that recommendation, please note:

- *Any student due to continue self-isolation next week must do so. Students arriving at school before the date previously notified for return will be sent home.*
- *If there are further positive tests or staff/students reporting symptoms suggestive of Covid-19, bubbles may be sent home as previously for a 10-day self-isolation period.*

We realise this may be inconvenient and disappointing for some students and their households. The aim is to keep Bexley safe and to end our school year without major disruption, which the introduction of new arrangements at short notice might create.”

2. Similar wording will be included in all Council communications over the next few days, in school’s information and on our website at www.bexley.gov.uk/news
3. NHS Test and Trace will be informed of this advice, so they are aware that contact tracing of Bexley school students is not necessary during the period before Bexley schools break for summer vacations.