



Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

To: All Greenwich Headteachers / Chairs of Governors and Trusts
(By email)

14 December 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I know that you will have seen the letters issued by Greenwich Council to all schools last night, asking them to move to remote education from the end of today, apart from provision for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.

I am deeply disappointed and concerned by the unilateral stance that Greenwich Council has taken and its potentially serious impact on schools, parents, and children, not just in Greenwich but also in surrounding authorities. The government has made clear its commitment that education and childcare settings should continue to remain open to all children during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak and we have prioritised education even in areas of high and very high transmission throughout this term, with no other local authority area in the country taking this extraordinary step.

I would like to restate here my appreciation for the efforts of school leaders, teachers and school support staff across Greenwich for all that you continue to do to provide full time, face to face provision for all pupils during these increasingly challenging times. Your commitment and dedication to ensuring that children get the best education experience possible in the circumstances is inspiring. I know how hard everybody has worked this term to give children the best possible experience in highly challenging circumstances and I would ask that you remain open for all children for these last few days of term. Children have faced a year of extreme disruption already, there will be groups preparing for examinations, and I believe that every day that they are in school is vitally important.

I am acutely aware of the increasing Covid-19 incidence rates in the region and the levels of anxiety and uncertainty in schools and the wider community. I and my officials regularly review regional data alongside the Joint Biosecurity Centre and Public Health England in the region to ensure that we have all the

available evidence. The latest advice from both the Regional Director of Public Health England that the Deputy Chief Medical Officer is that we are not in a position where the scientific and public health advice supports implementation of measures to restrict access to schools for children in Greenwich.

We have seen how across the country many areas with much higher transmission rates than those in Greenwich have kept schools open, working closely with our regional teams and accessing support through this route. My teams are ready to answer questions and help you if required.

I believe there is no place in our response to this pandemic for unilateral action such as Greenwich Council has taken and we must keep schools open for face to face education. Under schedule 17 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, the Secretary of State may make a direction to require schools to enable all pupils to attend full time, other than pupils who are required to self-isolate in accordance with the schools' opening guidance. We will consider using these powers in this instance.

I would appreciate you confirming directly with your school community your intention to remain open for face to face education from tomorrow through to the last scheduled teaching day of term, to ensure no families mistakenly believe their school to be closed.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nick Gibb". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "N".

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