

Report

Report to:	Education Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	19 January 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Education Resources)

Subject:	COVID19 – Education Resources Update
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ provide an update on the Education Resources response to COVID-19 by schools and educational settings and on the new Scottish Government guidance announced on Saturday, 19 December and publication of supplementary guidance on 6 January 2021.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the efforts of staff in schools and educational settings to adapt to the changing guidance and in being agile to respond to these changes whilst ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff be noted;
- (2) that it be noted that the partnership arrangements and protocols in place with NHS Public Health Lanarkshire who lead on the incident management of cases, are operating on a daily basis to ensure the wellbeing of individuals is at the heart of the assessment process for each case;
- (3) that the timeline of new guidance and impact on schools, educational settings, children and young people listed at Appendix 1, be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. Schools and educational settings across South Lanarkshire re-opened to all learners on Wednesday 12 August 2020. This is testament to the work of all staff in schools and nurseries in adhering to safe systems of work, infection control measures, the personal hygiene arrangements, maintaining physical distancing, PPE and the cleaning regimes which are in place to keep staff and all learners safe. We also recognise the significant challenges that occur each day for school and educational settings in complying with Covid19 safe practices and on their involvement in the assessment process of positive cases with NHSL Public Health specialists.
- 3.2. All positive cases which impact on a school or educational setting and involve a member of staff or young person have been subject to a rigorous self-assessment by NHS Lanarkshire Public Health. This may conclude that some people who have been identified as close contacts will have to self-isolate, the extent of the communication required for parents/carers, families and staff, and if necessary, a further clean as an additional precaution or that no further action is required.
- 3.3. The work of schools and educational settings in completing the necessary assessment form required by NHSL Public Health and if necessary, attending the daily on-line

meetings with support from central staff in Education Resources is a core part of the actions taken to keep people safe. The efforts to maintain and sustain this by schools and educational settings deserves to be commended. Education Resources, in partnership with NHSL Public Health, continued with the assessment process over the Christmas and New Year holiday period and to consciously give schools and Head Teachers some respite from the pressures that they have had to deal with in this regard when a positive case occurs.

3.4. NHS Lanarkshire Public Health have deemed, based on the evidence presented at the daily assessment meetings, that almost all positive cases have been community-based transmissions.

3.5 The assessment process of reporting has enabled NHS Lanarkshire Public Health, Education Resources, schools and services to work together to provide clear and coherent outcomes in a timeous matter which by its very nature is dynamic during a pandemic.

4. **Adapting to new guidance and keeping connected**

4.1 Regular information bulletins have been issued from the Executive Director to acknowledge the work and commitment of staff in the front-line in our schools and services as well as keeping them up to date on changes to national guidance. A key aspect being to provide as much clarity as possible to schools and educational settings and other stakeholders on national and health related guidance.

4.2 A series of meetings with Head Teachers has taken place since August 2021 with some focus groups of pupils and parents and regular liaison with the trades unions to hear what has gone well and if there are any changes or improvements people would like to see being made.

4.3 **SQA examinations**

On 7 October 2020, the Scottish Government announced that the national 5 exams will not take place in 2020/21. On 8 December 2020, the Scottish Government announced that both Higher and Advanced Higher examinations will not take place in 2021. Regular dialogue has taken place with secondary school Head Teachers, staff, the professional associations, the trade unions and the SQA on the impact of this decision for pupils, families and staff. South Lanarkshire Education Resources are developing moderation procedures to support schools with making predicated judgements.

4.4 The move to the assessment model as was the case last year, but now with the national lessons learned from the previous year being incorporated means there is a clearer understanding of the moderation process and the principal of equity is a core aspect for 2020/21.

4.5 Following the Scottish Government's announcement on Saturday 19 December 2020 of changes to the opening of schools and educational settings from January 2021 and on the new restrictions associated with Level 4 over the Christmas and the New Year period a special meeting with all Head Teachers was convened on Monday 21 December 2020 in advance of the school holiday on Tuesday, 22 December 2020.

4.6 Further details of the arrangements for the phased re-opening of schools in January 2021 are provided in para 6. COVID-19 School re-opening arrangements for 2021 (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-re-opening-arrangements-for-january-2021/>)

- 4.7 Our staff have worked incredibly hard since August keeping schools open under challenging circumstances. They now face another challenge in terms of moving to a different model of learning at short notice and keeping staff, parents/carers, children and young people and all who support the delivery of education services, like janitors, cleaners, catering staff and other providers, including the professional associations and trades unions, updated and informed has been a significant challenge before schools closed on 22 December 2020.

5. **Arrangements for the phased re-opening of South Lanarkshire Council schools in January 2021**

- 5.1 The First Minister announced on Saturday, 19 December 2020 that arrangements for pupils returning to school in January 2021 have now changed in response to the COVID situation. It is important to note that for all children the guiding principle remains, that if they can learn safely at home, they should. Our duty of care to our most vulnerable children must be balanced carefully with the need to reduce social contact to prevent the spread of the virus between households and across society.

The impact for schools and educational settings in light of the new Scottish Government guidance <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-re-opening-arrangements-for-january-2021/pages/schools-opening-timeline/> was:-

Christmas holiday period

Schools finished for the Christmas holiday on 22 December 2020 and were due to re-open on Wednesday 6 January 2021.

The new guidance stated that **the majority of pupils the holidays have now been extended until Monday 11th January.**

Re-opening of schools in January 2021

The school holidays were extended until Monday 11th January with the following exception:

The exception is for those children who have both parents (or, in the case of a single parent family, the main carer) as designated key workers and who are unable to source alternative childcare.

Children who fall into this category will be able to attend school from **Thursday 7 January** where they will be supervised by staff.

On **Wednesday 6 January 2021**, school staff will return to allow planning to take place for the safe return of children of key workers and vulnerable children.

- 5.2 A keyworker is defined as:
- Health and Care workers directly supporting COVID response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers (small numbers identified as top priority already); staff providing childcare/learning.
 - All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (for example: fire, police, prisons, social workers), as well as those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.

- All workers (private, public or third sector) without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland (but where the response to COVID-19, or the ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running, would not be severely compromised).

5.3 In order to be eligible to access childcare:

- both parents must be keyworkers. (or, in the case of a single parent should meet criteria)
- children should attend only when there are no alternative childcare arrangements
- keyworkers who are able to work from home are not eligible for critical childcare.

5.4 A key worker enrolment form was prepared and families who fall into this category to complete and return this enrolment to the school attended by their child by e-mail prior to 7 January 2021.

5.5 **School Transport**

All existing transport arrangements were in place from 7 January for children of keyworkers.

5.6 **Free school meals**

The Council continued with Free School meal payments for families during the extended holiday period (6 to 8 Jan) and the week of remote learning (11 to 15 Jan).

5.7 **Week Beginning 11th Jan - Online learning**

All other children have access to remote learning during this week which they will access from home. Schools will be in touch with individual arrangements on how children can access learning.

Children of key workers can continue to attend school where they will be helped to access online learning activities.

In addition, schools have made contact with individual families whose children may require access to school for other reasons.

5.8 **Timeline**

A timeline from August 2020, including the new guidance for January 2021 and beyond the and impact on schools, educational settings, children and young people listed at Appendix 1, be noted.

6 **Return to school by pupils**

6.1 The fundamental premise is that education continues on a full-time basis for all children from 11 January 2021. This will comprise a combination of direct interaction, on-line and offline tasks/activities and tutorial support.

6.2 A guidance note for schools has been prepared and distributed to headteachers, and HT meetings on 8 January 2021 provide the opportunity for clarification and discussion.

6.3 Headteachers will continue to oversee communication with parents and be in regular contact to ensure the principles of each school's learning offer is clear and that any individual concerns are dealt with promptly.

7. **Support for School Staff**

7.1 School buildings remain open for staff to access materials and resources and to undertake any work required for the delivery of remote learning that cannot be done at home.

Further training and materials have been provided to staff in the use of technology to support remote learning. This includes access to the bank of video lessons created by the West Partnership as the West Online School (West OS).

- 7.2 School staff are considered as key workers and as such their children can attend school to allow them to undertake their duties as per the conditions in para 6.1.
- 7.3 During the period of remote learning, school staff who are shielding will not attend school and will work from home.
- 7.4 Arrangements are in place for school staff who are otherwise vulnerable eg pregnant teachers in the 3rd trimester. Schools were asked to revisit their individual risk assessments and further temporary adjustments may be possible during the period of remote learning eg limiting/removing a member of staff from the supervision rota.

8. Remote Learning

- 8.1. The remote learning offer is intended to replicate a normal school day, in as far as it is possible and reasonable to do so.
- 8.2. There is an expectation that schools will provide high quality learning experiences during this period.
 - All schools have already agreed the principles of a robust and well-thought-out remote learning offer ready to be delivered.
 - All schools have access to support materials provided by the CQIS as well as information contained on the SLC2 website.
 - All SLC teachers also now have access to an ever-increasing catalogue of pre-recorded video lessons as part of the West Partnership online school (West OS) accessible via GLOW.

9 Test and Protect over the Christmas and New Year period

- 9.1 Positive school cases of COVID19 over the holiday period, continued to be assessed by NHS Lanarkshire (NHS) Public Health specialists, with the support of South Lanarkshire Council Education Headquarters (HQ) staff, to investigate and identify close contacts. This activity was ongoing from when schools closed on Tuesday 22 December 2020 until they returned on Wednesday 6th January 2021.
- 9.2 This arrangement took place for all schools and educational settings across Lanarkshire and was agreed by the Covid19 Pan Lanarkshire Tactical Group with assessment meetings in place for schools and also for premises and businesses via Environmental Health staff.

10. Employee Implications

- 10.1. There no pending employee implications arising from the recommendations in this report. However, Education Resources continues to monitor the impact of staff absences related to Covid19 as well as other absences as part of our workforce planning arrangements with weekly review meetings taking place. This enables Education Resources in partnership with Personnel Services to look at trends and to manage any potential cover requirements required to help keep schools and educational settings open.

11 Financial Implications

- 11.1. There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

12 Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 12.1. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environment in terms of the information contained in this report.

13. Other Implications

- 13.1 The requirement to update risk assessments is set out in the Scottish Government guidance and steps have been taken to do this as the safety and wellbeing of all adults, children and young people is paramount.

14. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 14.1. This report does not present a new strategy, policy or plan and is therefore not subject to equality impact assessment.
- 14.2. Consultation has taken place with a wide range of stakeholders on a variety during the period of school Closure including children and young people, parents, staff and unions in a range of areas such as digital access, safe return to school, emergency childcare, access to free school meals.

Tony McDaid

Executive Director (Education Resources)

11 January 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- Increase achievement, raise educational attainment and support lifelong learning
- Protect vulnerable children, young people and adults

Previous References

Education Committee – October 2020

List of Background Papers

- COVID-19 School re-opening arrangements for 2021
(<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-re-opening-arrangements-for-january-2021/>)
- Education Resources Local Phasing Delivery Plan
- Scottish Government Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020.

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:

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Information update and timeline of new guidance

- 1.1 August 2021
The national guidance on the re-opening of schools highlighted, that *'we do not expect the return to school in August to be a return to normality'*. It was important that both staff and pupils had the opportunity to become familiar with the new layouts in their school, introduce hygiene practice of washing or sanitising, implement arrangements for entering and exiting, lunch and interval breaks and new routines. The Local Phasing Delivery Plan was reviewed to consider the implications of this change.
- 1.2 On 26 August 2020 the Scottish Government issued guidance on the mandatory wearing of face masks for staff and pupils in secondary schools when entering and leaving the building and when moving around in corridors, communal areas and on school transport.
- 1.3 On 23 September 2020 further advice was provided to schools and educational settings on the arrangements around the restrictions in place for visitors which takes account of the national directive which still includes the exclusion of parents/carers from entering school premises, except for a specific and agreed purpose and as well as other potential visitors.
- 1.4 On 30 September 2020 one of the most significant changes affecting household members who were asked to self-isolate if they were identified as a close contact came into effect. This means that no longer is there a requirement for all household members of those identified as close contacts to self-isolate, which is warmly welcomed by families.
- 1.5 On the 7 October 2020 the Scottish Government announced further details on the wearing of face masks in the workplace including for schools and other settings.
- 1.6 On 7 October 2020 the Scottish Government announced that the national 5 exams will not take place in 2020/21.
- 1.7 On 8 December 2020 the Scottish Government announced that both Higher and Advanced Higher examinations will not take place on 2021.
- 1.8 December – General announcement on introduction of new restrictions for Scotland – moving to Level 4 and the implications for Christmas and into the new year.
- 1.9 On 21 December 2020 the Scottish Government published new guidance entitled, COVID-19 School re-opening arrangements for 2021 (*refer to para 5 of this report for more details on the arrangements*)
(<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-re-opening-arrangements-for-january-2021/>)
- 1.10 From 5 January to 8 January 2021, attendance in schools should be restricted to vulnerable children and children of key workers only.
- 1.11 The school holiday period has effectively been extended for all other children (i.e. those not meeting the definitions of vulnerable children, or children of key workers) until Monday 11 January 2021.

- 1.12 From Monday 11 January to Friday 29 January, vulnerable children and the children of key workers will continue to attend school in-person. Schools will switch from offering childcare and wellbeing support to learning and teaching on 11 January for these groups (attendance in schools should be restricted to all necessary staff, vulnerable children and children of key workers).
- 1.13 All other pupils should be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning during the period from Monday 11 January to Friday 29 January.
- 1.14 A review of these arrangements will be undertaken by the Scottish Government on Monday 18 January, taking into account the latest evidence about the new variant and progress in reducing community transmission levels.
- 1.15 Arrangements for the period from Monday 1 February onwards will be communicated at the earliest opportunity to local authorities by the Scottish Government following this review.

Please find attached the final version of the updated supplementary guidance which has just issued (6th January 2021) and which can be found online here: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): school re-opening arrangements for January 2021 - gov.scot](#) (www.gov.scot).