

Report

Report to:	Education Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	31 August 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Education Resources)

Subject:	COVID19 Update for Schools and Educational Settings (August 2021)
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ provide an update on the impact of the updated national guidance developed by the Scottish Government which is based on current scientific advice and designed to support a safe return to school for children, young people and staff in August 2021.

2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) the Scottish Government guidance to support a safe return to school for children, young people and staff; be noted
- (2) that the changes to the self-isolation rules requiring whole classes or groupings of pupils to self-isolate as close contacts is no longer required in normal circumstances and the guidance provided to schools, staff, parents and carers prior to the start of the new term, be noted, and
- (3) 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.

3. Background

3.1. The Scottish Government updated guidance to support the safe return to for children young people and staff with schools and educational settings across South Lanarkshire re-opening to all learners on Monday 16 August 2021 and teachers returning on Thursday 12 and Friday 13 August 2021 to help them prepare in advance of the start of the new term.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/pages/1-1-introduction-and-what-to-do-if-you-are-a-teacher-or-staff-member-in-a-school-or-educational-setting.aspx)

3.2. The safety and wellbeing of staff and all learners continues to be paramount and schools and educational settings have learned their experiences in having to adapt throughout the period of the pandemic.

- 3.3. Health and safety sits at the heart of the Council's approach and plans, with risk assessments and infection prevention and control measures in place. Hand sanitisers continue to be available at the entrances and in all appropriate areas across schools. Secondary schools have hand sanitisers available in all classrooms and in primary schools all classrooms with sinks will enable children to handwash regularly.
- 3.4. Enhanced cleaning routines continue to be implemented and clear signage is in place throughout school buildings to reinforce the infection prevention and control measures.

4. Information Update and New Guidance

- 4.1. The Scottish Government Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues advised in August 2021 that local authorities should adopt a "precautionary, staged approach to the removal of mitigations".

- 4.2. The preventative measures we have taken will continue to take to mitigate against the spread of the coronavirus, as we move forward into the new session. It should also be noted that there is some relaxation of the measures for schools and educational settings and these have been implemented for the start of the new term.

4.3. Testing

- 4.3.1. All staff and secondary aged pupils were strongly encouraged to restart, and then continue, their twice-weekly at home Lateral Flow Device testing prior to the start of the new term and to enter their results, positive or negative, into the NHS portal. LFD test kits are available free from schools and local pharmacies.

4.4. Physical Distancing/Bubbles

- 4.4.1. Previous arrangements for creating smaller groups in schools commonly known as 'bubbles' are no longer required. However, we continue to encourage appropriate physical distancing, where possible, to further minimise any risk. This means schools will avoid bringing children and young people together in large groups and, for example, this means there will be no large assemblies for an initial period.

- 4.4.2. One metre physical distancing between adults, and between adults and children and young people, is still a requirement in the school estate. However, as schools already have physical distancing arrangements that work well and do not limit capacity, staff continue with two metre distancing arrangements, where possible.

4.5. Self-isolation Rules

- 4.5.1. Overall, there is a welcome change to the self-isolation rules. The approach of requiring whole classes or groupings of pupils to self-isolate as close contacts is no longer required in normal circumstances.

- 4.5.2. There is no longer the need to isolate whole groups of children and contact tracing will be undertaken by Test & Protect (T&P). If someone is identified by T&P as being a close contact the following new rules apply:-

- **Children aged 5 to 18 years** will not have to isolate for 10 days, so long as they remain asymptomatic and have a negative PCR.
- **Under 5's** will not have to isolate so long as they remain asymptomatic but there is no mandatory requirement for them to have a negative PCR.
- **Adults** who are double vaccinated (and 14 days have passed since their second vaccination) and have a negative PCR will no longer have to isolate if they are a contact of a positive case.

4.5.3. Attached as appendix 1 is a copy of the letter from NHSL Public Health which explains the new procedure with regards to self-isolation in schools and educational establishments. This was provided to all schools/establishments in advance of pupils returning on the 16 August 2021 and made available to all parents/carers/families via school based and the council's social media channels.

4.6. **Face-coverings**

4.6.1. Face coverings continue to be worn by adults wherever they cannot keep a 2m distance from other adults and/or children and young people (unless exempt) :-

Adults

- All adults in communal areas of primary schools and early years establishments
- Parents and other visitors including parents at drop-off and pick-up.
- Early Learning and Childcare staff do not need to wear face coverings when interacting with nursery children.

Pupils

- All pupils in secondary schools are expected to wear a face-covering during class and in communal areas.

School transport

- In line with the current arrangements for public transport, **only young people aged 12 and over and adults** are required to wear face-coverings on school transport. (previously aged 5 and above).

4.7. **Ventilation**

4.7.1. Housing and Technical Resources have already been undertaking targeted and sample CO² monitoring, with assistance from school staff, and had planned to continue this good practice with on-going monitoring of classrooms across the school estate this year.

4.7.2. The new guidance makes reference to improving and increasing access to CO² monitoring. This is in order to support the goal of all buildings, including learning and teaching spaces, being assessed for ventilation issues with a view to remedial action being taken where required. Local Authorities have now been tasked with completing this work by the start of the October break, wherever possible, subject to any issues regarding supply of CO² monitors.

4.7.3. In South Lanarkshire, with our new estate, the practice of ventilation is one which has been at the forefront of our safety and infrastructure guidance and Education Resources and Housing and Technical Resources will continue to review and take forward any recommendations and actions to acquire Co2 monitors.

4.7.4. The importance of good ventilation is a key mitigating factor and a short film produced previously for staff was re-issued to all schools in August 2021.

<https://youtu.be/8Qmcs0kH-0Y>

4.8. **Vaccinations**

4.8.1. We are now seeing the vaccine offered to everyone aged 16 and over and, in line with JCVI guidance, it has also been offered to some young people from key groups who are aged between 12 to 15 years.

- 4.8.2. All 16-17 year olds can now get their COVID-19 vaccine appointment through advertised channels.
- 4.8.3. It is recognised that the arrangements on safe systems of work, risk assessments, classroom organisation and in most cases, consistency of physical distancing, our cleaning regimes and the knowledge presented by heads of establishments on the arrangements in place for their respective establishment, has been the bedrock for ensuring our schools remained open despite some major challenges in applying and adapting to the ever-changing landscape due to the coronavirus pandemic.
- 4.8.4. A jointly agreed protocol is still in place with NHS Lanarkshire Public Health for reporting on and acting quickly to any health-related matter which may impact on a school or educational setting.
- 4.8.5. Ongoing communication and engagement with stakeholders, including headteachers of primary, secondary and additional support needs schools, representatives of the professional associations and unions, continues to take place and detailed advice was provided to schools and education establishments including revised risk assessments in time for them reopening.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1. The Scottish Government will review the position again towards the end of September with an expectation that will be a further relaxation of other Covid-19 mitigation practices after this 6 week period.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. There no pending employee implications arising from the recommendations in this report. However, Education Resources will in partnership with Personnel Services look at trends and to manage any potential cover requirements required to help keep schools and educational settings open.

7. Financial Implications

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

8. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

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

9. Other Implications

- 9.1. 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.

10. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 10.1. This report does not present a new strategy, policy or plan and is, therefore, not subject to equality impact assessment.
- 10.2. Consultation and engagement has taken place with a wide range of stakeholders in order to provide schools, educational settings, parents/carers, families, staff and both the professional associations and trades unions with information on the impact of the new guidance.

Tony McDaid
Executive Director (Education Resources)

12 August 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 Resources Committee – 16 March 2021

List of Background Papers

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\).](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx)

Contact for Further Information

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

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