

Report

Report to:	Education Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	8 February 2022
Report by:	Executive Director (Education Resources)

Subject:	COVID19 Guidance Update for Schools and Educational Settings (5 January 2022)
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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 Scottish Government guidance published in January 2022 in response to the Omicron variant for schools and educational settings.

2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) the Scottish Government guidance for schools and educational settings, published on the 5 January 2022 in light of the emergence of the Omicron variant and the key mitigations highlighted in appendix 1, be noted;
- (2) that the further changes to the self-isolation policy that came into effect on 6 January 2022 along with the need for children, young people and staff to continue to implement and strictly observe the health mitigation; be noted, and
- (3) that the efforts of staff in schools and educational settings to adapt to the changing guidance when they returned from their Christmas and new year break and in being agile and flexible to enact these changes to help ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff, be noted.

3. Background

3.1. The Scottish Government published on 5 January 2022 revised guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools. The revised guidance superseded that in place during 2021. Following the emergence of the Omicron variant, the national Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues, as well as senior clinicians, published new guidance based upon the latest clinical and public health assessment of the pandemic.

[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)

3.2. 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".

3.3. It is worth highlighting that during the period from the start of the new academic year in August 2021, a range of restrictions remained in place for schools and educational

settings, which includes visitors to schools including parents/carers and in avoiding assemblies and other large gatherings.

- 3.4. With the safety and wellbeing of staff and learners continuing to be a priority, all local authorities were asked to implement the new guidance and to strengthen mitigations as part of a society-wide drive to minimise the spread of the virus when schools re-opened after the Christmas and new year break.
- 3.5. Health and safety sits at the heart of the Council's approach and plans, with risk assessments already in place, had to be amended accordingly. Infection prevention and control measures like sanitisers continue to be available at the entrances and in all appropriate areas across schools. The message about the importance of regular washing of hands continues to be a public health message which has been shared with schools and educational settings.
- 3.6. Enhanced cleaning routines continue to be undertaken and clear signage is in place throughout school buildings to reinforce the infection prevention and control measures.

4. Information Update and new Guidance for Schools (5 January 2022)

- 4.1. It is widely recognised that the pandemic continues to bring fresh challenges not only for those who work in education, but also across the NHS, social care, other critical services and businesses in a climate where absences are significantly greater than normal.
- 4.2. The First Minister gave an update in the Scottish Parliament about the impact of the virus on 5 January 2022. In this update we also heard of the changes to self-isolation periods which are based on scientific and medical advice and the notice that they would be effective from midnight on 5 January 2021. A summary of the key mitigations for reference is provided in Appendix 1.
- 4.3. The guidance on 5 January 2022 supplemented significantly the guidance provided for schools on 17 December 2021 which were introduced following the emergence of the Omicron variant.
- 4.4. The changes to self-isolation guidance are summarised below and we will work closely with NHSL to amend the current set of letters that they provide to our schools and educational settings. These changes are effective from the start of the school day on Thursday, 6 January 2022.
 - (1) **Positive cases** are advised to self-isolate for 10 days. However, if the individual returns two consecutive negative LFD tests taken at least 24 hours apart with the first test no earlier than day 6 they may end isolation before the end of the 10-day period if they have no fever.
 - (2) **Close contacts** who are fully vaccinated, having received 3 doses of the vaccination (plus 14 days) or are aged under 18 years and 4 months, can take daily LFD tests for 7 days instead of isolation - provided the tests are negative and they remain without symptoms. If someone has not received 3 doses of the vaccination, they will need to book a PCR test and even if this is a negative result, they will need to isolate for 10 days.
 - (3) **Advice on confirmatory PCR tests** where people test positive on a lateral flow device (LFD) test they are now not advised to get a PCR test to confirm infection, but to follow isolation advice as it applies to them as a positive case (see point 1)

– there is an exception for people who may be eligible for the Self-Isolation Support Grant who are advised to take a PCR test to ensure they can confirm their infection to be potentially eligible for financial support.

- 4.5. These changes and this approach were brought in to achieve a 'more proportionate, more sustainable and less restrictive' response to the pandemic. In addition, Education Resources worked in partnership with NHSL Public health to produce a new set of 'information letters' for parents/carers on the self-isolation rules when there is a positive Covid-19 case and these were issued on 11 January 2022.
- 4.6. However, it is important that in all of our schools and educational settings, we continue with our established risk assessments and infection prevention control measures, including distancing where appropriate, the wearing of masks and undertaking regular LFD tests (as per Scottish Government guidance) to help keep everyone as safe as possible.
- 4.7. Education Resources and Corporate Personnel continue to monitor the pattern of absences in schools and services and for management action to be taken to provide cover wherever possible noting that, as a mitigation, the Council had agreed previously to employ and deploy extra teaching staff.

5. Testing

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

6. Minimise Contacts / Groupings

- 6.1. Minimising contacts through the use of groupings should be introduced in indoor spaces to help reduce the vectors of transmission. As part of a strengthened approach to minimising contacts, schools are to 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. Headteachers are empowered to make decisions about the best approach for their individual school.
- 6.2. Preliminary examinations remain permitted provided they are held in accordance with the guidance and risk assessed.
- 6.3. Paragraphs 29 to 36 provide details on the restrictions still in place with regard to school visitors. It is imperative that all such visitors to schools should be agreed in advance and arrangements made appropriately. Noting that Parent Council and Parent Teacher Association meetings should not meet on school premises, and virtual meetings should take place instead.

7. Face-Coverings

- 7.1. 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).

8. Ventilation and Heating

- 8.1. Previous guidance on ventilation continues to apply. Housing and Technical Resources have been undertaking targeted and sample CO² monitoring, with assistance from school staff with on-going monitoring of classrooms and learning and teaching areas.
- 8.2. Local Authorities were tasked with completing this work by the start of the October break, wherever possible, subject to any issues regarding the supply of CO² monitors. A one-day assessment of CO₂ monitoring in all school teaching spaces took place prior to 11 October 2021.
- 8.3. The Council has undertaken to continue a programme of monitoring CO₂ levels in learning spaces through the remainder of the school year, until June 2022, and further guidance will be provided directly to schools on this by Housing and Technical Resources by the end of January 2022.
- 8.4. In addition, and in line in the updated guidance of January 2022, the Council has made arrangements to purchase more CO₂ monitors for all schools and early learning centres to enable them to conduct assessments for a minimum of one full day a week under normal occupancy.
- 8.5. Education Resources and Housing and Technical Resources will continue to work together and to take forward any recommendations and actions in relation to heating and ventilation.

9. Vaccinations

- 9.1. The uptake of the vaccinations of those children aged between 12 and 15 years of age in line with JCVI guidance, is

Covid Vaccination Uptake (12 - 15 Years Old)		
Within Scotland	Within NHS Lanarkshire	Within South Lanarkshire
66.2%	62.3%	66.8%

Date of data 18/1/22

- 9.2. All 16–17-year-olds can now get their COVID-19 vaccine appointment through advertised channels.

10. Keeping People Safe

- 10.1. The essence of the approach by the Council, its partners and through the leadership in our schools and those on the front-line like teachers, support staff, early years workers, janitors, cleaners, catering staff and others is to keep people safe.
- 10.2. The challenge in adapting to the mitigations, the changes to self-isolation rules and in implementing the new guidance at short notice should not be under-estimated.

Some major challenges in applying and adapting to the ever-changing landscape due to omicron and the pandemic still lie ahead and none more so in trying to keep schools and nurseries open when staff absences are rising. It is a credit to the staff in our schools that we were able to open all schools on 5 January 2022.

- 10.3. However, at the time of writing this report and whilst the mitigations remain in place for schools and educational settings, there is also hope that, with the continued roll-out of the vaccination programme, there is some light with the numbers of learners and staff absences beginning to show some improvement.
- 10.4. 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.
- 10.5. Ongoing communication and engagement with stakeholders, including headteachers of primary, secondary and additional support needs schools, early years, representatives of the professional associations and unions, continues to take place and information shared on the guidance and changes to self-isolation rules, including revised risk assessments during January 2021.
- 10.6. The preventative measures which have been taken in our schools and educational settings will hopefully continue to take to mitigate against the spread of the coronavirus, in the coming months.

11. Next Steps

- 11.1. The Scottish Government will continue to keep under review the position for schools and educational settings. Noting also that the Care Inspectorate published guidance on 11 January 2022 on adult to child ratios to address potential staff absence and this will be reviewed on 18 February 2022.

12. Employee Implications

- 12.1. There no pending employee implications arising from the recommendations in this report. However, Education Resources continue, in partnership with Personnel Services, to monitor staff absences and the cover requirements required to help keep schools open.

13. Financial Implications

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

14. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

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

15. Other Implications

- 15.1. 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.

16. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 16.1. This report does not present a new strategy, policy or plan and is, therefore, not subject to equality impact assessment.
- 16.2. Consultation and engagement has taken place with a wide range of stakeholders in order to provide schools, educational settings, parents/carers, families, staff, the

professional associations and trades unions with information on the implications of the new guidance.

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Executive Director (Education Resources)

20 January 2022

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 – August 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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Appendix 1

A summary of the key mitigations in the revised guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools (Version 7.2: 5 January 2022)

The table below summarises the current approach for key mitigations:

Mitigation	Status
Risk assessment	Retain
Encouragement of vaccination	Retain (note updated eligibility following JCVI advice)
Environmental cleaning	Retain
Hand and respiratory hygiene	Retain
PPE in specific circumstances	Retain
Face coverings in communal areas	Retain
Face coverings in secondary classrooms	Retain
Physical distancing for adults	Retain
One-way systems	Retain
Staggered drop-off and pick-up	Retain
Staggered start and stop times/ break and lunch times	Retain
Restrictions on assemblies	Retain
Support for people in the highest risk groups	Retain
Support for pregnant staff	Retain
2x weekly at-home asymptomatic testing	Retain
Outbreak management	Retain
Self-isolation, contact tracing and testing for adults 18+	Update in line with latest advice
Self-isolation, contact tracing and testing for U18s	Update in line with latest advice

Mitigation	Status
Minimise contacts	Proportionate reintroduction
Ventilation	Strengthen
Restrictions on school visitors	Proportionate reintroduction
Restrictions on Drama, Music, PE and Dance	Not required
School Transport	Retain
Limits on school trips	Proportionate reintroduction
Readiness and assurance	Retain
Residential accommodation	Retain