

Report

Report to:	Education Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	16 March 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 including the phased return of children to nursery and school.

2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) to recognise the efforts of staff in schools and educational settings to continue to adapt to the changing guidance and in being agile to respond to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff be noted; and
- (2) that the partnership arrangements and protocols in place with NHS Public Health Lanarkshire who lead on the incident management of cases, continues to operate on a daily basis to ensure the wellbeing of individuals is at the heart of the assessment process for each case, is noted; and
- (3) the arrangements for welcoming children and young people back to nursery and school from 22 February 2021, be noted; and
- (4) that the First Minister's announcement on 2 March 2021 on the return of all primary pupils full-time and all secondary pupils part-time to schools from 15 March 2021, be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. Schools and nurseries welcomed, on a phased basis, the return of some children on Monday 22 February 2021. This included the return of all children in early years, P1-P3 children, some senior pupils (S4-S6) for essential practical work and a limited increase in the provision for vulnerable children.
- 3.2. Schools were also required to support vulnerable children and those of key workers and to continue to provide remote learning to those learners who are at home.
- 3.3. This return has taken place as a result of the hard work, commitment and dedication of staff in schools and nurseries in preparing for the return children and young people. With a focus on adherence 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. With learning also taking place at home for those not in school.

3.4. A separate report on remote learning is on the agenda for this Education Resources Committee.

3.5. *Digital inclusion*

At the last Education Resources Committee on 19 January 2021 an update was provided on the steps taken to widen digital access for children and young people to support remote learning. A further update at March 2021 shows the Council has invested £1.46m to provide 5544 chromebooks and over 800 connectivity solutions.

4. **Next steps**

Arrangements for the continued phase of pupils returning to school

4.1. The First Minister announced on Tuesday, 23 February 2021 that, as part of the Strategic Framework for recovery, priority will be given to the return of other groups of pupils to school, which will be predicated on the suppression of the virus.

4.2. The indications are that based on the medical and health guidance it is expected that the following children will return to school from Monday 15 March 2021:-

- P4-P7 children in primary school
- An increased phased return for some senior phase pupils (S4-S6)

4.3. It is important to note that for other 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.

4.4. A copy of the advisory note from the Coronavirus (COVID19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues – advice on mitigations to minimise transmission during the phased return to in-person learning is provided via this link. [Coronavirus \(COVID19\): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues – advice on mitigations to minimise transmission during phased return to in-person learning - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/education/childrensissues/coronavirus-advice)

4.5. On 2 March 2021, the First Minister announced the return of all primary pupils full-time and all secondary pupils part-time to schools from 15 March 2021. We will be developing plans with our schools and nurseries on the continued phased return of children and further details will be provided to staff, parents and carers.

4.6. Guidance has now been received in response to the First Minister's statement to the Scottish Parliament on 2 March concerning the Phase 2 return to school. It is intended to provide support for local authorities and secondary schools on providing arrangements for senior phase learners to return to school (from the week commencing 15 March 2021, and conditional on continued progress on suppressing infection rates). It builds on the Phase 1 return to school which commenced on 22 February and included limited numbers of senior phase learners to allow for essential practical work.

4.7. The following Principles are the guides for local authorities and schools in planning their provision for learning:

- *Schools are best placed to decide on timetable arrangements based on their detailed local knowledge of learners, their choices within courses, accommodation availability and school transport.*
- *Schools should communicate the rationale for in-school and remote learning to parents, carers and learners. Communication should also include detailing the*

Covid-19 mitigations to be followed, all aspects of the existing guidance and accompanying mitigations continue to apply, and how the new requirement for 2m physical distancing will work.

- *Within the blended learning arrangements, schools should prioritise in-school learning for Senior Phase learners to ensure that they have a secure foundation and course coverage prior to any formal assessment for a range of qualifications (for example NQs, NPAs, SfWs and FAs and others) taking place in the later stages of the 2020/21 academic session.*
- *Schools should prioritise subject areas and cohorts of learners where there is greatest need as identified by the school, for example, targeted support for learners who may struggle with the transition back to secondary school or to allow access to practical facilities to support certification.*

4.8. To facilitate the above, schools may need to consider any adaptations required to the offer of remote delivery. Guidance on [remote learning](#), including principles and entitlements, was published on 8 January. Education Scotland and partners are extending the National e-Learning Offer across S1-3 to provide an increased range of live, recorded and other materials to support practitioners in preparing remote learning.

- *Make best use of the building and space out learners to ensure they adhere to the requirement for 2m physical distancing. Be clear as to routines for the safe entry and exit to the school building.*
- *Schools should minimise, wherever possible, the general flow of learners around the school through the day.*
- *Consideration should be given to the use of other facilities to support in-school learning such a gym-halls and community centres, if possible.*

4.9. Local authorities and schools were invited to use this guidance in developing their own arrangements for learners across S1-6 to spend some time in school from 15 March until the Easter break. Schools are best placed to determine the local arrangements that reflect the Key Principles and other advice set out in the guidance. They can also explain clearly to learners, parents and carers the rationale and detailed practical arrangements for learners across the relevant subject areas.

4.10. Education Resources will continue to support schools with their preparations and plans in providing clear communications through schools for staff, learners, parents and carers.

5. Adapting to new guidance and keeping connected

5.1. 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 parents/carers and other stakeholders on the phased return of children and on the national and health related guidance designed to keep people safe.

5.2. A series of meetings with Head Teachers and Heads of Early Years establishments has taken place with regards to the planning of a phased return of children and on remote learning. Regular liaison with the trades unions has taken place and they have been key partners in working with the Council in helping to shape and influence our

planning and safe systems of work with the safety of staff and learners being at the heart of discussions.

- 5.3. Around 100 parents/carers and representatives of Parent Councils also joined the on-line forum with the Executive Director of Education to hear about what matters to them and to share what was being done in terms of remote learning, assessments of senior phase pupils and our preparations for a safe return of pupils.
- 5.4. 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. All positive cases continue to be assessed and all identified close contacts should now seek a PCR test as per Public Health guidance with this information now included in their written communications to individuals.

6. Testing and vaccination

- 6.1. On 3 February 2021, the Scottish Government advised on the roll-out of the Covid19 asymptomatic testing programme as part of a package of risk reduction mitigations in schools and educational settings.
- 6.2. The request made by the Scottish Government to local authorities was to seek their support with the roll-out of Lateral Test home-kits for:
 - all primary, secondary and ASN school staff (including school-based early learning and childcare staff); and
 - all senior phase pupils (S4-S6)
- 6.3. The introduction of lateral testing drew on the learning from the pathfinder pilot of PCR testing of school staff across 8 schools from across Scotland one of which was Uddingston Grammar for a 4 week period.
- 6.4. The delivery of the lateral home test kits and the national on-line portal for recording results was completed during the week ahead of schools reopening on 22 February 2021. Ongoing monitoring is taking place at a national level through the Department of Health and Social Care (UK) as well as through Test and Protect and NHSL in partnership with Education Resources. This approach will help to identify asymptomatic positive cases and their close contacts earlier than before.
- 6.5. The Scottish Government has confirmed that arrangements are also being made to roll-out the lateral testing kits to standalone nurseries and partner providers and childcare settings as the next stage in what is a Scottish wide programme.
- 6.6. *Vaccinations*
Over 600 staff from education who directly support children with severe and complex healthcare needs took up the offer of the vaccine during the week beginning 8 February 2021. This was part of a Health Protection Scotland programme to mitigate the risks to our most vulnerable children and their carers in a school setting.

7. SQA examinations

- 7.1. As reported previously to the Education Resources Committee on 7 October 2020, the Scottish Government announced that the national 5 exams will not take place in 2020/21. Then, on 8 December 2020, the Scottish Government announced that both Higher and Advanced Higher examinations will not take place in 2021.

- 7.2. South Lanarkshire Education Resources continue to develop and adapt the moderation procedures to support schools with making predicated judgements with the principal of equity built in as a core aspect for 2020/21.
- 7.3. A further update on the assessment and moderation process to support the national qualifications of learners in the senior phase is provided in a separate report to the Education Resources Committee.
- 8. Guidance for supporting Vulnerable Children and Young People**
- 8.1. Guidance for supporting vulnerable children and young people was issued to schools educational settings in January 2021, recognising that vulnerability derives from family circumstances, developmental and medical conditions and environmental factors affecting a child's wellbeing. This guidance also included advice on re-engaging children on the school roll who were not attending for a variety of reasons due to the pandemic.
- 8.2. A web link to the support being offered to families in terms of keeping connected, mental health and wellbeing through the Psychological Services Team is https://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/info/200185/supporting_your_child/1947/supporting_your_child_with_learning_from_home
- 9. School Transport**
- 9.1. The new advice is that dedicated school transport should be regarded as an extension of the school estate. The advice on physical distancing in respect of school transport has now been confirmed as **1 metre** distancing and 2m when inside the building. Discussions continue to take place with transport providers on this matter
- 10. Free school meals**
- 10.1. The Council continues with Free School meal payments for families whose children are not back at school.
- 11. Ventilation**
- 11.1. Ventilation has been looked at by the SAGE Environmental and Modelling Group in terms of actions to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. In partnership with Housing and Technical Resources, Education Resources issued guidance and a supporting video to schools and educational settings as part of the safety and infrastructure guidance issued prior to the 22 February 2021 return date for pupils.
- 12. Employee Implications**
- 12.1. There are 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.
- 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 has taken place with a wide range of stakeholders on a variety of matters 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. Engagement with pupils, parent/carers, families and a wide range of stakeholders will continue throughout this period as we plan for a phased return of more pupils back to school.

Tony McDaid
Executive Director (Education Resources)

4 March 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.
- Education Scotland: Phase 2 of the return to in-person learning: Guidance for preparing in-school and remote learning for S1-S6 (3 March 2021)

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 was effectively 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 was undertaken by the Scottish Government on Monday 18 January 2021, taking into account the latest evidence about the new variant and progress in reducing community transmission levels.
- 1.15 Local authorities were asked to note that arrangements for the period from Monday 1 February 2021 onwards would be communicated at the earliest opportunity by the Scottish Government following the review as highlighted in the para above.
- 1.16 On 12 February 2021 the Scottish Government announced that schools and nurseries would re-open on a phased basis for some children on Monday 22 February 2021. This included the return of all children in early years, P1-P3 children, some senior pupils (S4-S6) for essential practical work and a limited increase in the provision for vulnerable children.
- 1.17 12 February 2021 – publication of the advice and guidance from the Coronavirus (COVID19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children’s Issues – advice on mitigations to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 during the phased return to in-person learning in schools and early learning and childcare (ELC) settings.
- 1.18 The First Minister announced on Tuesday, 23 February 2021 that as part of the Strategic Framework for recovery that priority will be given to the return of other groups of pupils to school, which will be predicated on the suppression of the virus
- 1.19 2 March 2021 the First Minister announces the return of all primary pupils full-time and all secondary pupils part-time to schools from 15 March 2021. We will be developing plans with our schools and nurseries on the continued phased return of children and further details will be provided to staff, parents and carers.
- 1.20 On 3 March 2021, local authorities received the new guidance in a publication entitled: Education Scotland: Phase 2 of the return to in-person learning: Guidance for preparing in-school and remote learning for S1-S6 (3 March 2021).