

18 February 2021

Education and Learning Directorate

The Bridge
 Glasgow Road
 Dumfries
 DG2 9AW

Dear Parent/Carer

PHASED RETURN TO IN-SCHOOL LEARNING

I hope all families enjoyed the mid-term break, having some time away from remote learning even though we could not stray far from our homes.

I wrote to all parents on 11 February where I set out what was planned for Dumfries and Galloway schools from 22 February, recognising that this would be finalised by the Scottish Government on 16 February. The First Minister confirmed in Parliament on 16 February that in-school learning would return on a phased basis from 22 February, beginning with early years and Primary 1–3, who will return full time, and small groups from the senior phase (S4-S6), who will have access to school buildings to undertake essential practical work. There are some exceptions around very small schools where there are staffing pressures and we are working with Headteachers to balance the arrangements for in-school and remote learning in these circumstances.

Thank you for all you are doing to support your child's learning. We have heard from our schools how good the response has been to remote learning; I hope that you have found the communication and advice from your school to be supportive. I know some children have enjoyed learning at home, some have found it very hard – and, as parents, we have had to juggle work too. Overall, I have seen lots of activity across social media of the great work being done by children, young people and families. We are all learning what works well, and how we can build on this for the pupils who are not coming back to face-to-face learning just yet. We all hope it will be not be too long before we can all be back together.

The Scottish Government has published updated guidance which sets out the arrangements for school education in February/March 2021 and we have set out some of these links on our website. Our Headteachers and staff will be working on what this means for their own school and I have asked them to keep you up-to-date. Thank you to the Dumfries and Galloway Parent Council Forum for helping us share messages and letting us know where we need to do more.

This letter sets out the general arrangements applicable to all schools:

STAGE/GROUP	ARRANGEMENTS FROM 22 FEBRUARY
Early Learning & Childcare - schools and funded providers	Full-time return for all children on 22/02/21, based on previous attendance patterns. There will be a phased approach for those children who were scheduled to start for the first time after Christmas. As before, children will form "bubbles" where they are grouped together to minimise interaction and reduce infection transmission risks. Headteachers will contact you with specific information in the coming days.

P1-P3	Full-time return for all children on 22/02/21. As before, children will remain in their class groups with interaction between groups kept to a minimum, again to reduce infection transmission risks
P4-S3	Continue with remote learning at home for the time being. Plans for the next phase of the return to in-school learning will be announced by the Scottish Government in the weeks ahead.
S4-S6	All pupils will continue with remote learning at home. In addition, for small groups at a time, access to the school building will be arranged only to complete essential, practical work as part of national qualifications. The Scottish Government has capped attendance at a maximum of 8% of the school roll on any one day. Individual schools are currently working on detailed plans for limited access to school buildings for senior phase pupils. Headteachers will contact you with specific information in the coming days.
Children of key workers / vulnerable children P4-S6	Continue to access school as before, following the same pattern as previously. For key workers the principle remains that, in line with Government advice, this facility is only to be used in exceptional circumstances, on days where families have no alternative option.
Children and young people at the highest clinical risk	Children and young people at the highest clinical risk (individuals on the shielding list) have also been advised by the Chief Medical Officer not to attend school or regulated childcare services during lockdown. Parents can consult with their child's secondary care (hospital) clinical team who may advise that an individualised risk assessment could be undertaken with the school or childcare provision and arrangements put in place which may allow your child to continue to attend when establishments re-open.

Clearly, whilst the situation is improving gradually, the virus has not gone away and as such we need to be more vigilant than ever in continuing to take steps to ensure we keep transmission levels as low as possible. The paragraphs below set out the general arrangements which will be applicable to all parents with children returning to school from next week:

Health and Safety

Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our pupils and staff remains paramount. Risk assessments for all schools are being updated in light of the newly published guidance. In all schools there continues to be 2m physical distancing for all adults. In secondary schools, 2m physical distancing will apply to everyone in the building, including pupils. As the phased return begins next week, we will again reinforce with pupils and staff the key messages about the current effective mitigations to control virus transmission: face coverings for adults and senior phase pupils; regular hand washing routines and good ventilation. We appreciate your support in ensuring that your child does not attend school if they are displaying COVID-19 symptoms. We ask for your support in reinforcing these messages with your child at home.

Drop Off and Pick Up

As before, schools may implement staggered start and finish times, to safely manage drop off and pick-up times. Given the ongoing stay at home message in place across Scotland, we would ask that, if possible, only one parent/carer comes to the school at drop off and pick-up times. In line with Government advice, we would ask you to maintain 2m physical distancing with other parents at the school gates. All schools will continue to restrict access to their grounds and/or buildings. As before, face coverings should continue to be worn by all adults (unless exempted) when they go to the school.

Staffing

Our staff continue to be focused on supporting your child to make progress in their learning, whether in school or at home. We would like to thank our staff for their dedication, flexibility and resilience in these challenging circumstances and for their commitment to educational continuity in uncertain times. To support the phased return to schools, additional staffing will be in place in many of our schools. It may also be that some children are not taught by their usual class teacher. For many, we know that remote learning will continue, and we will continue to provide the highest quality learning possible.

Catering

Free School Meals will be provided to all Early Learning and P1-3 pupils who return to in-school learning. In addition, our canteen facilities will also be available to senior phase pupils who are attending school for practical subjects.

Transport

Transport will be provided as normal to all eligible pupils returning to school. In secondary school transport, 2m physical distancing will be observed as an additional mitigation measure. Face coverings should be worn by all children and young people aged over 5, in line with the Government position on public transport. Car sharing with someone from another household continues to be strongly discouraged at this time.

Asymptomatic Home Testing for Staff and Senior Phase Pupils

As part of the range of COVID-19 risk reduction mitigations in schools, an asymptomatic testing programme is being made available to all staff and senior phase pupils. Participation in the programme will be encouraged but voluntary. Regular testing will help to identify asymptomatic individuals in school environments at the earliest possible opportunity and ask them and their close contacts to self-isolate, thus minimising the likelihood of them passing on the virus.

Further information is available on the asymptomatic testing programme: [SupportDG - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Asymptomatic Testing in Scottish Primary, Secondary and Special Schools, and ELC Providers \(dumgal.gov.uk\)](https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/supportdg)

Testing of Close Contacts

Beginning this week, close contacts of anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 will be asked to go for a test. This will not affect the period of isolation, regardless of the result. In a similar way to the regular testing programme outlined above, the testing of close contacts will help Public Health to understand the extent of asymptomatic community transmission. We ask for your support in this area by following any advice you receive from Public Health or the Trace and Protect team.

Finally, we acknowledge that the weeks ahead will probably present a number of challenges for everyone. Like you, we are hopeful that if we are careful and continue to take every step to limit the spread of the virus, we will be able to take further steps towards a full return to in-school learning before too long. In the meantime, if your child is scheduled to begin the return to in-school learning from next week, you will shortly receive further specific arrangements from your child's Headteacher.

Should you have any questions about the phased return to in-school learning, please contact your child's Headteacher.

Thank you for your ongoing support as we work through this together.

Yours sincerely



Dr Gillian Brydson
Director Skills, Education and Learning

Additional Support

Please note the following links which provide further support and advice for parents:

[Parent Club Website - Coronavirus advice](#)

[Parentzone Scotland Website](#)

[National Parent Forum of Scotland - Blended learning in nutshell](#)

[National Parent Forum of Scotland - Learning at home in lockdown](#)

[Young Scot - Going to School During the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic](#)