

UPDATE: Week beginning 1st June

We are now entering Week 9 of the school closures. Probably none of us imagined, even when the schools closed on Friday 20th March, that we would still be in this situation at this time.

Both the Scottish Government and East Renfrewshire Council have released a number of statements and documents over the last 2 weeks, looking at the ways for moving ahead. Some of these are still taking shape but it is a good time to update parents with at least some ideas about what is looking like happening.

Where We are At Now?

Online Learning and Teaching

The home learning has continued to progress well for many, but still raises a number of challenges. We, and no doubt you, are still conscious of differing levels of engagement and motivation. We know that it is not easy to keep this going for pupils, staff and parents and we want to thank you all for your support.

We have continued to mix emails congratulating pupils for high levels of engagement, with emails alerting parents and carers to individuals who are not finding it so easy to engage. We still realise that everyone's situation is different and there will be times and circumstances which prevent some young people engaging fully. As I said in the last communication, please do keep in contact with us where this is the case and we will look to support you.

Had we been in school, all our yeargroups would have moved up this week. The impact of this is less obvious working from home except for the S2 (new S3) pupils. These pupils will now move up to S3 and will start on the subjects that they chose through the transitions/options process and new Google classrooms have been set up. This has been flagged up on Twitter and through the S2 yeargroup Google classroom. The pupils should have now signed into their new subject Google classrooms to continue working.

S1 pupils will also move up to S2 this week, and S3 up to S4, but they will continue working in the same Google classrooms, continuing with the work they were already following.

The S4 have already become the new S5, and similarly S5 have become S6, and they have been working in their new Google classrooms for the last few weeks.

Note that due to the change in timetabled classes with the yeargroups moving, Show My Homework will not work in June. All work continues to be posted on Google Classrooms.

SQA Issues

The school part of the SQA process for the 2020 results certification has now been completed. I would remind you that the ERC (and national) procedures relating to estimated grades do not allow us to share these estimates with pupils or parents before the SQA release the final grades in August. The estimates are being used in a different way this year and are an integral part of the awarding process. Thank you for your understanding and acceptance of this. However I would again assure you that school staff worked very hard to ensure the best possible results for all our pupils.

School Trips

School trips continue to be a major concern for many parents and for us as a school and an authority. There was a significant number of trips affected across ERC (we had 5 in BHS) and the school, education, legal and insurance staff have been very busy working towards ensuring we can obtain full refunds if at all possible. Unfortunately even where companies are now cancelling the trips, most are not forthcoming in offering that refund. You may be aware that this issue was put directly to John Swinney in the question time last week seeking Government support for action to be taken.

Unfortunately I am not yet in a position to make refunds but I can assure parents that we are all working very hard to achieve this.

Other Activities

We have attempted to ensure our young people continue to receive as full an educational experience as they can at these times. Staff have gone out their way to provide additional communications, activities and challenges for pupils. Our inclusion of the Mental Health Awareness Week last week allowed an additional focus and activities which was very timely. We have just set up a virtual Conic Hillwalk this week. Please encourage your young folk to participate in these extra activities to give some sense that there is more to school than just online learning!

Mr Maybury and Mr Herd have prepared our submission to apply to become a Level 2 Vision School. We were awarded Level 1 last year and were encouraged to continue to pursue this. I think it says a lot about the calibre of our staff that in the middle of the situation we are finding ourselves in, they will still look out and beyond to even consider something like this.

Last week we also had another inservice day. Once again we were able to make use of technology to offer some training sessions to all staff on new online methods to improve the learning & teaching experience for pupils at this time. We were again able to meet together 'virtually' as a staff and it was a positive experience for all of us.

What is Happening for June?

For Staff

As agreed at national level, teachers will start returning to school with a main focus on preparing for August. The Senior Leadership Team will return this week and from next week other staff can be in the building as required.

For Pupils

We have continued to make in-school educational provision for pupils whose parents meet the criteria for Key Workers to allow them to be at work. Similarly we have made provision for certain individuals who require that additional contact at this time. This number has increased in recent weeks and we now have 2 members of staff on at a time to support these young people.

The Hub in Carlibar will close on Friday 5th June and from Monday 8th June, the Barrhead High pupils who were attending Carlibar will be accommodated in Barrhead High School. Although we will identify some additional pupils whom staff believe will benefit from further direct contact with staff from Mon 15th June, the Scottish Government has signalled that for the vast majority of pupils, the learning situation will continue to be based at home for June.

For P7 Primary Pupils

The one other exception to this will be that we will work with our primary colleagues to provide some transition experience for the P7 pupils who would be due to start with us in August. The details of this will be shared as soon as possible and any activity will take place later in June. We are hoping this will involve a chance to be in the Barrhead High building, although it is unlikely to involve all new S1 coming in together.

What Might Happen in August?

At this point, things are still more uncertain, both nationally and locally, around the August situation. The Scottish Government have announced a new start date to the session of Tuesday 11th August. It is not clear yet whether this will be an inservice day or not, and if so whether it will be 1 or 2 days. Please note that this is earlier than the scheduled date for return (which was Wed 19th for pupils / Mon 17th for staff). However even this date is dependant on Scotland having entered Phase 3 of the Government's "Route Map Through and Out of the Crisis".

It is anticipated that for the initial part of the session at least, and probably for some months beyond, pupils will continue to follow a curriculum based on 'blended learning' – in school part of the week and working from home for the rest. It is hoped that this might be a 50:50 split with half the pupils in school at any time, but this depends on the distancing restrictions in place at that time, and other factors. We are working to timetable this model and would hope to give parents more information about this later in June, with some idea of the possible in-school timings for each pupil.

What I would assure parents of is that we will work very hard to ensure that all Government and medical requirements are met in full, all the necessary health & safety procedures will be in place and followed, and all risk assessments will have been carried out to ensure the safety of all pupils and staff.

We are currently working on practical issues like seating arrangements, corridor movement, entry and exit procedures, use of toilets, etc. The model may avoid morning intervals and where possible we may be able to ensure pupils are in for a morning or an afternoon but not both on the same day, thus avoiding some distancing/supervision issues over lunchtime.

We will still follow our usual uniform policy on our return in June. One particular benefit of this is that pupils will be quick to remove their uniform when they get home!

Looking further ahead, there are no definite answers at this time to the SQA situation for next session. John Swinney faced questions on this last week and he indicated that plans were still in place to run the SQA 2021 exam diet. However it remains to be seen what impact the ongoing situation will have on that and whether modifications will be required in terms of coursework, etc. We will keep pupils and parents posted if there are any developments.

New Head Teacher

One certainty among these 'possibles' for August, is that we will have my successor in place to start from 11th August. I am pleased to confirm that the Education Department have appointed Mrs Fiona Johnston to take over from me as acting Head Teacher of Barrhead High School and I will retire (belatedly!) from that date. I have already met with Fiona and we have started working together to ensure a smooth handover at that point. Fiona introduced herself to the Parent Council this evening and I am certain that she will continue to lead Barrhead High School forward to even greater things with the support of our outstanding community of pupils, staff and parents. I wish her well.

Communication

As I said in the previous update, good communication is vital – now, for June and remaining so for August.

Please continue to access the school website, Twitter and the Parent Council Facebook page on a regular basis – they are all quick and easy sources of information.

Please also ensure that we have an up-to-date email address for you. That will increasingly become the main vehicle of communication. The new **Parentsportal** will help with that. You should register with that as soon as possible, but with the current situation, it is taking a little longer to process and accept your application, so please be patient.

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/er/Barrhead/2020/05/21/parentsportal-sign-up-to-communicate-with-the-school-online/>

Although there is no one in the school building on a daily basis, our office staff continue to monitor school email. If you require to contact myself, a Year Head, Pupil Support or even a teacher, please email to school mail and your message will be passed on as appropriate.

schoolmail@barrhead.e-renfrew.sch.uk

I have just shared most of this update with the Parent Council this evening. That gave me an opportunity to pick up on some of the questions they had on their minds and allowed me to add a few points here to address these. Once again the Parent Council took an opportunity to thank me and wish me well, pointing out that I will have next week served 10 full years in Barrhead High School – this is the retirement that just keeps giving! I have really appreciated the supportive community of parents that have worked with me over my 10 years in post and I would like to thank you all once again for your ongoing support at this time in particular.

Andy Sinclair

Head Teacher

1st June 2020