



Early Learning and Childcare Directorate
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Learning and Childcare

To:

Local Authority Directors of Education
Local Authority Early Learning and Childcare Leads

Copied to:

Local Authority Chief Executives
COVID-19 Education Recovery Group,
Critical Childcare and Early Learning and Childcare Working Group
Education Unions

By email

16th February 2021

Dear colleagues,

PHASED RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE

Firstly we'd like to thank you and your teams for continuing to provide support to key workers' children and vulnerable families throughout the stay at home restrictions, along with the provision of high-quality remote learning for all other children and young people..

Today the First Minister confirmed that, from 22nd February, we will proceed to phase 1 of a return to in-person provision – i.e. a full time return of pre-school children and children in primaries 1, 2 and 3, and a part-time return for a limited number of senior phase students who need access to school for essential practical work. As well the return of these children and young people there will be a limited increase in provision for vulnerable children – specifically those with the most significant additional support needs and where schools believe this is essential.

As the First Minister said today, we will need to monitor carefully the impact of this initial return, along with the general trajectory of the virus, before we can commit to any future phases. We hope that in two weeks' time, on the 2nd of March, we are able to set out some detail regarding the second phase of re-opening. However, at this stage, we do not envisage any further return to school or childcare before the 15th March.

EVIDENCE AND ADVICE TO SUPPORT RE-OPENING

The decision to reopen schools and childcare to all preschool aged children was taken following a detailed review of the evidence on transmission and infection in



Scotland, as well as on the transmissibility and severity of the new variant of the Coronavirus in relation to children and young people. Careful consideration was also given to the impact of restricted access to ELC on children's wellbeing and development. The advice of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues, which carried out the review, was published [here](#) on Wednesday 3rd February.

Following this, the Sub-Group also reviewed its existing advice on the mitigations required to ensure a safe return to in-person learning for staff and pupils. The Sub-Group's advice emphasises that the current mitigations remain vital in preventing transmission of the virus. The Sub-Group cited recent advice from the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) that a step change in the rigour of application of mitigations is required, given the increased transmission risk associated with the new variant. The Sub-Group's latest advice on mitigations can be found [here](#).

You will also wish to be aware that, on 15 February, a Joint Statement from Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Directors of Public Health on the re-opening of schools and childcare was published and you can find that statement [here](#). This statement supports the phased approach, and sets out other valuable points for consideration.

GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT RE-OPENING

To support the re-opening of schools and childcare services from 22nd February, we have today published a suite of updated guidance which reflect the latest public health evidence and advice. The following guidance documents are available here:

- [Schools](#)
- [Early Learning and Childcare](#)
- [School Aged Childcare](#)
- [Childminding Services](#)

Please note that links to the School Aged Childcare and Childminding Services guidance will be updated by COP tomorrow (17th February).

SCHOOLS GUIDANCE

The schools guidance provides clarity on arrangements for school education in February/March 2021 and to help schools to plan for the full-time return of children in P1-P3, for the part-time return of some young people in the senior phase and a small increase in existing provision for children and young people with significant additional support needs.

This guidance, supplements the [existing Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools guidance](#). All aspects of the existing guidance and accompanying mitigations continue to apply while schools are open, with a small number of exceptions (for example, the need for 2m distancing between young people in secondary school).

Education Scotland and the Scottish Government have worked with partners to produce [detailed technical guidance](#) intended to provide clarity and support for local authorities and secondary schools on providing arrangements for the small groups of senior phase learners carrying out practical work in-school.

This new schools guidance supplements the [existing Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools guidance](#), all aspects of this guidance and accompanying mitigations continue to apply.

CHILDCARE GUIDANCE

Key changes in the suite of childcare guidance are:

- The need to refresh risk assessments in light of re-opening.
- Staff induction and training on appropriate mitigations.
- Reminders and reinforcements around public health measures such as consistency in staff groupings, physical distancing, reducing bottlenecks and the use of face coverings.
- Encouragement to limit the number of settings a child attends, but an emphasis that blended care can be used where this supports children's wellbeing and access to high quality early learning and childcare, and subject to the appropriate risk assessments being undertaken.

The suite of childcare guidance has been developed in partnership with the Care Inspectorate, Health Protection Scotland and with the input of the Critical Childcare and Early Learning and Childcare Group and the ELC and Childcare Sector Recovery Group. We are grateful to all the local government colleagues taking part in these groups who have provided valuable input and advice throughout this process.

TESTING

The safety of children, young people, education and childcare staff remains our priority, and we understand the importance of offering staff and families as much reassurance as possible.

Arrangements are already in place for all school, ELC and school age childcare staff who are concerned they may have been at risk of infection, and wish to be tested. Two weeks ago, the First Minister confirmed we will introduce a routine testing programme for all staff working in schools and ELC.

The initial introduction of this routine testing programme will be available to schools, school-based ELC and childcare staff. Detailed implementation guidance has been made available to all local authorities and schools. This includes a clinical Standard Operating Procedure, a How To Guide, Instructions for Use for the at-home test kits, an FAQ, template communication letters and consent forms, a standard privacy notice, and posters/communication products. To support effective communication with senior phase pupils, we are working with YoungScot to develop an online campaign.

We are currently working through the logistics of making the same testing available to stand-alone local authority ELC settings, and settings and services in the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector. In the meantime, childcare staff in stand-alone local authority settings, and those in Private, Voluntary and Independent nursery settings, can continue to access asymptomatic PCR testing [through their employer](#) if they have concerns about having been exposed to the virus.

We will continue to keep up the flow of information as and when it is available; and assure you that the Scottish Government is absolutely committed to continuing to work in partnership with you through these extremely challenging times.

Thank you to you and all of your school and childcare colleagues for the ongoing support you are providing to children and families .

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