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Dear Parent/Carer,

Firstly we would like to thank you and all our children and young people for being so patient, understanding and accommodating during this unparalleled health emergency.

We do not underestimate the challenges faced by young people, who have been unable to see their friends and who have had their routines disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. Equally, we understand that, for parents and carers, the challenges of supporting children with learning at home while managing other changes brought about by coronavirus may have been very difficult.

We would also like to pay tribute to all our teachers and other education staff who are working hard to provide digital learning and many of whom have also been involved in keeping our community hubs open so that the children of key workers and vulnerable groups can be looked after.

Understandably you may be feeling anxious about how your child will access education following the summer break and we wanted to outline our plans. We aim to ensure that all our children and young people are fully supported and we have been working hard to make plans across early years, primary, secondary and additional support needs schools.

As you are aware, all schools and nursery classes in Scotland have been closed since 24 March as part of the national lockdown arrangements and we have been ensuring continuity of education provision through home and online learning. We know that schools and centres have been making great efforts to stay in contact with parents, carers and pupils over the last two months and we appreciate that this has been challenging.

The Scottish Government recently announced that children and young people will return to school and early learning and childcare settings on 11 August as long as it is safe to do so.

Teachers and other education staff will return to schools and early learning and childcare settings in June to prepare and plan for the forthcoming academic year. Access for those pupils who are transitioning to Primary 1 and Secondary 1 will be arranged, albeit in small groups and with their families, from 15 June. Head teachers and heads of centres at individual schools/centres will be in contact with parents and carers of transitioning children to confirm arrangements.

We are working hard on recovery plans to deliver a blended learning model from August 11, incorporating a mix of in-classroom teaching with home and online learning. This mixed model of learning is needed because the need to have physical distancing measures in schools and early learning and childcare settings means we are not able to accommodate the normal number of children every day. We have already been putting measures in place to assist pupils who require access to digital devices and schools will be in direct contact with those affected.

Health and safety sits at the heart of our plans, with risk assessments and infection prevention and control measures in place. We are working on a range of options which may include smaller groups of pupils being in school for shorter periods and over fewer days, possibly with staggered start, end and break times.

Schools, classrooms and playrooms will also look somewhat different to before, with fewer pupils, group learning, outdoor and alternative classrooms, enhanced hand hygiene and cleaning routines and step by step guidance to help maintain physical distancing.

We know this will be challenging for some young people. Physical distancing is difficult for everyone, but especially children and we will have signage and practical help in place to make sure your child is supported.

Our facilities management team is busy preparing our schools and centres for this. The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for teachers, early learning and childcare and support staff may be required for some early learning and support settings where close contact with children is required. There is no requirement for children and young people to wear PPE as a general rule.

We know that you will have a lot of questions around how schools and centres will operate, as well as issues including school transport, practical considerations for ASN pupils and future SQA exams. You will understand that this is a complex and fast-moving situation and we are working as hard as possible to finalise the details. We assure you that we will update all parents and pupils as soon as we can.

Childcare support will also be important to you as some parents and carers start to return to work and we are exploring complementary options for families of key workers and support for vulnerable young people.

You and your child's health and wellbeing is of the utmost importance. We hope you have been able to access some of the support resources available if you need it. You can find out more about them in the 'advice for parents' section at www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/coronavirus.

We also have a support helpline for parents and pupils which can be accessed by phoning 01236 812 380 during the hours of 10am until 3pm, Monday to Friday.

We will be in touch soon with more details about the return to school. We look forward to welcoming your children back to a safe learning environment in August and thank you again for your patience and perseverance throughout this period.

Regards,

Councillor Frank McNally
Convener
Education and Families

Derek Brown
Executive Director
Education and Families