



Monday 20th April, 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to you at this unprecedented time in Scottish education regarding a number of important issues affecting our young people. At present, there is heightened concern about the impact of the emergency situation on our children and young people, as well as their families and this letter is to offer some clarification and reassurance regarding arrangements over the next few weeks.

As you are aware all schools in Scotland have been closed since March 24th as part of the national lockdown arrangements in response to the COVID-19 health emergency. Over this period local authorities and schools have been ensuring continuity of education provision through home learning. Ensuring vulnerable children and young people are fully supported is also a priority for us.

North Lanarkshire Council currently operates a number of Community Hubs and Family Learning Centres to provide a childcare service for the families of key workers and support for vulnerable young people. The contribution by staff in these hubs during the period has been exceptional.

You will also be aware that the government announced an extension of the lockdown for at least an additional three weeks and, in light of that, our Education and Families team is planning for this and for any further extensions that may potentially be required. We are also considering carefully what the recovery phase will look like once the lockdown arrangements end and schools start to reopen. Parents will understand that it is not possible at this stage to set a date for this.

The information contained in this letter provides a broad overview of key areas of activity being undertaken by our team. There are a number of specific issues I have outlined that you may wish to discuss with your child's teacher or head teacher. You may find it more helpful to talk through practical issues with the people who know your child, and are therefore best to respond and help you. I know that schools have been making great efforts to stay in contact with parents and pupils, so it is sensible to recommend that this continues.

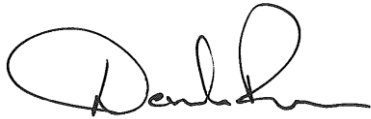
Therefore, if you have any issues relating to the contents of this letter, please email your school direct at its published email address. These email addresses are being regularly monitored by school staff who are working remotely.

I have been overwhelmed during my visits to our school Community Hubs (and in reviewing some of the online material produced by schools) at the commitment of our staff who greatly miss seeing their pupils every day. I am sure the children also miss the routine and day to day interaction that takes place in their schools, with their friends and with staff who help and support them. I know that this spirit will help us when we emerge from lockdown.

My main hope is that in such difficult times, families look after each other, make sure they stay safe and that we all do what we can to support our NHS colleagues in tackling the COVID-19 outbreak.

Please accept my very best wishes at this challenging time.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derek Brown', with a stylized, cursive script.

Derek Brown
Executive Director
Education and Families

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Examinations

Scottish Government guidance has clarified that in effect the academic session has ended for senior phase pupils who were preparing for examinations.

Guidance from the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which oversees examinations in Scotland, has clarified that pupil course work which had been previously submitted will not be marked by SQA or used for the purposes of the examinations process. They have said that they may be able to use this material to process appeals. The rationale for not marking this material has been due to public health advice received by the organisation.

For this session's examinations processes teachers will be asked to use existing evidence of pupil progress to estimate their performance. These estimates will be accepted, reviewed and quality assured by the SQA, based on the prior attainment in schools. Pupils will be awarded grades following the outcome of this process.

SQA is today publishing the guidance for schools on how to complete these estimates, which are due to be returned by May 29th. This is broadly in keeping with the normal examination period. It is important to understand that North Lanarkshire schools' activity in this area will be governed by the advice and guidance from SQA. This will include processes of appeal, for this session, details of which are still to be published.

Placing Requests

Scottish Government is clarifying arrangements for local authorities to adhere to in managing placing requests during this emergency period. This is to ensure that processes are effective in meeting required standards.

Up to this point, the normal process of placing requests has operated this session. Those we have received are being processed and we hope that decisions regarding requests will be sent to parents as soon as possible, in lines with the revised timescales established by Scottish Government.

However, the appeals process will have to be altered this year, due to the emergency and the fact that appeals hearings cannot be conducted in the normal way. We are currently awaiting government guidance as to what date such appeals will have to be concluded by and on the processes that can be used to expedite these.

Since such decisions are important to families, we will want to ensure a rigorous process operated that people have confidence in. It is important to note that these processes will continue to involve our elected members.

Transitions

Of particular concern to staff across Education and Families is that of transitions. A huge amount of activity goes into these processes on an annual basis, especially where young people are moving between establishments (Early Years to Primary 1; Primary 7 to Secondary 1; and beyond school from the senior phase). However, even when young people are transitioning within their own establishment, there is always a process of handing over information between staff and relationships building between pupils and their new teachers. This is a particular challenge this year, especially for senior phase pupils who are about to embark on new courses of study.

Should the lock down period continue, such processes will require to be handled differently and we will implement different mechanisms to communicate with young people, parents and carers.

In the next few weeks, schools will be asked to consider ways to manage this range of transitions to meet the needs of their pupils. The local knowledge they have of your child or children will be at the heart of this process. A clear timeline for providing information regarding transitions will be published by each school so as to ensure that you, as a parent, know what steps are being planned that affect your child's education.

Normally, there are orientation periods which run for the new academic session in June. We do not at this point know if such arrangements will be possible this session, but parents will receive regular updates on what is being planned. This will be communicated through schools and head teachers.

Community Hubs

Information on the locations and opening hours of our Community Hubs and Family Learning Centres is available on North Lanarkshire Council's website – northlanarkshire.gov.uk/keyworkers. These hubs operate for the children of key workers and also for vulnerable young people.

The hubs will also provide additional services to support children and families throughout the lockdown, for those who require them. Information on such services will be provided through North Lanarkshire Council in due course.

Additional Support Needs

Of particular concern is the support of young people with additional needs. We are moving from today to a model for our ASN schools where some pupils with significant needs will undertake part-time arrangements, in order to provide some respite to parents and a measure of continuity for pupils who are most likely to find it difficult to cope with the lockdown period. We will review these arrangements in the next few weeks to ensure that they are effective in meeting the needs of families affected.

For the remainder of our young people with additional needs, schools are being asked to stay in contact with their families and to consider any remote supports that can be offered. This is a continuation of the approach we have taken so far and is based on government advice.

Providing Continuity of Learning during the Emergency Period

There has been an enormous effort across our schools to ensure that there are robust processes in place for digital learning for young people. There have also been important steps taken to support those with no digital access.

The use of different approaches to meet the needs of children and young people remotely has been hugely impressive. Schools are expected to provide advice and guidance for parents regarding access to digital learning. If any parent has a concern that they are not able to access such provision, they should contact the school directly as a priority.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Through our schools we have continued to publish information for children and their families about health and wellbeing generally, and about mental health in particular. This information is written with the support of experts in NHS Lanarkshire and our own Psychological Services and is designed to be person centred – [advice for parents](#).

A help line for pupils and parents has been established by our Psychological Services to ensure that supports are available. This can be contacted on 01236 812 380 between the hours of 10am – 3pm Monday to Friday.

In addition, schools will take steps to provide remote supports for young people who have mental health concerns through their normal pupil support systems.

Free School Meals

North Lanarkshire Council has put in place a voucher scheme which provides £20 per week to pupils who are entitled to free school meals. This is in excess of the cost of a school meal and is in response to the challenges families will face during this crisis period. The vouchers are sent electronically and can be redeemed as cash at Pay-Points in shops. We obviously hope that parents support their local shops by spending the money in them. The money should be used to feed families during this period. Information on the voucher scheme is to be found on North Lanarkshire Council's website [here](#).

It is really important that parents understand this system is based on the records of mobile phone numbers held by schools in our management of information system. Therefore, should you have any issues receiving or redeeming these vouchers, please contact us.

The Free School Meal Voucher scheme is being monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis by a dedicated team which has been set up to manage this. If you have any concerns or enquiries relating to the scheme please email us at FME@northlan.gov.uk and a member of the team will reply to your enquiry. In order for us to assist you as quickly as possible, it would be helpful if, when emailing, you could provide the following information:

- Child's name/children's names:
- Date(s) of birth:
- School Attended:
- Home Address:
- Mobile Phone Number: