

Education and Families

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Dear Parent/Carer

I am pleased to have the opportunity to write to you to outline the progress we have made in planning for the return of children to school from August 11 onwards. It is anticipated that we will clarify arrangements in more detail in June, but what follows is an outline of our planning and a description of the steps we are taking to consult with various groups of stakeholders.

Planning Assumptions

In August, we have to plan, first and foremost, on the basis of safety. We need to ensure that your child and the staff in schools are as safe as possible and that the opportunity for viral transmission is reduced as far as possible.

In addition, due to government stipulations on physical distancing (2 metres squared, being used as a basic stipulation for schools, and anticipated guidance on smaller groupings in early years settings) it is likely that the capacity of settings to welcome children and young people will be between 40%-50% of current volumes.

We also have a reduction in staff capacity due to the continued need (under Scottish Government guidance) for staff who are part of the shielding programme to continue to work from home, as has been the case during the emergency lockdown period. It is difficult to quantify this absolutely at present, but the service is planning on the availability of 80-85% staff being able to attend work as a basic assumption.

Therefore, as Scottish Government advice makes clear, there will need to be models deployed in local authorities and in private settings which incorporate what the First Minister has called, 'partial delivery' and 'blended learning.'

Opening Schools

It is likely that all young people, with the exception of the children of key workers and designated vulnerable groups will receive between 40%-50% of pre-lockdown education and childcare provision in the recovery period.

While this is enormously challenging for staff in schools and settings, as well as for the young people and those who care for them, it is an absolute requirement if Scotland is to recover its services fully in a way that prioritises health and safety and minimises viral transmission.

In schools, most pupils will experience a partial in-school timetable, equivalent to a minimum two days most weeks, supplemented by an enhanced online digital learning offering and the potential for wider community based support. In primary, the priority will be to take a family-centred approach, overseen by head teachers. In secondary, due to the need to align the senior phase with the offering of key partners, such as New College Lanarkshire, there will be a focus on key year groups attending on particular days.

Importantly, further consultation on how this will operate in practice will take place in June, and the precise detail will be clarified before the end of the school session, in plenty of time for August.

Early Years

In Early Years, the Scottish Government decision to pause the roll out of the 1140 Hours Expansion programme, due to the need to reduce staff:child ratios, means that it will be likely that most parents will receive 600 hours, which they are entitled to by statute.

This is based entirely on the prioritisation of critical child care for the children of key workers and vulnerable children as set out by the Scottish Government. Where local authorities make a critical childcare offer to key worker families and vulnerable families, this should be free at the point of access during the emergency response period.

To ensure settings are as safe as possible for children and staff, there is an expectation that all settings will put in place arrangements to accommodate physical distancing. This will also potentially reduce capacity within individual settings.

How this all works in the recovery period will depend on further advice and guidance from Scottish Government, due to be published on 15 June on arrangements for early years' settings, including private funded providers. Following this, further dialogue will take place with partner providers regarding how they can adapt their settings to comply with guidance and draw down funding from the framework and further communication will take place with parents and carers.

Consultation and Communications

We hope to enlist the support of the members our representative parent groups for the approach we are advocating, which is grounded in clear national guidance and the professional advice of our own central officer teams.

Any plans being brought forward are being done with reference to existing council policy and we will continue to communicate with you as things develop.

We understand you will have questions, many of which we are unable to answer at this point. We are working as hard as possible to manage all of the details and we will keep you updated by letter and at www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/schoolplans.

Yours sincerely



Derek Brown
Executive Director, Education and Families

