



Director of Children's Services: Helen Budge

Children's Services

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Parents and Carers

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Your Ref:

Dear Parents and Carers

Information to all Parents and Carers – Children and Young People returning to Schools and Early Learning and Childcare Settings, 11 August 2020

The Scottish Government have instructed all local authorities to plan for their schools and Early Learning and Childcare settings re-opening for children and young people on Tuesday 11 August with a blended model of delivery. This means an earlier start to the new session for children and young people and school staff in Shetland and further information will follow on this.

To make ready for the 11 August, staff will return to settings in June. While remote, 'online' and 'offline' learning will continue, your children and young people may not receive the same level of virtual interaction and promptness of reply from staff that they have experienced up until now, owing to them also being in school, preparing for August.

Children's Services central staff are currently working with Head Teachers and Managers of Early Learning and Childcare settings to organise, **optional**, physical in school/setting transitions later this month for children and young people transitioning from Early Learning and Childcare to primary one and children moving from primary seven to secondary one after the summer holidays. For children and young people moving into secondary one, transition arrangements, agreed at school/cluster level, may include up to two half days in their primary school, and up to two half days in their new secondary school. There will be further communication with parents and carers by Friday 12 June.

Please be reassured that the safety of all children and young people involved in physical transition activity is paramount. The appropriate building checks, risk assessments, cleaning, signage, enhanced hygiene practices, and physical distancing requirements will be in place before any child or young person enters either a school or Early Learning and Childcare setting in June, and ahead of the wider return of children and young people in August. The local authority will continue to follow public health advice very closely.

Regarding the August return, at this point, the Scottish Government guidance is that the two metre physical distancing requirement must be in place for the majority of children and young people. This has significant implications for our schools including:

- The number of children and young people that can be in a classroom at any one time and the need to reduce class sizes in the majority of our settings;
- The need to keep children and young people in smaller groups without mixing with other children and young people out-with their group and to minimise their movements during the school day;
- The need to stagger break and lunchtimes, as well as having clear protocols for dropping children and young people off at school and picking them up from school;
- Increasing the frequency of cleaning during the school day, reducing the use of shared items and utilising outdoor space;
- The number of children and young people that can travel to and from school on school transport;
- The possible option of expanding the learning estate, utilising additional spaces, including community buildings in localities to support face-to-face teaching.

In short, the blended model of education delivery is predicated on a smaller number of children and young people attending schools at any one time across Scotland. In practice, this means that many children and young people, both locally and nationally, may have a blended combination of face-to-face teaching in school and remote learning at home. More specifically, this may mean certain days of the week that children and young people are in school, or in school for a full week then a week of remote learning, at least at the start of the new session.

All of our Head Teachers, in discussions with their staff, are currently exploring how the blended model of learning will work for their setting, considering how classroom sizes align with the physical distancing requirements, and referring to local guidance and the appropriate Scottish Government documentation.

The Scottish Government have also encouraged flexibility of approach regarding blended learning, taking into account local circumstances like the size of buildings and school rolls, and what is possible, in terms of the amount of time children and young people can be safely in school at any one time. This will mean a bespoke models of delivery for schools in Shetland.

I appreciate you will have many questions about the blended learning model and what it will mean for your children and young people. You may also have understandable concerns about your child(s) safety on their return and the impact of the length of time away from school has had on their development, wellbeing and progress with their learning. I would like to reassure you that health and wellbeing, nurture, and the appropriate learning experiences, will be central to all our schools planning and approaches when they reopen, and that all the required health and safety measures will be in place.

For our senior phase pupils, in secondary four to six, we also await further clarity from the Scottish Government and the SQA around what assessment arrangements will look like in 2020-21.

Moving forward, all schools will share more information with their parents and carers over the coming weeks on all the points raised in this letter. Children's Services' will also add FAQs for parents and carers to the Shetland Digital School Hub. <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/sh/digitalschoolhub/>

Meanwhile, our critical childcare provision for key workers and provision for children with additional support needs, established in March at the outset of the pandemic, will continue during the coming months with more information to follow.

Finally, thank you for all that you are doing supporting your children's remote learning at this very challenging time, it is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Helen Budge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue circular stamp or mark to the left of the name.

Helen Budge
Director of Children's Services

