

16 June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

School buildings were closed by the Scottish Government on the 23 March in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. We want to thank you as parents/carers for your continued support with delivering the home learning programmes that your child has been set by their teachers during this period.

The Scottish Government has now issued guidance to schools which states that the start date of the new term will be 11 August for all schools across Scotland. Tuesday 11 August will be an In-Service day for staff and some children will start the return to school on Wednesday 12 August, with others following after that, on a planned programme.

Plans for the reopening of schools are based on scientific and medical advice and are in line with public health measures. Great care is being taken to make sure it is safe for staff and pupils to return to school in August.

A range of hygiene measures are being put in place by the school such as:

- increased hand-washing facilities/availability of hand sanitisers;
- regular and enhanced cleaning of surfaces (e.g. sinks, toilet seats and door handles);
- plans for what to do if a child or member of staff has suspected or confirmed COVID-19; and
- ongoing and updated risk assessments.

Principles for reopening schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings in Highland

All school staff are currently working hard with support and guidance from the local authority to ensure that we are able to plan for as many children as possible to have as much learning time at school as is safely possible. In line with national guidance the Highland Council has adopted 4 key principles which will underpin all decisions made about our schools and ELC settings reopening:

1. **Equity (all pupils have the opportunity to be in school)**

Children will have regular access to high quality activities. They will work with teachers and practitioners in school some of the time. At other times they will continue with remote learning at home. This will be the case in all schools across Scotland. Your school will communicate the carefully planned new structure of the week with you very soon.

As usual, our schools will be working with partners in youth work, culture and sport who help us to deliver the curriculum for our learners. Schools will also be engaging with their parent councils and forums to make use of the skills and experience of the parent community. This will help to support learning, especially with promoting and developing skills that will increase children's abilities to learn remotely, and creating opportunities to develop future skills.

2. **Health and wellbeing and the Covid-19 situation**

The health and wellbeing of all will be at the heart of the planning process so that children feel supported, safe and happy as they return to school. Schools will continue to concentrate on communications and dialogue with children and their families. Children will have regular contact with a key adult from their school who knows them well to talk about their wellbeing. This will usually be their class teacher or an ELC practitioner they are used to working with. Children will be able to share their experiences during lockdown, including successes and challenges. School staff will offer individual support as needed.

3. **Recovery of learning, teaching and assessment (including new opportunities with digital learning)**

In the Broad General Education phase of secondary education (S1-S3) focusing on learning across literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing will be the first priority with gradually increasing learning experiences across the whole curriculum. Working with young people and their families in drawing together evidence of their learning will help schools begin to understand attainment and achievement during lockdown. This will help with planning their next steps in learning.

In the Senior Phase of secondary education (S4-S6) young people will be able to benefit from face to face contact with subject specialists as they work towards courses and awards that will help them to make the key next steps in their lives. Work towards Scottish Qualifications Authority courses and awards will include in-school and at-home learning and teachers will work to ensure that young people complete the necessary assessments to ensure that evidence is being gathered to show attainment. Young people in the Senior Phase should be aware that these assessments may well form a very important part of their overall course awards next year, especially if circumstances lead to the examinations being cancelled again. We will keep young people and families updated with any further information about this from the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

Reviewing the curriculum regularly during next session will help to make sure that the curriculum suits the local situation and takes account of young people and their families' circumstances. Evidence of learning will be collected in a sensitive way and schools will strive to support young people as they take part in potentially stressful assessment activities.

We will continue to use digital platforms to enhance teaching and learning in new and creative ways. This will be the case when young people are working at home but also when they are working in school. Networks of teachers across Highland are letting us create new opportunities for sharing resources, and approaches to learning. This will help us to make sure young people continue to develop important digital skills.

We will support all young people with this on-line learning. However, we know that device access or connectivity can sometimes be an issue for young people and families. The Scottish Government's Connecting Scotland project will help Highland Council to work with families to make sure that our young people do not face any barriers to developing their digital skills.

4. Attainment in session 2020/2021

It is very important that we understand how all of our children will have faced challenges to learning during the school closures. Schools will work to provide additional and appropriate support to children where it is most needed. They will focus on maximising children's engagement with their learning. Teachers will be very focused on identifying and closing gaps in children's learning.

Physical distancing and impacts upon capacity

Each school will aim to create as much capacity as possible for children to be in the school in August. It will not be possible to have all children in school at the same time for reasons of safety. Planning will be based on making best use of available staff and careful planning to make sure that the spaces being used are safe. Appropriate risk assessments will be carried out and health and safety assessments checks will lead to changes if that is found to be necessary. Our plans will make sure we are following national advice about social distancing, including in staff spaces (such as staff rooms), this will help us to work out what the capacity will be in each school for pupils to attend. We are working closely with service partners as we plan, for example, we will work with school transport providers to make sure that children who need to use buses or taxis can travel safely between their homes and schools.

The rules about social distancing will also affect the number of children we can have in classrooms at the same time for in-school learning. Schools and ELC settings across Highland will now have to make some important changes to what the school day looks like for learners.

Schools and ELC settings will soon communicate their own local arrangements with you on the following matters:

- teaching in smaller groups, and plans about how they will make sure all children have access to some time in school;
- minimising the mixing of groups of children in school and ELC settings;
- reorganising seating positions so that children and staff are a safe distance apart (for example, 2m when seated at desks);
- increasing the use of outdoor spaces for learning;
- staggering arrival and departure times and giving clear guidance to parents about dropping off and picking up children from school;
- staggering breaks to avoid pupils from different classes coming into contact wherever possible (particularly when indoors and some more enclosed outdoor spaces);
- considering whether teachers, rather than pupils, should move round classes or whether a mixture of these approaches would be best;
- planning how pupils and staff will get to and from school in a safe manner;
- providing dinner and snack in a safe way; and
- making sure that hygiene practices are as high a standard as possible.

Additional Support Needs

Additional space will be needed for some children with additional support needs who rely upon the use of equipment, and planning will make sure that this will be in place for safe use. Appropriate arrangements will be made to cater for individual needs on a case by case basis and particularly for children with severe and complex needs. Schools will discuss arrangements with families affected.

Breakfast Club, after school clubs and Out Of School Care

Unfortunately, to begin with schools will not be able to deliver Breakfast Clubs, after school clubs or Out of School Care. Your Head Teacher will keep you informed about plans for these services to start again when it becomes safe to do so.

Sickness and Shielding

Schools will take every precaution to make sure that everyone is safe. We will need families to help us with this by following the national guidance about Covid-19. If a staff member or child develops a new continuous cough, fever, or a loss of, or change in, their sense of smell or taste (anosmia), they should stay at home and not attend school. Staff or children with these symptoms should stay at home for seven days from the start of their symptoms, even if these symptoms are mild. They should then return to school, in line with the rota of attendance worked out by the school. If a staff member or child lives with someone who has symptoms of cough and/or high temperature, they should stay at home for 14 days. **This should be reported to the Head Teacher immediately.** Following these rules will help us to keep everyone safe and healthy.

Shielding is designed to protect the lives of individuals who are at a very high risk of severe illness and require to be protected from the risk of catching the Covid-19 virus. **Children who meet the criteria outlined in the national guidance on shielding should not attend school.** In some cases, particularly where social and health needs are complex, this may mean that other arrangements must be found to assure the safety and welfare of the child. If you are in this situation you should contact the school to discuss the issue as soon as possible.

Your school will keep you fully informed of all transition arrangements as they continue to unfold. School local Parent Council meetings will take place over the next few weeks, this is your opportunity to hear about how your young person will safely return to school. Communication is key, and through working in partnership with you, schools will be able to provide a safe return to school. We hope that this letter will help to explain in general terms what will happen in August. Your school will provide you with the detailed arrangements for your child.

I would like to thank you for your patience and understanding as we begin to move out of the school closure phase and gradually begin to open up learning again.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicky Grant'.

Nicky Grant
Head of Education