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Chief Executives of local authorities
Directors of Education
Proprietors of Independent Schools
Managers of Grant Aided Schools

Cc: Education Recovery Group Members
Scottish Council of Independent Schools

By email

29 May 2020

Dear colleague

Strategic Framework Supporting Guidance and Next Steps

Last week we published the [Strategic Framework for Reopening Schools and ELC Provision](#) to provide direction for the whole of Scotland and enable consistency and equity as we move toward recovery.

As set out in last week's correspondence of 21st May, we are also asking local authorities to prepare Local Phasing Delivery Plans, which will outline local plans regarding the reopening of schools. Colleagues from Education Scotland will be in contact with authorities shortly to discuss their part in the process. These Local Phasing Delivery Plans will give further operational detail, and we remain grateful to all those colleagues who are taking this important work forward and are contributing to the ongoing work of the Education Recovery Group and its supporting work streams. It is clear that in taking this work forward a 'one team' approach is going to be crucial, involving national and local government, Education Scotland, trade unions, the entire schools workforce, school communities and other key partners.

To inform this planning we have published supporting guidance for the re-opening of schools, covering many of the current practical implementation issues including determining capacity, physical distancing in schools, hygiene measures, workforce planning, digital and additional areas such as school transport. This guidance should be used by all education authorities to support a safe phased re-opening in line with the Strategic Framework. It may also be used by grant aided schools and independent schools to support their recovery efforts. Recognising the specific context of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and childcare sector, separate guidance for these settings is being developed.

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The guidance can be found [here](#), and will remain under constant review as the situation progresses and public health advice evolves. Please check the web page regularly for updates. When phasing plans are developed, it will be important that effective communication takes places with parents and carers so that they understand how the model will operate in their child's school from August, including the practical arrangements for returning to school and the timetable that will be in place.

We are in discussion with COSLA colleagues to understand further the financial implications of the phased re-opening of schools and ELC. This is being considered in the context of the overall additional costs and savings exercise across the full COVID-19 response between national and local government, including further representation to the UK Government for further funding and flexibility but recognising that further funding may be limited.

Timing and next steps

As you know, at present access to schools, ELC and out of hours settings remains restricted, with exceptions for certain limited purposes set out in the [Education Continuity Direction and Associated Guidance](#) issued last week. It remains the case that no school can re-open more widely other than for the purposes set out in the current continuity direction and associated guidance, until permitted by a further direction.

However, the Direction and associated guidance issued last week also communicated that, subject to public health guidance, teachers and other school staff may return to schools during June, to assist in the planning and preparation that is required for the new blended model of learning to be implemented from August.

The statement from the First Minister yesterday confirmed that Scotland can now proceed to Phase 1 of the Scottish Government's Route Map for getting through and out of lockdown. The route map sets out the criteria and conditions for moving to phase 1 and an orderly process of easing measures that seeks to minimise the four harms (direct COVID, indirect health, societal and economic harm) in a way that both does not jeopardize the over-riding necessity to suppress the virus and is aligned with the principles set out in the Framework for Decision Making. While some outdoor activity restrictions will ease as of today (Friday), the public are still urged to stay at home as much as possible and to maintain strict physical distancing when outdoors.

Phase 1 allows for some workplaces to re-open, and that includes schools. From Monday 1st June onwards, teachers and other staff will therefore be able to access schools for the purpose of preparing for a re-opening of all schools on August 11 for a blended in school/at home model of learning, as it is expected that some of the preparation and planning required cannot continue to be done fully effectively from home.

This is based on scientific and medical advice that this is consistent with wider efforts to control the reproduction rate and protect the health of staff and pupils. It also takes

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account of the implementation of complementary public health measures, including ‘test and protect’.

It is important that appropriate risk assessments are in place prior to any return, along with adherence to physical distancing and hygiene measures as set out in supporting guidance. In this respect, please note that, in line with the supporting guidance, where clinically vulnerable staff cannot work from home – for example because they need to attend settings to do preparatory work or to deliver face to face teaching – a full risk assessment must be in place, with the ability to adhere stringently to physical distancing requirements prior to any return. For the avoidance of doubt, extremely clinically vulnerable staff (those who are shielding) are strongly advised to continue to follow shielding measures to keep themselves safe and not to attend school in person.

Authorities **can therefore plan for more general access to schools by school staff to support planning and preparation from 1 June where that is necessary and appropriate**. However, this must only be on the basis that all the required protections are in place, including risk assessments and appropriate physical distancing.

For the purposes of managing Covid-19, and as long as we have seen evidence of transmission being controlled, the start date of the new school year across Education Authorities is **standardised to 11 August 2020**. SNCT will give advice to LNCTs on how to manage any lost holiday time due to the change to term dates. In determining the appropriate approach, we would expect appropriate consideration to be given to the need for preparation to continue throughout June 2020. Independent schools should continue to arrange their own term dates, and are advised that they may re-open for pupils from 11 August.

Local authorities should also now work with partners to increase the numbers of children attending critical childcare provision including hubs over the remainder of this term. This will include both keyworker children and children whom teachers, ELC professionals and other partners, in consultation with the local authority, think would benefit most from early direct contact with education and care staff.

There should also be a particular focus on planning for supporting children at key transition points (e.g. due to start P1 or S1) which may include some in-school experience in late June, so that they are fully supported to make the next steps in their education. Decisions on how and when this takes place will be for schools and local authorities. It is expected that staff will need to be in school to support this work on transition, however, access for this purpose for both pupils and staff will need to be given by a further educational continuity direction and therefore should not take place ahead of the 10th June or until such a direction is in place.

As announced by the First Minister yesterday, from 3 June all childminders and all fully outdoor childcare provision can reopen. On Monday 1 June we will publish guidance to support the safe reopening of these settings. We will write to you on Monday with copies of these guidance documents. Guidance to support the safe reopening of wider

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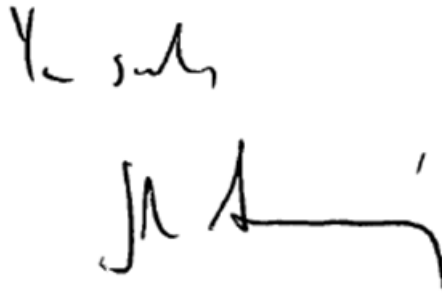


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childcare services during Phase 3 is being developed in partnership and will be published on 15 June.

We look forward to continuing to work constructively with all partners as we undertake these steps, and to continue to review the guidance and support in place to ensure that children and young people's wellbeing and learning is prioritised in these challenging times.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Swinney', written in a cursive style.

JOHN SWINNEY

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