

17 February 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Phased return to school

Today, the Scottish Government confirmed the phased return of some pupils to school settings will go ahead from Monday 22 February. The purpose of this letter is to outline what this announcement means for your family.

Primary Schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Settings

For Primary schools, in most cases this means that all pupils in ELC settings and in P1-P3 will return to school on that date. Pupils in P4-P7 will continue with remote learning and will not be returning to school yet.

The Scottish Government hopes to be in a position in two weeks' time to detail plans for their Phase Two of return to school of other primary-aged children but have said that it is unlikely that P4-P7 children will return before 15 March at the earliest.

The Scottish Government has made a special allowance for schools with a roll of 25 pupils or fewer, where all of the pupils are taught in one single class, because it would be difficult for the class teacher to teach the children in school and also provide remote learning for the children still working at home. In Highland schools like this, all pupils from P1-P7 will be able to return to school from 22 February. The schools in the Highlands that will return under this special allowance are listed in Appendix 1.

School aged Childcare Settings

The current position for school aged childcare settings remains unchanged: only children of key workers and vulnerable children can access childcare in out of school settings (other than childminding services).

Secondary Schools

In Secondary schools, only a small number of pupils from S4-S6 (the Senior Phase) will be returning to school from 22 February, with all other pupils continuing with remote learning. The Scottish Government has asked schools to arrange for Senior Phase pupils to come into school **only** to carry out practical activities that are necessary to complete courses. Numbers should be kept as low as possible, because the key priority continues to be suppressing the Covid-19 virus. This means that there are many Senior Phase pupils who will not be returning to school at all just yet.

Your school will be in touch with you to explain what plans are in place to allow some pupils to come in to school to complete these practical activities. Those pupils who are coming into

school will only be attending for as long as necessary. This might only be for a single day or part of a day. They will otherwise continue with remote learning as before. Detailed arrangements will vary from school to school, because of differences in terms of school size, staffing and the courses on offer.

The Scottish Government hopes to be in a position in two weeks' time to detail plans for the return to school of other secondary-aged young people but have said that it is unlikely that this will happen before 15 March at the earliest.

Children of Key Workers and Vulnerable Children

Children and young people who have been attending school because their parents are Key Workers, or because they have been invited in by the school, will continue to attend as before the half term break.

Remote Learning

For almost all pupils in P4-P7, S1-S3 and the majority of pupils in S4-6, remote learning will continue. Schools have been asked to make arrangements to ensure that remote learning continues to the high standard that has been on offer so far. Schools will make every effort to ensure that this is the case. Where teachers are involved in delivering face to face learning for Senior Phase pupils working on practical activities for short periods of time, there may be some changes to the way remote learning is arranged for learners who are not in school.

Arrangements to Reduce Risk

It continues to be very important for any children and young people attending school to follow health and safety advice. Schools will place a very high priority on measures to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

In Primary schools, the same rules about face coverings and social distancing will continue as before.

All young people and staff in Secondary schools will be expected to maintain 2m social distancing, and to wear face coverings. This is an increase to the measures in place and reflects the fact the Highland Council is now a Tier 4 area. We would be grateful if you would stress the importance of these rules to your child/ren and support us in making sure that all rules in place to reduce the risk of spreading the infection are followed.

Transport

School transport will run for any pupils who are attending school. All children and young people over the age of 5 should wear a face covering on school transport, and secondary school pupils should maintain 2m social distancing on school transport, which is a change from the arrangements when schools were open previously.

Local Arrangements

Your own school will keep you up to date with any specific arrangements in place to minimise the risk of spreading the virus. These arrangements might include details about which entrances and exits to use, and rules about movement around school buildings.

Covid Testing

As pupils begin to return on a phased basis, Highland Council and schools will start routinely to offer at-home testing using lateral flow devices to:

- All primary, secondary and special school staff;
- All ELC and childcare staff based in our schools; and
- All senior phase pupils attending school.

Your own school will be in touch about testing.

Further Advice

As soon as the Highland Council is informed about the next phase of school reopening, we will be back in touch with you. Meanwhile, please continue to keep up to date with the latest information on the Scottish Government website, the Highland Council website and your own school's online platforms.

We are all looking forward to the time when schools are fully open again. Meanwhile, thank you very much for your support and patience as we make these initial steps. Please do not hesitate to make contact with your own school for further clarification.

Kind regards

Nicky Grant
Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning