



Your Ref:
Our Ref: ES/SP
Contact: Eleanor Sheppard
Location: Marischal College

Date: 4th March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

On 2nd March 2021 the First Minister updated Parliament on the next phase of the return school building plans. Plans are dependent on continued suppression of the virus and will be confirmed on the 11th March following a review of data on levels of transmission across Scotland.

Primary pupils

The First Minister proposed that from 15th March all children in primaries 4 to 7 will return to school buildings on a full-time basis which will see our childcare and vulnerable learner provision coming to an end in our primary schools. From 15th March all primary school children will also be able to return to regulated childcare, including after school and breakfast clubs.

Primary school leaders are busy making final arrangements and will share further information with you by the end of the week. Our regulated childcare providers are also speedily making plans so that they are well placed to support families from the 15th March. I know you will welcome this news and look forward to seeing your children get back into the routines of attendance at school.

Secondary proposals

The First Minister proposed a slightly different approach for secondary pupils who will return full time after the Easter holiday period, again this is welcome news.

Local Authorities are guided by the Scottish Government to use the two weeks immediately prior to the holiday period (15th March to 26th March 2021) flexibly to prepare young people for a full return whilst building on the success of the Phase 1 arrangements.

National Scottish Government guidance on the Phase 2 return states that, '*Schools should prioritise subject areas and cohorts of learners where there is greatest need as identified by the school, for example, targeted support for learners who may struggle with the transition back to secondary school or to allow access to practical facilities to support certification*'.

School leaders and I have carefully reviewed the national guidance and considered the groups of learners who should be targeted for time in school. I hope that the skeletal details contained below are helpful as you help prepare your young person for the return to school buildings. Head teachers will write with more detailed plans soon.

Provisional secondary arrangements

From the 15th March all secondary schools will continue to maintain the provision of key worker childcare and provision for more vulnerable learners. If you have been accessing these services please continue to do so.

Given the constraints of 2m distancing in secondary schools up to Easter, only one third of pupils can attend at one time and there is a risk that the quality of the curriculum will be compromised if we try to deliver the timetabled curriculum in school for all pupils. Doing so would essentially result in pupils only receiving one third of their entitlement so we have taken a pragmatic approach to ensure that learning continues right up to the end of term.

High priority will be given to maintaining the delivery of the remote curriculum for all pupils. Young people should continue to engage with their Google Classroom as staff will continue posting and engaging with young people on line.

Young people in the senior phase who have been attending school to complete practical courses should continue to attend. More senior phase pupils will be invited to attend in school learning where there are concerns about their readiness for certification. The school will be in touch if your child is asked to attend in school learning and they will share their rationale for the invitation with you.

All pupils in the senior phase who have not been attending in school learning and all young people across the broad general education will be invited to attend school for 2 wellbeing sessions before the end of term. These sessions will provide an opportunity for young people to reconnect with staff and friends, make sense of current circumstances and prepare for in school learning next term. These sessions will also offer an opportunity for staff to identify any further young people who may need some additional support prior to the end of term.

The three different groups of building users (childcare, senior phase and those invited in to reconnect) will be kept in separate bubbles to limit any chance of transmission of Covid-19 and as a result staff movement between bubbles will be limited. Initial planning suggests that we need to strictly limit the number of young people on campus over lunchtimes in order to maintain separation and morning and afternoon sessions may be favoured. We are extremely conscious that it is in our interests to ensure that the data available to the Scottish Government supports the full time attendance of our children and young people next term and safety remains the highest priority.

School leadership teams are currently working through the finer details such as the provision of school transport with 1m distancing; splitting staff across three in school provisions and continuing the operation of remote learning for all. Head teachers will share more detailed plans with you when they have comprehensively considered the logistics to ensure that the last two weeks of term run smoothly.

Lateral flow tests will continue to be available to staff and some pupils. Head teachers have highly effective working relationships with our colleagues in Public Health and will continue to work in partnership with them to manage any incidents effectively.

I appreciate how unsettling this period has been for you and your family and know that managing supporting your children with schoolwork whilst managing the demands of everyday life during a pandemic has been extremely challenging. Staff in schools and I are exceptionally grateful for your continued support.

The end now feels in sight and we are all very much looking forward to welcoming all of our children back into school buildings on 12th April on a full time basis.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eleanor Sheppard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'E' and 'S'.

Eleanor Sheppard
Chief Education Officer