

To parents, carers and pupils

Date 26 August 2020

Your ref

Our ref

Dear Parents, Carers and Pupils

Important Information

Thank you for the support you have shown your school communities so far this session. You've helped us make a strong start after the challenge of lockdown.

I realise that the past few weeks have tested our resilience, patience and adaptability, and no doubt this will continue to be the case. I am writing to ask for your continued support and to set out some of the biggest challenges which we've still to overcome. I'll also let you know how you can give us feedback so that we know if we are getting it right on an ongoing basis.

Health and safety

The main aim in every institution right now is to keep it COVID-19 free. This has required significant planning and preparation before schools returned. Youth voice in our schools has strengthened the health and safety approaches that were in place. Following the Scottish Government's announcement yesterday 25 August, everyone must now use face coverings in crowded spaces and in transit in our school communities from next Monday 31 August.

We expect young people will want to wear their own face covering but we will have free supplies in school for anyone who forgets or who wishes us to provide one. Headteachers will work with their communities to set out local arrangements, making sure we adapt for people who can't wear face coverings, including young people who have a health condition or a disability which might affect their ability to wear a mask safely and hygienically. This includes hidden disabilities, for example, autism, dementia or a learning disability.

Breaks and lunches

Our schools are not designed for physically distanced gatherings. This makes managing lunch and break times safely one of the biggest issues to solve for many of our schools. It's almost impossible to find a perfect solution, so we ask that you work closely with the school to support with the difficult decisions staff are making to keep young people safe, nourished and dry. This will probably include spells outdoors, staggered breaks and now the use of face coverings.

The curriculum

The senior phase started before the end of session with all learning taking place online, at home. Each school worked out contingency arrangements for partial reopening and we must continue prepare to adapt to a blended learning approach. Schools are also developing plans for digital learning in line with the Council's aim of one-to-one devices for learners. Digital learning has become a strength and its use will expand as our main contingency strategy. We must be able to deliver online every subject we offer to young people, should we have further lockdowns or closures.

The biggest curriculum challenge is delivering practical and vocational subjects. As colleges are not expected to open for several more weeks, young people who would expect to gain qualifications at college are a priority group for support. We are working hard to find solutions that will allow them to gain qualifications while still adhering to rigorous health and safety COVID-19 requirements. As soon as our risk assessments allow, we'll make sure that these young people can resume the practical element of their studies.

A small group of learners who are also affected are young people who attend neighbouring schools for lessons. Following national guidance our initial risk assessments precluded groups mixing between schools. Staff are working hard to make sure that learning is available online, or have suggested alternative courses. However, we will review the risk assessments in light of the requirement for face coverings and may be able to make changes for certain practical subjects ahead of the planned review date of 21 September.

Extra-curricular activities

Improving health and wellbeing is a huge priority just now and many pupils and parents are questioning decisions to continue to pause extra-curricular activities. Our sports and outdoor education leaders have rigorously risk assessed this area and produced a clear timeline for the re-introducing organised sport safely. You will be aware that mixing groups of pupils, staff and volunteers is not possible under current school guidelines, however school-based PE, particularly outdoors, is a priority for all schools. We are therefore satisfied that health and fitness is being developed safely and will continue to risk assess.

Decisions on all the measures we've put in place have been difficult and some are disappointing, not least to staff and pupils who are passionate about their subjects. We're completely committed to moving ahead safely with the gradual return to the full and vibrant school lives we have known and which we cherish. We believe that a cautious, safe return will mean a full return. We ask for your support to achieve this.

We'll set out the return to school phasing more fully in our school renewal timeline which we are finalising. We will consult on this with Parent Council Chairs by email.

Please get in touch via the Parent [FAQ](#) on the council website, or direct to your school office or headteacher to discuss any of this update.

With best wishes

Lorna French

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