

Frequently Asked Questions

Highland Council's return to education

Updated on 05.08.20

Highland Schools to re-open for pupils on 12th August 2020

On 21st May the Scottish Government indicated plans for schools to open to children and young people from the 11th August. Since then it has been confirmed on 30 July that the 10th August will be a holiday and the 11th August will be an in-service day, so schools will open to pupils from the 12th August. Details of phasing pupils back will be planned by each school with a full return for all pupils by 18 August.

Highland Council has prepared supporting documents including a reopening pro forma, a generic risk assessment and re-opening guidance for ELC settings.

It is understandable that parents and carers will have questions and concerns about their child returning to school in August. In this communication, we have answered a number of frequently asked questions to seek to address those queries.

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Returning to school

Is my child expected to attend when schools return?

Highland schools are looking forward to welcoming your child back to learning and will be taking every precaution to ensure the environment is as safe as possible.

All Highland school aged children and young people - including priority groups – will be expected to attend their school, unless they are medically vulnerable or living with someone in this category (if this applies to you, [please click here](#))

Why will school start a week earlier, and will we be given this week back at a later date?

The Scottish Government have confirmed the start date for school session 2020/21 will be standardised as 11 August across all local authorities, with pupils returning to school on Wednesday 12 August. This may be a phased approach across the first week to support pupils with their return. Your school will inform you on the specific dates and arrangements for your child's return. An amended school calendar for next session has now been agreed for Highland Council and schools will close one week early on Friday 25 June 2021.

[View our amended school term dates](#)

What items will my child be able to bring to school with them?

Please ensure that your child only brings items to school that they will require during the school day or at an after-school club, if appropriate, this includes Chromebooks.

Staying safe in school

As always, the safety and wellbeing of our children, young people, their families, and our staff is our top priority. If you are feeling unease, we hope the measures we have put in place reassure you that your child will be safe upon returning to school.

Should children who are medically vulnerable return in August?

A small minority of children will fall into this category, and parents should follow medical advice if their child is in this group.

If someone in their household has been identified as medically vulnerable, pupils should attend if they are able to understand and follow the instructions.

Will my child need to wear a face covering, mask or other PPE?

Children are not required to wear face coverings in the school environment. If you have any concerns, please speak to the head teacher at your school. Pupils may however find that some school staff will be wearing a mask for a number of reasons e.g. if it is not possible for them to maintain 2m distance.

How will you limit the risk of infection for my child and will there be a strategy to reduce areas of frequently touched surfaces?

All Highland schools have carried out risk assessments ahead of re-opening in August so that they can put in place a programme of control measures to limit the risk to staff and children.

Changes may include:

- decluttering of classrooms
- minimizing contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school
- cleaning hands more often than usual - wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly or use alcohol hand rub or sanitizer ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered
- ensuring good respiratory hygiene - promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach
- increasing ventilation where possible in classrooms/social areas
- cleaning surfaces in classrooms

In addition, the Council have carried out a number of checks to the school buildings including water testing, electrical testing, checking of emergency lights, fire extinguishers etc.

What extra training will be provided to Head Teachers to allow them to carry out detailed risk assessments?

Head Teachers are already experienced in preparing risk assessments. Generic assessments on the management of COVID related risks are in place and developed for use within all school/ELC settings. Head Teachers will also be receiving additional support and advice on COVID related risks from Highland Council's Occupational Health & Safety Team.

Will there be COVID-19 testing and contact tracing in schools?

When pupils return to school in August, all children eligible to attend, and members of their households, will have access to testing if they display symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Will clear direction be given to parents about what symptoms pupils should be kept at home with if they are ill?

As a parent it is your responsibility to ensure your child does not have any COVID symptoms before attending school. Please do not send your child to school if they are unwell.

You can access advice regarding Covid-19 symptoms [here](#).

Parents and carers should follow previous Highland Council advice regarding all other medical conditions.

My child has a condition (e.g. minor allergies, a vulnerability to colds, etc) that often result in symptoms that are similar to COVID-19. Will they be sent home, and/or should I ask for weekly COVID19 testing for them (to reassure others)?

If a child develops symptoms of the coronavirus during the school day, they will be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 10 days and to book a test.

Using the Test and Protect arrangements - a test will be available, and the results will be delivered as rapidly as practicable.

What will happen if a child or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

Where the child or staff member tests positive, the school will be advised by the NHS Highland Health Protection Team about who else within the school should be asked to self-isolate.

The other household members of that wider group do not need to self-isolate unless the child or staff member they live with subsequently develops symptoms.

All pupils and staff will have access to a test if they display symptoms of coronavirus and are encouraged to get tested in this scenario.

Where the child or staff member tests negative they can return to their setting and the fellow household members can end their self-isolation.

We understand that test results will be available within 24 - 48 hours.

Further information on Covid-19 and the Test and Protect system are available on the NHS inform website [here](#).

How can I look after my child's mental health and well-being?

Guidance for parents and carers on looking after the mental health and well-being of children and young people during the COVID-19 outbreak can be found [here](#).

We also have a list of resources on our [back to school webpage](#). Please also link with your child's class Teacher/Guidance Teacher if you have any concerns.

What will schools do to help children feel safe and secure in school?

Highland Council's Promoting Positive Behaviour policy document will continue to be supported in schools.

In addition to the above, Educational Psychologists have a role in promoting positive relationships across Highland.

What additional cleaning practices will be in place in school?

Our Cleaning & Facilities Management (FM) Service are working in partnership with all schools to adjust cleaning provision to their specific requirements.

It is our plan to implement enhanced cleaning regimes within schools, details of which are currently being finalised and will vary from school to school depending on a number of factors.

The Council's Cleaning & Facilities Management Service adheres to the [guidance issued by Health Protection Scotland](#)

Regular hand washing will continue to be crucial and teachers will support pupils to follow the advice on this. Parents are asked to please reinforce and encourage this with your child/ren.

Transport Drop off/collection

Will school transport still be available for children with an existing entitlement and how will bus companies or taxis manage social distancing?

Providers have carried out risk assessments to ensure infection control measures are in place for pupils to return in a safe manner.

Government guidance currently states that pupils are not required to wear face coverings while on dedicated school transport. However, if they travel to school by public transport, it is mandatory to wear a face covering.

Face coverings should be provided by parents/carers.

As an alternative to public transport or using private vehicles, Highland Council is actively encouraging parents and carers to continue walking, cycling and scooting (where possible).

Please refer to the [Highland Council coronavirus homepage](#) for the latest updates.

Will the school day start and end at the same time?

We anticipate schools returning under normal start and finish times. Should there be a change to these times, schools will clearly communicate these arrangements with parents before the school returns.

How will I drop off and collect my child?

Further details on the arrangements will be sent to parents via the school's normal communication channels.

Usually someone else collects my child from school as I work, can someone from another household collect my child?

Any arrangements that parents make for the collection/drop-off of children should be within current Scottish Government guidance in terms of meeting-up with people from out with your household.

Classes

Will my child be taught by their usual teacher?

Schools cannot guarantee this as some staff may be absent, but the aim will be to have at least one adult who will be familiar with the children in each class and this may be the teacher or other staff member.

Lunch and snack arrangements

Will my child get a hot meal or a packed lunch?

The majority of schools will initially be offering a reduced menu. Plans are to return to the full menu as soon as possible. Further details on the arrangements will be sent to parents via the school's normal communication channels. Head Teachers will provide more information in relation to each school's specific lunchtime arrangements.

What should I do if I think I might be eligible for Free School Meals?

Please visit our website at [our webpage](#) where you can apply on line and will receive an instant decision on your eligibility. If you are experiencing any problems with applying online please email the team with your full name, national insurance number and the child's name and date of birth at welfare.support@highland.gov.uk or phone 0800 090 1004. Calls are free from landline and mobile phones.

Can I pay online for school meals?

All secondary schools and a few primary schools are able to accept payment online for school meals. Further details on the [school meals web pages](#), or email SchoolMeals.OnlinePayments@highland.gov.uk

Curriculum

Can parents opt to continue home learning, and will they get support with home school materials for this?

Highland schools are looking forward to welcoming your child back to learning and will be taking every precaution to ensure the environment is as safe as possible.

All pupils are expected to return to school.

Are there education resources that I am able to access online?

All schools are being supported with online resources.

[Visit our highland digital hub](#)

Clubs and Hubs

Will Breakfast Clubs and After School Clubs be open?

It is anticipated that Breakfast Clubs and After School Care Clubs will be in operation for school aged children.