

22 December 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

Changes to the start of term

As you know, at the weekend the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced some changes to the way schools will return after the holidays. You can find the details of what was announced by looking on the Scottish Government website: <http://bit.ly/FestivePeriodGuidance>

The purpose of this letter is to give you some key information about the new arrangements for the return to school in Highland in January.

There are three phases to the return to school next term:

- 1) From Wednesday 6 to Friday 8 January
- 2) From Monday 11 to Friday 15 January
- 3) From Monday 18 January onwards

1) Wednesday 6 January - Friday 8 January

Highland schools were due to return on 6 January. The First Minister announced at the weekend that the school holiday has been extended until 11 January. So, during 6-8 January, all schools will only be open for the children of Key Workers and for children who are vulnerable. We have asked schools to identify vulnerable children and young people and to make contact with the families where appropriate. You may already have had contact from your school about this.

Scottish Government Keyworker categories: -

- Category 1 – Health and Care workers directly supporting COVID-19 response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers (small numbers identified as top priority already); staff providing childcare/learning for other category 1 staff.
- Category 2 – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (for example: fire, police, prisons, social workers), as well as those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.

- Category 3 – All workers (private, public or third sector) without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland (but where the response to COVID-19, or the ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running, would not be severely compromised).

For example, this could be key workers who are:

- Staff delivering NHS services
- School based staff/childcare providers
- Public Sector staff i.e. working for The Highland Council
- Staff providing social care to protect and care for the most vulnerable
- Staff with face-to-face roles in residential homes with people in the care of the state
- Staff working on key national infrastructure
- Staff directly involved in maintaining public safety and security
- Staff essential to the delivery of critical and essential services

If you are not sure if you are a Key Worker please contact your school for further advice or visit the Scottish Government website here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-re-opening-arrangements-for-january-2021/pages/children-of-keyworkers/>

Children and young people attending school during 6 - 8 January will be supervised by staff and should take with them enough to keep them busy throughout the day. Provision may be limited to in-school childcare and wellbeing support as the holiday has been extended until 11 January, though of course children and young people can choose to do some school work if they want to. School transport and catering will operate as normal for those children and young people who will be in school and normal school attendance times will apply.

School ELC settings, Partner Provider settings and Childminders will also be open between 6 and 15 January for Key Worker children and children who are vulnerable. Children in these categories attending ELC settings and Out of School Care will follow their normal attendance pattern. In those ELC settings where 1140h rollout is due in January 2021, the formal start date for this will now be 18 January 2021. However, any Key Worker children attending these settings will not be charged for any hours up to 1140h from 6 January 2021. If you need to change your child's attendance pattern you will need to contact the school/setting to see if this is possible to accommodate. Any additional hours, on top of ELC entitlement, will be charged to you as parent/carer.

There may be different opening times for some Private Provider settings and Childminders. Information will be shared in that case with you directly by your provider.

For all children and young people not identified as children of Key Workers or as vulnerable, the school holiday continues and they should not attend school.

Please note that if you are a Key Worker you are not obliged to send your child to school or to use childcare if you can make other arrangements and, indeed, you may prefer to keep them at home if you can.

2) Monday 11 January - Friday 15 January

The First Minister has also announced that between 11 January and 15 January all schools will switch from offering childcare and wellbeing support to offering learning and teaching for those children and young people in school - attendance in schools will still be restricted to necessary staff, vulnerable children and children of key workers. Children in these categories in school will be supervised as they work on the online learning provided by their teachers.

During this time learning will also commence online for all other pupils not in school. Your school will be in touch prior to 11 January with the details of online learning.

Transport and School Meal Provision

Please be assured that from 6-15 January all children attending school will have access to their usual school transport and school meals provision. If your child will not be attending school but is usually in receipt of Free School Meals then you will receive vouchers.

3) Monday 18 January

From this date, the plan is that schools will be open as normal, with the same arrangements in place as were in place from October to December. As before, rules will apply about social distancing, face coverings, movement around the school building and so on. Your school will let you know if there are any changes to these rules. Teaching will be face to face in classrooms as usual. If there is any change to this plan due to decisions made by the Scottish Government, we will let you know.

IT support or connectivity issues

In this section we have included some information about supporting online learning at home. The ICT in Learning Team have created an online Digital Hub that provides support for parents, pupils and staff and includes detailed information about online learning. This can be accessed on any device and can be found by searching Google using the term Highland Schools Digital Hub or by using the following link: <http://bit.ly/ParentsSchoolHub>

We suggest that you give your child's Chromebook a 'once-over' as soon as possible to ensure that the device is working correctly. If there are any problems with a device, please let the school know as soon as possible. If you have any concerns about connectivity for online learning please let your school know and they will be able to help.

Digital screen time can be an issue for children and young people and it is important to think about your child's wellbeing in relation to this. Online learning works in a different way to

actual classes and lessons will not be online all day. There will be independent tasks set for completion away from a computer.

Welfare Help

For advice and support if you need any welfare help and to apply for a Covid-19 Self-Isolation Support Grant, please contact the Welfare Support Team on 0800 090 1004.

You can find more information about this grant here: <http://bit.ly/Self-IsolationSupportGrant>

Mental Wellbeing

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it's important to have the right information. Getting news from unreliable sources can make you feel more upset and anxious, which is unhelpful when it comes to mental wellbeing.

Visit <https://www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus> for the most up to date and reliable information.

There will be a daily wellbeing drop-in event available to all secondary school pupils on Google Meet from Wednesday 6 January until Friday 15 January at 1.30pm until 2pm. These are informal sessions run jointly by former Youth Development Officer, Yvonne Ross, who is now a Community Wellbeing Instructor for Highland, and High Life Highland Youth Development Officers. Young people can drop in to informally chat.

Wednesday 6th January - meet.google.com/vys-pskk-vgu

Thursday 7th January - meet.google.com/pdx-guwj-pbe

Friday 8th January - meet.google.com/gqw-icva-man

Monday 11th January - meet.google.com/bct-pbby-chx

Tuesday 12th January - meet.google.com/xnu-adib-oat

Wednesday 13th January - meet.google.com/pfq-xhix-dbu

Thursday 14th January - meet.google.com/vpi-iehh-pjy

Friday 15th January - meet.google.com/bxw-iavy-dtr

Conclusion

We hope that the key information set out above will help you and your family understand the changed arrangements for our planned return to school in January. Our Highland communities have worked together to support each other in these uncertain times. There is no doubt that all our staff, children and young people will demonstrate their resilience and determination to succeed as we briefly return to the online learning model. Your support as parents/carers is invaluable and very much appreciated.

If you have any further questions about the plans set out in this letter please do not hesitate to contact your child's school.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicky Grant'.

Nicky Grant
Executive Chief Officer