

9 March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to update you about the next phase of the re-opening of schools.

The Scottish Government has announced that this next phase of reopening education will take place from Monday 15 March. Detailed guidance from the Scottish Government is expected to be published next week, and we will provide a further update when we have this information. Meanwhile, Education Scotland have published some guidance about this next phase, and our planning is based on that guidance. You can find the guidance [here](#).

Primary

Pupils in P4-7 will return to school on Monday 15 March, joining P1-3 pupils who are already back at school. Arrangements for vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers will end, and these children will re-join their normal classes.

Breakfast clubs and after-school will start on Monday 15 March. Your school will be in touch with you in the next few days (and by Friday 12 March) with the details. You should contact the school directly with any questions you might have.

The initial focus for children returning to school will be on reconnecting with learning, friends and routine, supporting wellbeing and ensuring the transition back to school runs smoothly. Children will receive all the support they need as they adjust to being back in school, reconnecting socially with friends and school staff.

Secondary

From 15 March, all secondary pupils will, where possible, receive a combination of remote learning and *some* in-school teaching. The Scottish Government has stated that Senior Phase students (S4-S6) who are taking national qualifications will have priority for face-to-face lessons in school. Young people in S1-S3 will have *some* time in school each week where this is possible, to allow schools to continue to connect with learners, support their health and wellbeing and support the transition back to full time schooling after the Easter break.

We will let you know about any changes to arrangements for children of key workers and vulnerable children when Scottish Government Guidance is published. We expect that the existing provision for children of Key Workers, and other children who have been invited in to school, will continue.

Planning the return to school will be very focused on keeping young people, their families and staff safe, in order to continue to minimise the risks of spreading the Covid infection. Each

individual school is in the best place to understand how many learners can be accommodated within the school at one time, based, for example, on the flexibility provided by the school and community environment and in keeping with 2m physical distancing between learners, between adults, and between adults and learners who are not from the same household.

Our secondary schools in Highland vary considerably in terms of size, available classroom space and staffing. For that reason the way in which this phase of return to school is managed will vary from community to community. Each school will decide how to safely balance remote and in-school learning based on local circumstances and needs, in discussion with officers from The Highland Council.

Arrangements for remote learning for learners who are not in school will be affected by these new plans, and schools will contact parents/carers to inform them of the changes which are necessary. Because our teaching staff will be carrying out more face to face learning, our provision of remote learning is likely to change, though of course our schools will continue to provide as high quality remote learning as possible. We know that our learners and families have been very patient and understanding as we have coped with the pandemic and remote learning, and we ask for your understanding as schools work on the very complex demands of this next phase of the return to school. We have updated our Remote Learning Guidance and have added more resources to support learners and families. You can access the guidance [here](#). To support all S1 - S3 pupils during the return to school (15 March - 2 April), the Digital Learning Team in Highland have created a live learning space on the [Highland Schools Digital Hub](#). All pupils, staff and parents have access to this webspace and the resource remains a key support for digital learning in Highland.

Your own school will be in touch in the next few days (and by Friday 12 March) to share their plans for how more in-school time will be balanced with continued remote learning, which will continue to be the main type of learning for most secondary school learners until the Easter break.

It is the Scottish Government's expectation that all secondary school pupils will be back in school on a full-time basis after the Easter holidays on Monday 19 April.

Special Schools

Head Teachers of Special Schools have already discussed arrangements for individual children and young people for return from 11 January and these arrangements will continue, in discussion with parents and carers.

Transport

Pupils who travel by school transport will continue to be able to do so. If it is necessary to alter arrangements for any pupils, parents/carers will be informed by Friday 12 March. We will inform you of any changes to arrangements for minimising risk, for example face coverings and physical distancing, when Scottish Government Guidance is published. We expect that staff and learners in secondary schools will be expected to wear face coverings at all times when indoors.

School Meals

School meals will be available for primary pupils, and secondary pupils when they are in school at lunchtime, and those entitled will receive free school meals.

Vouchers for parents/carers of secondary pupils entitled to free school meals will continue until a full time return to school is achieved.

Clinically Vulnerable Children and Young People

We will inform you of any changes to arrangements for clinically vulnerable children and young people when Scottish Government Guidance is published. Please be assured that the health and wellbeing of our learners, their families and our staff are of the utmost importance.

Once again, I would like to thank you for all you are doing to support your child's learning. Our schools are grateful for all the support you have given during the period of remote learning. We know how challenging this time has been and we very much appreciate your continuing support as we enter this next phase of school reopening. If any children or young people are feeling anxious about returning to school we would encourage you to contact your school to discuss arrangements, and school staff will be more than happy to provide whatever support is needed.

Kind regards

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

Nicky Grant
Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning