

2 March 2021

**Education and Learning Directorate**

The Bridge  
Glasgow Road  
Dumfries  
DG2 9AW

Dear Parents / Carers

I wanted to write to you all following our first week back after our mid-term break and to also look to the weeks ahead following the First Minister's announcement today.

After many weeks at home, it has been good to see the re-introduction of in-person teaching within our schools. Our Headteachers have said how nice it has been to welcome staff and learners back to classrooms last week. The Scottish Government's phased approach has provided an opportunity to review practices on a smaller scale, ensuring that they meet the guidance as well as allowing our teachers to focus on welcoming pupils back, focussing on their needs and to restart in-class learning again. This initial re-opening of our schools to some of our learners is a positive step towards the reintroduction of in person learning for all.

For our pupils who remain at home, positive feedback on remote learning is providing reassurance that good progress is being made in covering the required course content. Schools will continue to encourage and support learners, and to monitor their engagement in the remote learning provision.

For our Senior Phase pupils, we already know that the 2021 exam diet has been cancelled. We have now received confirmation of the Scottish Qualification Authority's (SQA) alternative certification arrangements for this year. Across the Scottish education system, actions will now be taken to ensure that pupils have time to complete the necessary assessments needed by their teachers. More information will be sent in a letter from the Chief Education Officer to parents this week.

As our schools plan for the reintroduction of learning for some pupils, the Supporting Learners' Service is also having to make changes. Its teaching and non-teaching staff will now be based in schools to help provide early learning and childcare, in-school learning and in-school childcare for vulnerable and key worker children. Providing this support will inevitably impact on our capacity to undertake the additional support for learning activities normally undertaken at this time, including supporting transition planning, preparation of Individual Education Plans, involvement in child planning, and direct support to children, young people and families.

Within our schools, we continue to work with new measures in place in order to keep everyone safe including the use of social distancing, face coverings, regular cleaning throughout the day, staggered break and lunch times and dedicated seating plans so that we are able to provide levels of mitigation within our school environment. Coupled with this, our staff and senior phase pupils are now undertaking regular asymptomatic testing to reduce coronavirus-related risks in schools and, in so doing, to enhance the confidence of our school communities.

Against this backdrop of our youngest and senior pupils returning and asymptomatic testing in place, the First Minister today outlined the Scottish Government's plan for all our pupils to return to classrooms. From 15 March, all our primary pupils will be returning to school. All secondary pupils in Scotland will also return to classrooms but on a part-time basis from 15 March. Although a phased approach means that everyone will not be returning until after the Easter break, it does give us a date to look forward to. We await the details from the Scottish Government following today's announcement and will work with our Headteachers on specific plans that will see all our pupils return to classrooms. I will be in touch with more information in due course.

I am optimistic that in a few weeks' time, we will have all our teachers and pupils back in our schools and learning again. Today's announcement allows us to see some light at the end of the tunnel which I know we are all looking forward to.

Yours sincerely



Dr Gillian Brydson  
Director Skills, Education and Learning