

Please ask for: Paul Senior
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Dear Parent / Carer

Scottish Government Announcement – Coronavirus and Schools Reopening

I would like to thank you for all your support and understanding over the last few months since our schools and nurseries closed to the majority of children and young people. I'm proud of all the staff who work across schools and Education settings in the Highland area and how they've dealt with providing different forms of provision against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis in a professional and caring way. I'm also proud of our amazing children and young people who continue to show resilience and are fully engaged in their learning in engaging in the virtual learning and home schooling programmes. Since recently joining Highland Council it has been a pleasure to hear the positive feedback from a range of communications in addition to social media with examples of the positives that have come from this very difficult situation.

We have recently been notified by the Scottish Government of the expectation that all schools and education settings should reopen to children and young people from the 11 August. Since this announcement was made I appreciate that some parents and carers are likely to have concerns about their children going back to school and nurseries. Please be assured that as a local authority we will be working closely with our key partners along with local schools and nurseries to ensure that our settings are supported in preparing for reopening from the 11 August. I can assure you further that no decision to open our schools and education settings will be taken lightly. In the Highland Council region every school and educational setting is different. As a council, we will be supporting our headteachers and staff members in the decisions they make for their settings and communities to stay well and stay safe.

To minimise the potential for risk to our children, staff and communities we will be working with all of our all schools and settings to formally undertake risk assessments and we will be introducing the most rigorous steps to ensure the highest standards of environment 'readiness' for reopening including hygiene, including regular cleaning and hand washing. The settings will make the best possible arrangements for social distancing based on their

own unique settings. Our approach will also include support from local public health personnel.

During June, the priority of local schools, settings and a number of local authority services will be working together to plan provision for August. We will not be applying a 'one size fits all' solution to reopening and it is unlikely that our schools or settings will be able to initially offer full time provision, given the guidance and measures that will need to be followed around pupil numbers, safe working and also staff availability. This may lead to a range of arrangements being put in place e.g. part-time provision, staggered start and finish times, and short weeks which will be discussed further with education leaders over the coming weeks to accompany our risk assessment processes to ensure that our learning environments will be as safe as possible for when the children and young people are due to return in August.

Over the coming weeks we will be facilitating a number of discussions in local areas with parents, carers, schools, settings and partner agencies to help inform the Highland and our local approaches to securing the best ways to enabling our children and young people to be able to return to learning in August in our 3-18 educational establishments safely .

Finally, I'd like to thank you for all that you are doing during these incredibly challenging times and for the support you are continuing to provide for your local school and nurseries.
Yours faithfully



Paul Senior
Executive Chief Officer
Education and Learning