

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 28 October 2021

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Education Update – Covid-19

1. Summary

- 1.1 During academic session 2020/21, there was significant disruption to face to face teaching and learning as a consequence of ongoing infection levels of covid-19. As part of the government's approach to reducing the risk of transmission of the covid-19 virus, schools and early years centres were closed for most children and young people between January and February 2021.
 - 1.2 Following the full reopening of schools, significant restrictions remained in place until the summer holiday period. Upon return in August 2021, teaching and learning has taken place in a more normal manner with a number of mitigations remaining in place.
 - 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide an update for elected members of the steps taken to support all our children, young people and families during the current period of education recovery of schools.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The education and children's services policy board is asked to note the content of this report.
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3. Background

- 3.1. Following the publication of updated guidance by the Scottish government prior to the start of the new academic session, with a further update on 15 September, all risk assessments have been reviewed and updated as required to reflect required changes.
- 3.2. A number of mitigation measures remain in place. These include staff continuing to observe physical distancing, enhanced cleaning being maintained, visitors being restricted and parents and carers being asked to respect physical distancing during pick up and drop off times. In addition, all secondary aged pupils should continue to wear a face covering in school at least until the October break.

- 3.3 Ventilation remains an important mitigating factor and CO₂ monitors have been purchased for use in schools and early years centres. A risk-based approach to placement of these in line with the HSE guidance is currently being implemented. Devices which have been received have been deployed on a planned basis in order to complete a full survey of all enclosed teaching spaces. Upon conclusion of this full survey, any specific areas where there appears to be a lack of ventilation and appropriate action can then be identified in order to rectify concerns. Following this, the devices will continue to be used across all schools and early years centres in order to continue to ensure adequate ventilation.
- 3.4 Engagement and awareness raising with staff and secondary aged pupils is continuing to encourage the uptake of regular LFD testing. A recent analysis of uptake by colleagues from Public Health has allowed a more targeted approach to be taken at this time. Further communication and engagement with staff and pupils is currently being planned.
- 3.5 Previous arrangements for creating smaller groups in schools, commonly known as 'bubbles', are no longer required. However, we will continue to encourage physical distancing, where possible, to further minimise any risk. This means we will avoid bringing children and young people together in large groups. For example, there are currently no large assemblies taking place.
- 3.6 Children and young people aged 5 to 11 no longer need to wear a face covering whilst on school or public transport. However, young people aged 12 and older still have to wear a face covering, unless they are exempt.
- 3.7 The national vaccination programme is continuing and now includes everyone aged 12 to 15 years old, in line with the national Joint Committee on Vaccinations and immunisations (JCVI) guidance. These are currently taking place in NHS clinics with invitations being sent to families using the same mechanism as with other groups.
- 3.8 Significant changes have been made to contact tracing with individuals now being classified as either high or low risk. Where a school or early years centre is notified by parents or Test and Protect of a confirmed case, a copy of the NHS "warn and inform" letter is issued on a targeted and proportionate basis. This provides advice on what to do if they are identified as a low risk close contact or start to develop symptoms themselves. This is only sent on the notification of a first case within a class with subsequent letters only being sent after an intervening period of time.
- 3.9 If someone is identified by NHS Test and Protect as being a close contact the following rules now apply:
- Children aged 5 to 18 do not have to self-isolate, as long as they remain asymptomatic and have a negative result from a PCR test.
 - Children under the age of 5 do not have to self-isolate so long as they remain asymptomatic but there is no requirement for them to have a negative result from a PCR test.
 - Adults who are double vaccinated and have a negative result from a PCR test no longer have to self-isolate if they are a contact of a positive case.

- 3.10 Children's services is continuing to monitor staff and pupil absence on a school by school basis. The table below shows the trend of attendance since the start of the current academic session. It should be noted that this data is dependent on absence reporting by parents to their child's school. As a consequence, there may be a time lag in ensuring the data is as up to date and ensuring it is as accurate as possible.

| Stage | Absence category | Absence (%) | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | | WB 16 Aug | WB 23 Aug | WB 30 Aug | WB 6 Sep | WB 13 Sep | WB 20 Sep | WB 27 Sep | WB 4 Oct |
| Primary | Sick | 0.2 | 1.3 | 2.3 | 2.4 | 1.8 | 1.2 | 0.8 | 0.7 |
| | Isolating | 0.5 | 2.3 | 4.0 | 3.4 | 2.3 | 1.8 | 1.2 | 0.9 |
| | All covid-related | 0.8 | 3.7 | 6.3 | 5.8 | 4.1 | 3.0 | 2.0 | 1.6 |
| Secondary | Sick | 0.4 | 1.6 | 3.3 | 3.7 | 2.7 | 1.8 | 1.2 | 0.9 |
| | Isolating | 0.7 | 2.2 | 4.5 | 3.6 | 2.2 | 1.7 | 1.0 | 0.8 |
| | All covid-related | 1.1 | 3.8 | 7.8 | 7.3 | 4.9 | 3.5 | 2.2 | 1.7 |
| Special | Sick | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 1.3 | 0.6 | 0.2 |
| | Isolating | 0.2 | 0.8 | 0.3 | 1.5 | 3.0 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0.3 |
| | All covid-related | 0.2 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 1.9 | 3.6 | 2.1 | 1.4 | 0.5 |

Implications of this report

1. Financial Implications

None.

2. HR and Organisational Development Implications

None.

3. Community Plan/Council Plan Implications

None.

4. Legal Implications

None.

5. Property/Assets Implications

None.

6. Information Technology Implications

None.

7. Equality and Human Rights Implications

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. Health and Safety Implications

None.

9. Procurement Implications

None.

10. Risk Implications

None.

11. Privacy Impact

None.

12. Cosla Policy Position

None.

13. Climate Risk

None

List of Background Papers

None.

Children's Services

GM/KO/LG

11 October 2021

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