

Our Ref LF/CR
Your Ref

Please ask for Caran Richardson
Direct Dial 01467 533305
Email caran.richardson@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Laurence Findlay
Education & Children's Services
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
Aberdeen
AB16 5GB
Tel: 01467 537438

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laurence.findlay@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Parent/Carer

Dear Parent/Carer

When I last wrote to you all on 22nd May, The First Minister had just launched “*A Strategic Framework for the re-opening of schools and early learning and childcare provision in Scotland*” on Thursday 21st May 2020. The following week, on 28th May, further advice was published for local authorities and schools to support a return to school in August. There are many considerations which require to be made over the coming weeks as school provision will look very different in August. Social distancing and increased hygiene measures will be put in place, meaning a significant decrease in the amount of young people in a class at any one time. Furthermore, consideration also needs to be given to transportation, pick-up and drop-off arrangements, staffing availability, catering and much more besides. This is a hugely complex undertaking and I am keen to assure you that officers within Aberdeenshire and Head Teachers and their teams are working very hard to have plans in place to share with you all ahead of the summer break. Again, we are all operating in a very fluid environment, with updated advice and guidance coming in regularly.

While Head Teachers would always aim to respond swiftly to queries, it is important we recognise the scale of their planning efforts at this time. Their plans for next session are being quality assured by a central management team who are liaising with colleagues nationally on an ongoing basis, and Head Teachers will update their communities as soon as it is possible to do so.

When schools return in August, all young people will have a mixture of school-based and home-based learning and how this is configured will vary from school to school, depending on the school building, staff availability and school roll. This is known as blended learning. Education Scotland, the national improvement agency for Scotland, is due to publish advice on blended learning in the next few weeks. Education Scotland will also be publishing materials which schools, and indeed parents and carers, can use to support learning in the home. From August, a significant element of blended learning that will take place at home will be promoting the flipped learning approach. Flipped learning (sometimes referred to as flipped classrooms) is a pedagogical approach that inverts the traditional method of the teacher leading learning, instead handing some of the responsibility over to the pupil, variant on their age and stage. This is a learner-centred approach that involves students being active in their development. In the flipped-learning scenario, pupils are given materials and tasks when in school, or indeed online, and instructed

to work through these independently when at home. The flipped learning model has been used successfully in many other countries.

In addition to flipped learning, some schools are also keen to use virtual classrooms. We have been very keen to promote this format of delivery across Aberdeenshire and give schools the opportunity to exploit the ability of technology to facilitate this. However, the video-conferencing component of the two platforms our schools can use, Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom, has not been available for the majority of local authorities in Scotland. The vast majority of Scotland's state schools use the Education Scotland Glow platform to access Teams and Google Classroom, as it is inherently safe and open only to pupils and staff. After significant national discussions over the past few weeks, video-conferencing has now been enabled in Google Meet. This has been done on the basis that each local authority takes responsibility for any inherent risks associated with any platform of this kind and in Aberdeenshire we are currently working on our risk assessments for this.

Your own Head Teacher will be sharing with parents, carers and young people, the blended learning approaches they will be using once the new school year starts in August. These are new approaches for everyone, so everyone will be learning together. We have ongoing training available via webinars for school staff on the use of technology and these have been very well attended by our colleagues across Aberdeenshire.

In addition to preparing for the return to school in August, we are also required to continue providing critical childcare for the children of key workers and for vulnerable children and young people over the summer holidays and into the new school year. This will clearly have an impact on resources and staffing, and as such we will be reviewing and changing the provision in place to ensure we can deliver it effectively with the resources we have.

To summarise, you will note that there is a huge amount of work going into planning for August across Aberdeenshire and I would like to thank you all for your patience and continued support of your schools at what is a unique and challenging time for everyone. As I previously indicated, your Head Teachers will share further information in due course as plans are further developed for a partial return to school in August. We would hope schools will be in a position to share these throughout the final two weeks of term.

Yours sincerely



Laurence Findlay
Director of Education & Children's Services