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Dear Parent/Carer

Thank you for your patience and support during this last wee while – it really is very much appreciated.

The Scottish Government has now confirmed that all young people can return to school from the start of the new term, which for us in Aberdeenshire is Monday 19th April 2021. This date was set out within a broader framework for the gradual re-opening and easing of restrictions which are, of course, dependent on continued success in suppressing the virus. To that end, it is essential we do all we can to continue following the rules and adhering to FACTS as we go about our daily lives.

We have come a long way over the past year and the vaccination roll-out across the NHS Grampian area is making good progress, but the situation remains delicate. To that end, it is essential that we keep doing all we can to keep ourselves and each other safe. I know schools have been asking parents and carers to avoid gathering at the school gates at drop-off and pick-up times and I would ask you to continue to show your support as youngsters return to school next term.

Schools have reported very positive feedback to date on the phased return to face-to-face teaching and learning which commenced on 22nd February and I know staff have been pleased to have young people back in school buildings again.

The virus continues to circulate in society and as such there will be a continued need to be vigilant and there may well be times when individuals and indeed whole classes are asked to self-isolate as cases arise. We continue to work closely with and be guided by our colleagues in the Health Protection Team in NHS Grampian. While we will continue to ensure any identified close contacts receive communication from schools as well as directly by Test and Protect, it is no longer always essential to issue letters to whole-school communities. Our focus remains on prioritising health and safety within all establishments and public health colleagues have offered some very positive feedback about the substantial mitigating measures in place.

We will continue to do all that we can to keep schools open, using additional staffing where we have this available, and schools will keep parents and carers updated.

Lateral flow testing is available for all school staff who wish to undertake the tests and will be available to all S1-6 students in secondary schools from the beginning of the new term. Secondary schools will share specific details with learners with regards to these tests.

I know that you will be looking forward to the Easter holidays and I wanted to bring your attention to an update being shared by our Infrastructure Services team encouraging residents to act responsibly when enjoying our beautiful countryside: <https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/apps/news/release.aspx?newsID=8122>

For those who will be looking for activities to enjoy at home, I also wanted to highlight some of the great ideas shared by colleagues working in sport, culture and leisure. It's worth checking out [Live Life Aberdeenshire on YouTube](#) and also [Live Life @ Home](#) pages on the team's website.

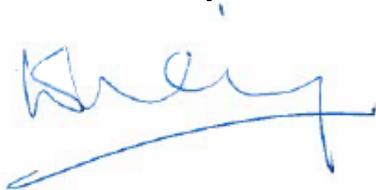
Additionally, we are looking for nominees for this year's Inspiring Aberdeenshire awards and there is a category especially for young people – the Aberdeenshire's Future award, for a young person (under 25) who has shown great leadership and helped to inspire and motivate others in support of a local cause. Can you think of someone who deserves a nomination? Nominations close on 5th April and can be submitted at: <https://engage.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/inspiring2021>.

We're also looking forward to the launch of a Time Capsule campaign in partnership with the Evening Express and Press and Journal in the new term. Children and young people will be invited to reflect on their experiences during the last year and put forward creative submissions for the time capsule which will be buried in Aberdeenshire for future generations to enjoy. A selection of submissions will also be shared digitally in our [Shine a Light on Lockdown website](#) so please encourage children to have a think about what they may like to submit once they return to school.

Finally, I would just like to take this opportunity to say – on behalf of all our schools and all my colleagues – thank you again for your ongoing support over the past challenging year. I would also like to thank those who have taken the time to contact me personally with your messages of support for your schools and for the service. Everyone has been working tirelessly to navigate an ever-changing landscape and this has been greatly appreciated.

I wish you and your families a safe and restful break over the Easter holiday period.

Yours sincerely



Laurence Findlay
Director of Education & Children's Services