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Dear Parent/Carer

The First Minister made an announcement on Tuesday 2nd March 2021 with regards the phased return to face-to-face schooling. The arrangements announced would see a full return to primary schools from Monday 15th March 2021 further to a final checkpoint on 11th March ensuring that continued progress was being made across the country with regards to tackling the virus.

The situation in secondary schools is more complex. The First Minister announced that in addition to senior phase students (S4-6) continuing to have time in school from 15th March, there should also be some time given to S1-S3 students. 2 metre physical distancing will be required in secondary schools and this will have a significant impact on how many young people they can have in school at any given time. Across Aberdeenshire we have 17 secondary schools, all with different schools rolls and different capacities in terms of available space. Furthermore, each school has different staffing availability. Between now and the 15th March each school will develop their plans for the period from Monday 15th March until the end of term on 1st April and will share this with parents and carers. I would ask all parents/carers to note the following points which are very important;

- Each school will decide on the number of pupils who can be in school each day based on available accommodation, staffing availability, transport availability and other constraints.
- Each school will have flexibility to deliver what is best for their learners based on the 2m physical distancing requirement. It should be noted, however, that only one third of the overall school roll is likely to be able to be accommodated in the school building at any given time given the 2m physical distancing requirement. For example, a 900 student school will be able to accommodate no more than 300 young people at any given time. Furthermore, some schools will have an imbalance in numbers across different year groups which will exacerbate the timetabling challenges they face.
- This should not be seen as a full time return to school. The First Minister indicated that she hoped to be able to announce a full time return after Easter. Given the 2m physical distancing requirements, any time in school between 15th March and the end of term will be minimal. There are only 14 school days between 15th March and the end of term.
- Priority will continue to be given to senior phase students working towards SQA and other qualifications.
- Further to the senior phase students, schools will prioritise the groups of learners they bring back into school based on their tracking and monitoring to date.

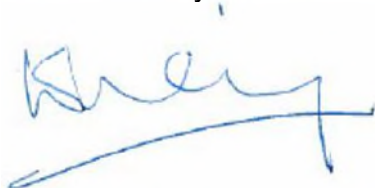
- Further guidance about remote learning delivery will be forthcoming in the new guidance as clearly more staff will now be needed in school settings and as such will not necessarily be available to support the remote learning. Schools will do what they can to continue supporting remote learning, including signposting to nationally developed materials, but the availability to support remote learning will be greatly constrained by the requirement for more staff to physically be in school.
- We will work with schools to augment in school learning with an appropriate outdoor learning and health and wellbeing package to support learner wellbeing where we have available staffing and facilities.
- On school transport, one metre social distancing will be in place in line with the arrangements for public transport. As such, there will be constraints on transport availability and we will work with our colleagues in the Council's transport team to consider how best these constraints can be addressed.
- Face masks will require to be worn at all times in secondary schools and on all school transport.

As noted earlier there will be a final checkpoint on 11th March before any new arrangements for 15th are confirmed. It should be noted that there is a huge amount of planning required between now and 15th March and this will need to be done at a rapid pace. As ever, I would ask for the support and forbearance of parents and carers and would ask you to show understanding to your schools who are again dealing with more changes at pace which will result in more changes to the experiences your child(ren) have.

It should be noted that the information in this letter is based on the information we hold at present and is subject to further change. It is also worth noting that schools do not get any advance notice of announcements and our response mechanisms reflect that situation. Technical guidance will be published by Scottish Government over the next few days which will provide further detail on the points above and clarity for schools to support their planning.

In the meantime, I would like to thank you all for your ongoing support and your Head Teachers will be in touch with their own local plans over the next couple of weeks as we head towards 15th March.

Yours sincerely



Laurence Findlay
Director of Education & Children's Services