

# Back to school in August is planned

Deputy First Minister John Swinney has confirmed that subject to the scientific advice, pupils will return to schools in August 2020.

Children and young people should be ready to return to the classroom on 11 August 2020, a week earlier than planned for most pupils, while Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings will open over the summer.

This depends on continuing compliance with social distancing and that the coronavirus outbreak remains under control. The First Minister explained today that the R number has been reduced to somewhere between 0.7 and 1. This number is the rate of reproduction and is an indicator of how many people would be infected by a single person with the virus. At the beginning of the lockdown in March, the R number was over 4.

In tandem with keeping an eye on these numbers, the Scottish Government will introduce its Test and Protect programme to try and avoid a second outbreak.

An agreement reached between councils, professional associations and parent representatives means:

- schools will implement physical distancing measures, such as providing seating that is two metres apart and staggering arrival, departure and break times
- increased hand-washing or use of hand sanitisers, enhanced cleaning, robust protocols for suspected or

confirmed Covid-19 cases and ongoing risk assessments will be implemented

- class sizes will be significantly reduced as a result of the new way of working, with most pupils spending around half their time in class and half learning at home. Time in school will increase further as soon as it is safe to do so
- teachers and other education staff will return in June – subject to appropriate safety assessments being completed – to prepare and plan for the new way of working and welcoming pupils back
- existing ‘hubs’ will continue to run to provide vulnerable children and those of key workers with childcare over the summer
- the school ‘estate’, or buildings used to teach pupils, will be expanded where necessary and possible by using libraries, community halls, leisure centres, conference venues or taking short-term leases of vacant business accommodation to increase the time children can spend with their teachers
- innovative use will be made of existing teachers and staff and, where necessary, consider the role former teachers can play either by returning to the classroom or teaching virtually to support in-home learning

To maximise the time pupils can have in the classroom and support children in the new model of schooling, including digital home learning, The Scottish Government is investing £9 million to provide 25,000 laptops or tablets – with internet access – for disadvantaged children as part of the first phase of provision to support their learning outside school. Working with local authorities, a second phase of investment will involve further funding to support digital inclusion.

Education Scotland will also deliver new national digital learning resources to support schools’ own arrangements for children and young people.

Mr Swinney said: "In reopening Scotland's schools, our overriding priority is ensuring the health and wellbeing of our pupils and staff and giving parents the confidence schools are safe.

"Subject to public health guidance, teachers and other school staff will be able to return in June to prepare for a new model of learning from August. Comprehensive health and safety guidance will be in place prior to staff returning to school.

"This is not, however, a return to schooling as we knew it – schools are not returning to normal at this stage.

"To keep our pupils and staff safe we will implement physical distancing, staggered arrival and departure times, staggered break times, increased hand hygiene, enhanced cleaning regimes and a range of other measures

"That means a new model of teaching, learning and support will have to be delivered. Precise details will vary from school to school but for the vast majority, classes are going to be much smaller to allow physical distancing and, as a result, children are likely to spend about half their time learning at home.

"To maximise time in the classroom, we will work with local authorities to expand the size of their school estate where that is possible by using outside space, libraries, leisure centres, community halls and anywhere else that can safely be made to work.

"And, with classes being split in two or even in three, we will examine whether we can expand the number of teachers by asking those recently retired to return.

"In all of this, we recognise that some pupils will need extra help, particularly those who don't have the technology at home to learn effectively.

“That’s why we will provide an initial tranche of 25,000 free laptops – bundled with a free internet connection – to pupils who need it. Education Scotland will support digital learning through new national digital learning resources that will bolster schools’ own arrangements for children and young people.

“We don’t know how long schools will have to work this way, just as we don’t know how long coronavirus will be a threat. As long as that is the case, school life will feel quite different to before Covid-19.

“We have a mission to make this work, to educate Scotland’s pupils and, above all, to keep them safe. Working with our teachers, school staff, and councils this plan gives us a way to do that.

“We can safeguard our children’s future and get them learning alongside their classmates again. This plan will do that and get our young people safely back to school.”

COSLA Children and Young People spokesperson Councillor Stephen McCabe said:“In planning for a return to face to face schooling the safety of our children, young people and staff is paramount. In preparing for this we have been acutely aware of the impact that not being in school has on our children and young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable. The wellbeing of all of our children and young people is at the heart of everything we do.

“A key part of this agreement is that local authorities will have the flexibility to plan and deliver a return to education which suits local circumstances and takes the needs of all of the children, young people and parents in their area into account. Where it safe to do so and the scientific advice allows, local authorities will also have the flexibility to bring some children back to school in June with a particular focus on those at the key transition points of P1 and S1.

“This has been developed with key partners in education. To make sure we get it right for all of our children at this challenging time we will continue to work closely together.”