

Coronavirus – some school pupils to return on Monday

At Holyrood on Tuesday the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced new plans to allow some school pupils to return to school from Monday 22 February 2021. But the majority of pupils will continue with remote learning until at least mid-March.

Children in Primary 1 to Primary 3, children in early learning and childcare will all be back in the classroom from Monday. There will be strict limits on numbers and the government says it has strengthened [safety guidance](#) for schools and there will be more testing for teachers and for secondary school pupils. A limited number of S4 to S6 pupils will be allowed back in classrooms to finish any practical work for their SQA qualifications.

Those pupils already at school are children of key workers or those considered vulnerable will remain at school. A further announcement on schools reopening to other pupils will be made on 2 March.

Ms Sturgeon said: “In terms of the order in which we exit lockdown, the Scottish Government has always made clear that education should be the priority. I can confirm today that, in line with the advice of our expert group, this first phase of the re-opening of schools will go ahead as planned on Monday.

“We will need to monitor the impact of this change very carefully before taking any further decisions. However, I hope we will be able to set out the second phase of school re-opening in two weeks’ time. I want to be clear, though, that the need to properly assess the impact of this limited re-opening means we do not envisage, at this stage, any further return to school before 15 March.

“As we consider these issues, we are of course doing everything we can to ensure that schools are as safe as possible for children, and for the education workforce. We are also publishing today updated school safety guidance, developed with the Education Recovery Group. This sets out a range of additional safety mitigations.

“And to help implement them, we will be providing local authorities and schools with an additional £40 million, as part of a wider £100 million package to accelerate school recovery. The Finance Secretary will confirm details later this afternoon. The success of this limited re-opening, and the prospect of getting more pupils back later in March, very much depends on all of us continuing to abide by the wider restrictions.

“So, for now – and I really cannot emphasise this point strongly enough – please treat Monday’s important milestone as a return to education for children only, and not as a return to greater normality for the rest of us.”

Cllr Ian Perry, Education, Children and Families Convener for The City of Edinburgh Council, said: “This is the news many families across the city were waiting for and it’s great that they now have confirmation their children will be back in school next week. There’s very good home learning involving our young people, teaching staff and parents taking place but everyone knows there’s no better place for children than being back in school with their peers and learning face to face.

“For all other pupils home learning will continue and we hope we can welcome more pupils back in school soon as long as the virus continues to be suppressed. It’s really important we all continue to follow the guidance especially now pupils are back at school so parents are advised not to gather at schools gates at drop off and pick up times. We all have to work together to help protect the NHS and save lives.”

Education, Children and Families Vice Convener, Cllr Alison Dickie said: “I’m delighted that our youngest pupils will be able to return to their schools and nurseries next week as these are really challenging times for many families. It’s so important for their learning and development that children are back in school where they belong. And very much for their mental health too. Our schools have been working hard preparing for their return and teaching staff are really looking forward to welcoming them back.

“We will make sure our schools continue to be safe learning and teaching environments for all our young people and staff by following the latest health advice. We very much want to see more pupils back in our schools as soon as it is safe to do so and the Scottish Government will make a further announcement on the phased return of pupils in two weeks time.”

Ministers announced a package of support for schools:

- A further £40 million to help councils implement safety mitigations aligned with clinical advice
- £60m of additional investment in education recovery, including employing more teachers, classroom support staff and facilities management
- Twice weekly at-home testing to be offered to people who work in schools, early learning and childcare settings attached to schools, and senior phase pupils. Comprehensive testing guidance has been issued to schools and local authorities, and by the start of this

week, more than 2,200 schools had received test kits, with deliveries to remaining schools continuing throughout the rest of this week. The programme will be expanded to stand alone childcare settings as soon as possible thereafter

- All secondary pupils will be required to observe two metre physical distancing while in school and on school transport in the period immediately after the return. This is in addition to existing measures including the use of face coverings

A further update is being published today on this year's national qualifications. National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams 2021 have been replaced by an alternative certification model based on teachers' judgement of evidence of each individual pupil's attainment. The National Qualifications Group 2021 has agreed to extend the deadline for submitting provisional grades from 18 June to 25 June.

In recognition of the additional workload this will bring, teachers and lecturers involved in the delivery, assessment and moderation of National 5, Higher and Advanced Highers will receive an exceptional one-off payment of £400. There will also be two assessment support days available for all secondary teachers to give them extra time to engage with the alternative certification model.