

## **Return to School**

### **FAQ**

#### **Is it safe to reopen schools in August?**

It is recognised that some parents and carers may be concerned about their child returning to school, however, In Scotland less than 1% of positive cases of COVID-19 have been among people aged under 15. This is a rate of less than 20 per 100,000 of the population in that age group. There have been no deaths among people under 16 years of age. The Scottish Government considers that the balance of risk is now strongly in favour of children and young people returning to school full-time. This is a positive development that will help address the wider impacts of the virus on the health and wellbeing, educational progress and attainment of our children and young people.

Despite this, we do not expect the return to school in August to be a complete return to normality. We must all remain vigilant and continue to manage the risks of COVID-19. This FAQ has been designed to help you, and the Council, to do so, and ensure the safety of children, young people and staff.

#### **Is it necessary for my child to attend when schools reopen?**

Parents are required by law, under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, to provide education for their child. With the exception of those children who are being home schooled, it is the Scottish Government's intention that **all** children and young people, in all year groups, will return to school full-time from the autumn term in August so as to benefit once again from all that school brings to their lives. There is increasing concern around the negative impact of school closures on children and young people's wellbeing – the wellbeing of all children, young people and staff has been the central focus when preparing for the reopening of schools.

#### **Does this apply to all children, including those with underlying health conditions or other factors that may increase vulnerability to COVID-19?**

All schools will follow the latest guidance on attendance for children, young people and staff who have underlying health conditions, or live with individuals with underlying conditions or other factors, such as ethnicity, which increase their vulnerability to COVID-19. Parents and carers may wish to have a discussion with their child's healthcare team if they are unsure or have queries about returning to school because of their health condition.

School staff will work with parents and carers to update personal or health care plans for children and young people who already have them or who need them. More children and young people may need an individual/care plan than previously so if you think your child would benefit from this approach, please contact your child's school.

In addition, local monitoring arrangements will be in place to give early warning of any local increase in infections in the future which could lead to people in the higher risk categories being advised to stay away from schools again for their safety.

### **What social distancing rules will apply in school settings?**

On the basis of the scientific advice, and subject to all risk mitigation measures being appropriately implemented, Scottish Government has advised local authorities that there is no requirement for physical distancing between children in schools.

Two metre physical distancing between adults, and between adults and children and young people who are not from the same household will continue to be maintained wherever possible. Where this is not possible, and face-to-face interactions extend to 15 minutes or more, face coverings will be worn.

We must ask that parents do not enter school buildings unless formally invited. Arrangements for parents/carers to drop off and collect children and young people will be managed by each school, to ensure that large gatherings of people can be avoided and physical distancing between adults and children of different groupings is maintained. Parents are encouraged to assist school staff in this by seeking to maintain social distance from other parents and children at all times.

### **Will there be any attention paid to social distancing during the school day?**

Schools will actively discourage physical contact between pupils and will continue to encourage children and young people to maintain a degree of distance where possible, recognising differences in ages and stages of children's development. Parents are encouraged to reinforce these messages.

### **What additional measures will be in place to combat the spread of COVID-19?**

It is a legal requirement that local authorities and headteachers ensure that risk assessments are conducted or updated to reflect the revised planning assumption of a full return to school. Implementation of the mitigations identified in these assessments will help manage risks effectively for children, young people and staff returning to full-time learning. Each school will adopt core public health measures in a way that is appropriate to their setting, these include:

- Enhancing hygiene and cleaning arrangements;
- Minimising unnecessary contact with others, and/or large gatherings of pupils;
- Wearing appropriate personal protective equipment where necessary;
- Requiring that people who are ill stay at home; and
- Actively engaging with Test and Protect.

Each school will:

- Introduce hand sanitizer stations;
- Increase ventilation and the frequency of cleaning;
- Promote frequent washing/sanitising of hands for 20 seconds and drying thoroughly, and always when entering/leaving the building, before/after eating and after using the toilet;
- Encourage children, young people and staff to avoid touching their faces including mouth, eyes and nose; and
- Promote the use of a tissue or elbow to cough or sneeze, and ensure bins are emptied regularly for tissue waste.

It will continue to be the responsibility of every individual in society to promote and observe good hygiene practice. Schools will provide handwashing facilities and ensure that hand-sanitizer is available in key locations. **It will, however, be necessary for parents to ensure that children aged P5 and above carry**

**their own supply of hand sanitizer at all times.** This will minimize any requirement for queueing to use school facilities, and thereby maximise time spent learning. The Local Authority will make an additional payment, to families entitled to benefits-related free school meals, of £5 per pupil (P5 and above), per term to support the purchase of hand sanitizer.

### **Should face coverings be worn in school settings?**

Scottish Government advises that there will be no requirement for additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to be worn by staff when schools reopen, and face coverings will only be required where the specific circumstances described above apply. Individuals are, however, welcome to wear a face covering should they choose to.

### **What do I need to know about school transport?**

Firstly, no child, young person or adult should travel to school if they, or a member of their household, have symptoms of COVID-19. Where pupils are fit for school, parents and carers are encouraged to consider the use of active travel routes where possible.

All passengers and staff must sanitise their hands prior to joining any form of transport. Dedicated school bus transport will be regarded as an extension of the school and, as such, there will be no requirement for social distancing between children and young people, nor will there be a requirement to wear a face covering. Where taxis are used solely for the purpose of transporting children and young people to school, as with dedicated school bus and coach services, physical distancing requirements are not necessary. Unless a section is set aside solely for pupils, children and young people using public transport, including buses, ferries and aircraft, for any element of their journey will be required to conform with the prevailing Scottish Government and Transport Scotland guidance. As the time of writing this includes social distancing and the wearing of face coverings.

### **What can my child bring with them to school?**

Parents are strongly encouraged to prevent their children from bringing any unnecessary items to school. Exceptions for this may be agreed through communication between families and professionals. School bags must not be placed on desks. Schools will manage their own arrangements and communicate them to parents.

### **Will it be possible to borrow school library books?**

Yes, in principle, children, young people and staff may be able to take books and other resources home. All items will be quarantined for 72 hours upon return. The amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surface is likely to have decreased significantly after this time. Again, schools will manage these arrangements and communicate them to parents.

### **What should I do if my child is unwell?**

No child, young person or adult should attend school if they have symptoms of COVID-19. The most common symptoms are:

- new continuous cough
- fever/high temperature
- loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste (anosmia).

### **What will happen if my child develops COVID-19 symptoms while at school?**

All children, young people and staff will know that they must inform a member of staff or responsible person if they feel unwell with symptoms of COVID-19. Staff will also be vigilant for the symptoms of COVID-19 and will understand what actions they should take if someone develops them, either onsite or offsite.

If a child or young person is identified to be symptomatic then parents/carers will be contacted and asked to make arrangements to pick the child or young person from school immediately and follow the national guidance for households with possible COVID-19 infection including testing and self-isolation. The Education Service is in the process of working with Development and Infrastructure, Environmental Health and NHS Orkney to establish a specific plan for Mainland based pupils from the outer isles.

The effective application of Test and Protect in the school environment will be an important means of preventing any spread of the virus. The key initial step will be the self-isolation and rapid testing of all symptomatic children, young people and staff. Other children, young people and staff members in the school will not be required to self-isolate unless contacted by the contact tracing service. If a child, young person or staff member tests positive, Orkney's Health Protection Team will assess what action is needed, taking into account the close contacts the person has had within the school and other factors such as the implementation of mitigating measures, eg cleaning, ventilation and PPE.

If a child, young person (or their parent/carer if under 16 years) or staff member is contacted by a contact tracer and told to self-isolate for fourteen days, the person should leave school to self-isolate at home straight away and, if possible, wear a face covering and avoid public transport. The Scottish Government has published advice for employers on how to support people who are asked to self-isolate.

Please note that Head Teachers and Orkney Islands Council will take very seriously any activity that feigns COVID-19 symptoms and is used in a threatening manner. Parents have a strong role here to support their children in understanding the possible implications of this action.

### **What are the Local Authority's contingency plans should there be a need to reintroduce social distancing in schools?**

Education Scotland has formally approved Orkney Islands Council's Local Delivery Phasing Plan. This Plan sets out what the Council will do should it become necessary to reduce the time spent in school for children and young people. In such circumstances the Council will pursue a blended-learning model of delivery. As circumstances and guidance changes, it may be necessary to amend any plans that are in place. Orkney Islands Council and/or Head Teachers will continue to communicate with parents and carers any changes that may be required. These changes may apply to only some schools and not others as it is difficult to apply generalized expectations to the variety of settings we have in Orkney.

### **Will Papdale Halls of Residence be open for business?**

Yes and, as with schools, a risk assessment has been undertaken and additional mitigations are in place to minimize the likelihood of any COVID-19 infection. Halls staff will communicate directly with families to outline the key strategies and risk mitigations they are putting in place.

**Will there be a school catering service?**

Yes, although there may be some temporary changes to provision in some schools which will be communicated to you by the head teacher.

**Will there be extra-curricular activities before and/or after school?**

No, these activities will not be possible in the first instance. The situation will be kept under regular review.

**Will there be more detail provided to parents/carers?**

Yes. This FAQ sets out the essential facts for families. Every school is different, however, and each head teacher will understand best how this guidance can be applied in their settings. They will do so in a way that prioritises the health, safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff, and ensure that the risk mitigation measures set out in this guidance are implemented effectively. Head Teachers will share specific arrangements for their school with parents and carers.