



From mountain to sea

Returning to school in Aberdeenshire

Information for parents, carers and young people on return to school arrangements in Aberdeenshire Council's schools

Update from Laurence Findlay – Director of Education and Children's Services

Thank you for continued patience and support, and we hope you have been able to enjoy a well-earned break during the summer holiday. We are very much looking forward to welcoming children and young people back to Aberdeenshire's schools from August 12th and wanted to share some helpful information with you following the [Scottish Government's confirmation of a full return to school](#) and the [associated guidance to help us all prepare](#) for the start of the new term.

The [summary version of the guidance](#) is particularly helpful in providing families with reassurance about what school will be like so that you can work with your children to support any concerns or worries they may have.

The Scottish Government's Education Recovery Group has been reviewing the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic restrictions and specific consideration has been given to evidence and data relating to transmission among young people.

The return to school has been agreed on the basis of the virus being suppressed to sufficiently low levels and we will do our utmost to ensure schools are safe and clean so that everyone can have confidence the risk of infection is low.

Our [Local Delivery Phasing Plan](#) will now be used as a contingency plan should any further closures be required but it has also given us a chance to consider in detail many aspects of the latest advice for schools, which centres on putting health, safety and wellbeing first.

I would like to thank all colleagues who have worked so hard in recent months to develop local guidance based on a rapidly evolving situation. This has not been easy, but our teams have really risen to the challenges presented to them.

Head teachers will continue to keep you updated on specific arrangements for your school.

I would like to wish every young person and everyone in their wider support network well for the school year ahead. If you're feeling nervous – young person, staff or parent – know it's normal and many of your peers will be feeling similarly cautious. We are here to support you.

Our [FAQs on the return to school](#) have been updated on the council's website. Some of the key points from the new national guidance are summarised below alongside details of some of our support mechanisms.

All the best, Laurence



Some key pointers from the Scottish Government guidance and what to expect

Risk assessments have been carried out on all aspects of Aberdeenshire schools' work and continue to be updated in line with public health advice. Schools will ensure that children and young people, parents/carers and staff are well-informed about health and safety measures.

Rigorous cleaning measures are being put in place, proportionate to the size of each school.

A focus on enhanced personal hygiene will mean:

- *Measures to allow pupils and staff time to clean their hands with soap and warm, running water or sanitiser when they arrive at school, return from breaks, change rooms and before and after eating*
- *Adequate hand-washing or sanitising facilities throughout the school estate*
- *Arrangements to support young children and those with complex needs who may need assistance*

Children, young people and staff will also be encouraged to:

- *Catch coughs/sneezes with tissues or elbow*
- *Avoid touching their faces*
- *Keep windows/doors open to aid ventilation*

Minimising contact between individuals and groups is also an important aspect of the guidance, allowing for 2m physical distancing between adults, and between adults and children not from the same household wherever possible. Primaries will be looking at how best they can maintain consistent groups of young people together throughout the school day where possible. As a precaution, secondary schools will also encourage physical distancing among young people where possible, particularly those in the senior phase, but not to the extent where this would introduce capacity constraints.

It is important to emphasise that both the approaches of maintaining distance between young people (in secondary schools) and the use of consistent groups are not all-or-nothing approaches, and will bring public health benefits even if practical arrangements mean they can be implemented only partially (e.g. with groups maintained for the majority of the day but some limited mixing into wider groups permitted for specialist subjects or transport, etc.). Schools should apply proportionate, risk-based approaches to implementation of distancing and the use of groups.

The guidance is clear that face coverings are not be required for most children (other than those clinically advised to wear one). Where adults cannot keep 2m distance and are interacting face-to-face for a sustained period (about 15 minutes or more), face coverings should be worn. Anyone wishing to wear a face covering in school will be allowed to do so.

Just as we are in the wider community, it will be important that all members of our school communities stay vigilant to COVID-19 symptoms and follow the Test, Trace, Isolate and Support advice where needed.

We are here to support you

Leadership teams

School leadership teams are continuing to work hard behind the scenes to take on board the latest national guidance, reflect on the impact of this at a local level and communicate with families about the detailed arrangements for children and young people. Your patience is very much appreciated and if you haven't heard from your school yet, please don't worry – anything you need to know about before heading along to school will be explained.

Parent Councils

Parent Councils have a statutory responsibility to support and represent all the parents in their school. Many Parent Councils have managed to hold virtual meetings during this time and some have found they

have increased attendance. Guidance for holding virtual meetings and AGMs and suggested Parent Council activity will be sent to all Parent Councils this week. A series of virtual meetings with the Director of Education and Head of Education will be arranged for mid-September as a follow up to the meetings held in June. You can find details of your parent council on your school's website or via your school office. Anyone with any Parent Council queries should contact Christine McLennan at christine.mclennan@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Learner Participation

Aberdeenshire Council issued a pupil survey in June called 'Learning from our time in Lockdown' and the feedback has been shared with Head Teachers. Schools and settings will develop arrangements for good quality dialogue and communication with children and young people about the return to school. Schools will be able to access 'Shine a Light on Lockdown', a Google site where young people have shared their experiences of Lockdown and young people will now be able to use this to reflect on returning to school. Schools will continue to emphasise the importance of Learner Participation at this time and the council's Pupil Participation Forum will be meeting virtually for the 2020/21 session.

Educational Psychology

Our Educational Psychology team continues to offer a dedicated phone line service to parents and carers on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9am to 3pm. Please call 01779 403721 or email eps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk with your name and number if you would prefer they call you. They will be happy to help by offering guidance and reassurance.

You can also watch a series of FAQ videos they have developed on their website:

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/aberdeenshireeps/transition-support/>

Give us your feedback

There is a section on Aberdeenshire Council's website if you wish to make a complaint about any of its services: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/contact-us/have-your-say/have-your-say-guide/>

You may also direct feedback to feedback.team@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or email our central education team via education@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

We would always encourage you to engage with school staff in the first instance, particularly if your feedback relates to learning and teaching or other aspects of school life.

Websites referenced in this document:

<https://www.gov.scot/news/schools-to-re-open-full-time/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020/>

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/25374/aberdeenshire-local-phasing-delivery-plan-schools.pdf>

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/25386/covid-faqs-schools.pdf>

You may also find the following national websites offering support and guidance to parents and carers helpful:

- *Parent Club's dedicated COVID-19 web pages:* <https://www.parentclub.scot/topics/coronavirus>
- *National Parent Forum:* <https://www.npfs.org.uk>
- *Education Scotland's Parent Zone:* <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone>
- *Sign up for Education Scotland's newsletters:* <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/scotland-learns/>