

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



EDUCATION EXECUTIVE

EDUCATION RECOVERY - UPDATE

REPORT BY DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members of the updated Scottish Government Guidance on reducing the risk in schools from coronavirus (COVID-19), and the implications for mitigations in place in West Lothian Schools.

To inform members of HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) updated scrutiny programme for academic session 2021-22.

To inform members of the Scottish Qualification Agency contingency planning, and the plans in place in each secondary school in relation to the 2022 examination diet.

B. RECOMMENDATION

To note:

- 1) the updated Scottish Government Guidance on reducing the risk in schools from coronavirus (COVID-19), and the implications for mitigations in place in West Lothian Schools; and
- 2) HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) updated scrutiny programme for academic session 2021-22.
- 3) the Scottish Qualification Agency contingency planning, and the plans in place in each secondary school in relation to the 2022 examination diet.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; developing employees; making best use of our resources; working in partnership
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools – published 22 November 2021, 17 December 2021 and 5 and 7 January 2022.
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations	Delegated authority to the Depute Chief Executive to implement further changes to the

	to Officers	Education Recovery Plan.
IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	Potentially significant impact on education outcomes, with mitigations reported in previous Education Recovery reports.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	The approved revenue budget includes one off resources of £6.958 million and specific Covid-19 grants from Scottish Government for 2021/22 of £9.073 million, including carry forward of funds from 2020/21, for education recovery.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	N/A
VIII	Other consultations	Engagement has taken place with Headteachers; Teaching and Non-Teaching Unions, Financial Management Unit

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 National Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID 19 in schools – 22 November 2021

Revised National Guidance was published on 22 November 2021, with minor revisions to ensure that Guidance remained up to date. The key changes in this revised guidance were:

- The re-commencement of Childsmile and the National Dental Inspection Programme in schools.
- Revised guidance for pregnant staff, advising that all pregnant women who are vaccinated should undergo a risk assessment in the workplace and continue to work if it is safe to do so, and that pregnant women who are unvaccinated at any gestation should take a more precautionary approach in light of the increased risk.
- Updated guidance relating to children and young people with Additional Support Needs, requiring the review and updating of risk assessments to reflect current circumstances.
- Updated guidance on the use of taxis and private hire vehicles clarifying the mitigations required if physical distancing is not possible.
- Updated guidance on school uniform policy, recommending less restrictive uniform policies to help ensure that children and staff remain warm in building with increased ventilation.

- Revised guidance on school trips. International trips can now take place with appropriate mitigations, subject to a risk-based assessment to consider whether such trips would be appropriate on a case-by-case basis, including in light of their local circumstances and wider guidance on international travel. School trips are permitted, including day visits to residential outdoor education centres and overnight and multiple night residential stays, with appropriate mitigations. There are no longer any limits on overnight tent/dorm occupancy.
- Updated text on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) containing definitions of high and low risk of transmission.

D.2 National Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID 19 in schools - 17 December 2021

Updated National Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID 19 in schools was published on 17 December 2021. This updated Guidance reflected changes to the balance of risks following the emergence of the Omicron variant. Schools were asked to implement these changes as soon as is possible from the start of the January term. In addition schools were asked to promote maximum compliance with all current measures (such as appropriate physical distancing, one-way systems, asymptomatic testing, and the correct use of face-coverings) to help to reduce transmission.

Key changes to the previous guidance that will be introduced are set out below.

D.2.1 A strengthened approach to minimising contacts, primarily through the reintroduction of groupings where practicable indoors.

This provides benefits due to reducing possible vectors of transmission. The size of such groupings might differ depending upon local circumstances and the need to minimise education disruption – for example a grouping might refer to a whole class in primary school, and a whole year group or the senior phase in secondary school. In line with the subsidiarity principle, headteachers and local authorities are empowered to make decisions about the best approach for their individual school or setting.

As part of a strengthened approach to minimising contacts, schools should continue to avoid assemblies and other types of large group gatherings. As with the existing policy, preliminary examinations remain permitted provided they are held in accordance with this guidance. Maintenance of any groupings used within schools is not required within transport arrangements.

D.2.2 Tightened restrictions on school visitors, including a return to parent councils and other activities being precluded from operating on the school estate

In recognition of the positive impact on the wellbeing of children and young people, supply staff and other professional visitors can continue to visit schools. This includes visiting teachers, psychologists, nurses, social workers, youth workers, outdoor learning specialists, Higher Education Institution (HEI) tutors, SQA staff and appointees (e.g. visiting assessors and visiting verifiers), Education Scotland staff (including HMIE) and those providing therapeutic support. Movements should continue to be limited to those that are necessary to support children and young people or the running of the school until otherwise advised. Such visitors should look to reduce the number of schools visited and to limit their contact time with children and young people. They should also take regular lateral flow tests when asymptomatic. Consideration should be given to the provision of this support by virtual means as appropriate.

Parents/carers may attend school premises where this is agreed with the school and is considered necessary to support children and young people. Where it is considered beneficial, parents/carers may also attend school premises for individual parental visits related to the wellbeing, progress and behaviour of children. All such visits should be risk assessed and agreed in advance by schools as being a necessary and proportionate measure. It is imperative that all such visitors to schools should be agreed in advance and arrangements appropriately risk-assessed.

In line with SportScotland advice on the 'Return to sport and physical activity', parents/carers may attend school premises to spectate at outdoor school sports events, providing all activity is consistent with relevant Scottish Government guidance on health, physical distancing, and hygiene.

D.2.3 Updated guidance on the required approach to ventilation and CO2 monitoring, including clarification of some key points based on user feedback

All schools and ELC settings should have access to CO2 monitoring, via mobile or fixed devices. This is in order to support the goal of all school buildings, including all learning and teaching spaces, being assessed regularly for ventilation issues with a view to remedial action being taken where required. It should be noted that large volume or low occupancy spaces, for example games halls, may require alternative assessments, as CO2 may not be a useful indicator of good ventilation in certain circumstances.

Local Authorities should ensure that an appropriate ratio of monitors to spaces is made available to each school, taking account of local circumstances and workforce requirements. Sufficient monitors should be made available for use to enable ongoing decision-making by staff about balancing ventilation (including by opening of doors and windows) with temperature during the winter months, taking account of changes in weather conditions.

Local authorities should re-assess their current arrangements to ensure they have enough devices to allow every learning, teaching and play space to be assessed for a minimum of one full day per week under normal occupancy. Local authorities should ensure the information they gather as a result of these assessments is used to inform actions to improve ventilation in schools where required.

D.2.4 Updated text on asymptomatic testing, specifically the processes to be followed when distributing test kits

Schools and local authorities will continue to promote twice-weekly at-home LFD testing actively to their staff and secondary pupils, and that participants are encouraged to record their results, whether positive, negative or void. Schools should make every effort to try and improve uptake and reporting of asymptomatic testing by staff and secondary pupils.

Some additional improvements have been made to testing processes to allow schools to hand out test kits more proactively to staff and students, and focus efforts on encouraging greater uptake and reporting. These involve reductions in the requirements for schools around keeping test kit logs, which should reduce burdens for school staff; and a move away from the need for written agreement to participate, with acceptance of test kits and completion of the tests at home taken as implied agreement to participate.

D.2.5 Strengthened approach to self-isolation for high risk / household contacts, whereby they are required to self-isolate for 10 days regardless of age, vaccination status or a negative PCR result

Based on the latest evidence, enhanced self-isolation measures were introduced for all household contacts of any Coronavirus strain from Saturday 11 December 2021. Those requirements are that *household* contacts of all cases should now isolate for 10 days. This applies to everyone in the household, irrespective of age, and the self-isolation period cannot be reduced by testing negative or being vaccinated. For the purposes of this guidance, household contacts fall within the wider category of high-risk close contacts and should be treated in the same way.

With that exception, the previous risk-informed approach within schools will continue to apply. This approach means that blanket isolation of whole classes will continue to be minimised. Fewer children and young people are likely to be asked to self-isolate, and when they do it will be for a shorter period of time while they await their PCR result.

D.2.6 Details relating to school staff eligibility for exemption from self-isolation under the critical worker guidance

Schools are amongst the vital public services which can apply for an exemption to allow essential workers to volunteer to leave self-isolation and return to work, in certain limited circumstance, to allow vital services to continue. Exemptions may be considered in order to avoid school buildings closing and avoiding moving to remote learning where possible.

Staff who volunteer not to self-isolate must only do so following a risk assessment of their personal circumstances, and the employers' duty of care to all their employees must be respected. Before a staff member who is a close contact of a positive case can return to work, they must meet the criteria as set out in the guidance for critical workers exemptions. They must:

- have had their second COVID-19 vaccination more than 14 days ago
- have a valid vaccination record (You can download the NHS Scotland Covid Status app or get a paper record of your vaccine status from NHS Inform.)
- not have symptoms of COVID-19
- have evidence of a negative PCR test
- take daily lateral flow tests for up to 10 days after being exposed to the virus
- fully comply with any PPE requirements, hand hygiene and other infection control measures

D.2.7 Update to guidance on school visits and trips in order to reflect the above ‘in school’ mitigations

Domestic school day and residential trips scheduled to take place up to the end of December can be completed, however; local authorities and schools will wish to consider the risk assessment for any trip in detail and all additional mitigations that apply due to the update on guidance relating to schools. Pre-visit testing for staff and pupils is strongly recommended. In line with the wider updates to school safety guidance made on 17 December, any groupings should be maintained for the duration of the trip.

Bookings for January 2022 onwards, including those involving overnight stays with no caps on numbers within each dorm/tent can be maintained at the current time, but authorities, schools and venues should ensure that mitigations are in line with the updated in-school guidance. Those organising school trips should ensure that adequate insurance is in place, including financial protection for possible cancellation.

D.2.8 Requirement that schools and local authorities continue to provide essential in-person support for particular groups (including vulnerable children and young people) in the event of temporary school closures at a local level

Where temporary school closures are required – either partial or in full – local authorities should give consideration to how they can continue to provide essential support for particular groups. This should include: i) providing limited in-person provision within the school for vulnerable children and young people, and the children of key workers, ii) continuity of provision of free school meals for eligible children and young people, and iii) the continuation of provision of therapeutic support to children and young people, including through alternative means if beneficial. This applies in the event of individual school building closures as well as any larger scale temporary closures.

D.3 National Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID 19 in schools – 5 and 7 January 2022

Revised National Guidance was published on 5 January 2022. The key changes in this revised guidance were updates to self-isolation requirements to reflect amended approach from 6 Jan, in light of latest evidence and booster programme; the section on vaccination, to reflect the latest JCVI advice, and a minor update to outbreak management to reflect the requirement for ongoing local prioritisation by Health Protection Teams.

Further Guidance was published on 7 January 2022. This made some further, limited updates to provide clarity on some key points with regard to self-isolation changes and some further adjustments to text on self-isolation to ensure continuing alignment with NHS guidance, as detail had been added to the NHS Inform webpages in response to stakeholder feedback/questions.

D.3.1 Self-isolation policy (including contact tracing and testing) - updated approach to high-risk contacts (from 6 Jan 2022)

Based on the latest clinical evidence, revised self-isolation measures applied to index cases and close contacts identified from Thursday 6 January 2022. The revised measures were not applied retrospectively to cases and contacts identified before this date.

The revised requirements are, in summary:

- **Positive Cases (regardless of vaccination status)** must isolate for 10 days. However, if the person tests negative on day 6 and day 7 LFD tests (taken at least 24 hours apart, with the first test no earlier than day 6) they may leave isolation if they have no fever after their day 7 test.
- **Fully Vaccinated Adult Contacts (NB: definition of “fully vaccinated adult” is now 3 doses i.e. 2 doses plus booster) AND all contacts who are aged under 18 years and 4 months** must take 7 daily LFD tests and report results instead of isolating. There is no requirement for a PCR test to be released from self-isolation. Children aged under 5 are encouraged, but not required, to take LFD tests
- **Unvaccinated/Partially Vaccinated Adult Contacts (NB: this includes adults with only 0-2 doses)** must take a PCR test and isolate for 10 days.
- Full guidance on updated self-isolation measures can be found on NHS Inform.

D.3.2 Vaccination

The updated guidance incorporated the latest JCVI advice on vaccination for children and young people, which the Scottish Government has decided, in agreement with Governments across the UK, to follow, including detail of the vaccinations to be offered to all 16 and 17 year olds, all 12 to 15 year olds, and children aged 5-11 years in a clinical risk group, or who are household contacts of someone who is immunosuppressed

D.3.3 Outbreak Management

Under normal operating conditions, schools should continue to contact their local Health Protection Team (HPT) if a cluster is identified. In the event of very high local case numbers, and where capacity is constrained, HPTs may need to prioritise engagement with the highest risk settings in their area. These may include, for example, care homes (public health advice remains that schools are relatively low-risk settings). In these circumstances, local HPTs will agree with local authorities and schools the way in which clusters and outbreaks should be managed in order to minimise the involvement of HPTs and free up capacity to support the higher risk settings.

D.4 Risk Assessments

The West Lothian Schools Risk Assessments have been updated in line with revised Guidance, and Schools have updated their individual Risk Assessments.

D.5 HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) updated scrutiny programme for academic session 2021-22

HM Inspectors of Education had communicated to local authorities its planned 2 Phase resumption of its scrutiny programme during Session 2021/22.

During the implementation of Phase 1 of the resumption of scrutiny programme (October – December 2021), inspectors observed first hand the challenges staff and learners are facing. Inspectors have also engaged with stakeholders on their views regarding the resumption of individual setting inspections in January 2022. In considering the views of stakeholders, along with the ongoing challenges settings and schools are facing in dealing with COVID-19, HMIE have taken the decision not to resume the routine school and early learning and childcare school inspection programme as previously outlined.

It is now the intention that following the mid-term February break, if COVID-19 conditions allow, HM Inspectors will carry out 'recovery visits' to a selection of early learning and childcare settings and schools.

During these visits, HM Inspectors will focus on how schools and settings are addressing the impact of COVID-19 and will seek to learn about what is working well and also highlight the ongoing challenges. HM Inspectors will explore with staff that range and quality of learning children and young people are experiencing and the work being done to meet children's and young people's learning and wellbeing needs. HM Inspectors will not report on specific quality indicators nor assign summative grades as part of their visits.

HM Inspectors will provide more information regarding the revised programme of scrutiny in January 2022.

D.6 Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) and West Lothian Schools Contingency Planning – Examination Diet 2022.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) wrote to schools, colleges and training providers delivering National Qualifications, in December restating its contingency plans for examinations in 2022.

These include three scenarios. **Scenario 1** is that schools and pupils prepare for the national exam diet with significant modifications to the 2021-22 course assessments – coursework and/or exams – which were announced at the start of the session. These assessment modifications are in place to help learners by taking account of disruption to learning caused by the pandemic

Should there be significantly more disruption to learning and teaching across the country, under **Scenario 2** the SQA will provide additional support for learners to help them prepare and revise for the 2022 exams, where that is possible. In this scenario, the vast majority of learners will receive help from revision support in one or more of their courses. There will not be any further modifications made to the course assessments.

If the Scottish Government cancels the examinations due to public health restrictions at the time of exams, the country will enter **Scenario 3**. That means the evidence teachers and lecturers are gathering through normal in-year assessment to determine learners' estimates can be used to form the basis of learners' provisional results.

Prior to the pandemic, when exams last took place, SQA's results services supported learners who, for example, were unable to sit exams due to circumstances out with their control in the run up to or on the day of their exam, or who received results that were not what they were expecting. SQA is planning to have similar services in place for 2022, in recognition of the ongoing difficulties once again facing this year's learners, most of whom will be sitting exams for the first time.

West Lothian Schools have been preparing for each of the scenarios to ensure that pupils, and staff, are well prepared for all contingencies.

E. CONCLUSION

Members of the Education Executive are asked to note the changes in National Guidance on Reducing Risk in Schools, and that risk assessments have been updated accordingly.

Members are also asked to note the HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) updated scrutiny programme for academic session 2021-22, and the latest situation in relation to SQA examinations.

Members are reminded that the situation remains subject to change and that schools will continue to follow updated national guidance issued in response to changing circumstances.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools – published 22 November 2021, 17 December 2021 and 5 and 7 January 2022.

Appendices/Attachments: None

Contact Person: Andrew Sneddon, Service Manager, Education Services.

Elaine Cook, Depute Chief Executive

Date of meeting: 18 January 2022