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Clare Adamson  
Convener  
Education and Skills Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
By email

16<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear Convener,

## PHASED RETURN OF SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE

The Scottish Government has been clear about its priority to have children return to childcare and school as quickly as possible when it is safe to do so, even if this means that restrictions are kept in place in other parts of everyday life and the economy for longer.

The First Minister announced on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February the Scottish Government's intention to have a phased reopening of schools and childcare from the 22<sup>nd</sup> February. This was subject to continued suppression of the virus. Today, following a Cabinet meeting where clinical advice was considered, the First Minister confirmed those plans would proceed. Therefore, from the 22<sup>nd</sup> February, we will see the full-time return of children in P1-P3, for the part-time return of a limited number of young people in the senior phase, and a small increase in existing provision for children and young people with significant additional support needs. Childcare for all preschool aged children can also reopen from the 22<sup>nd</sup> February. All of the above will be supported by updated public health guidance.

On Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues published its advice, which informed the phased return of schools and childcare. That advice can be found [here](#). At its meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> February, the Sub-Group then considered in full the mitigations required to support reopening of ELC. That advice can be found [here](#). The Sub-Group's advice emphasises that the current mitigations remain vital in preventing transmission of the virus, and reiterated that schools and ELC settings should place very high priority on reinforcing those mitigations.

Guidance to support the phased reopening of schools and childcare has been updated and can be found:

- [Schools](#)
- [Early Learning and Childcare \(ELC\)](#)
- [School Aged Childcare \(SAC\)](#)
- [Childminding Services](#)

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*Please note that links to the SAC and Childminding Services guidance will be live with the updated guidance by COP tomorrow (17<sup>th</sup> February).*

We have today written to all local authorities to make them aware of the phased return and enclosed copies of the updated guidance.

Education Scotland and the Scottish Government have worked with partners to produce [detailed technical guidance](#) intended to provide clarity and support for local authorities and secondary schools on providing arrangements for the small groups of senior phase learners carrying out practical work in-school.

The First Minister has confirmed that we will introduce a significant expansion of the testing offer for all staff working in schools and ELC settings (including school-based ELC staff) and all senior phase pupils returning to schools. This will involve making available twice-weekly at-home testing using lateral flow devices for all those who wish to participate. Detailed implementation guidance has been made available to all local authorities and schools, and at the start of week commencing 15 February more than 2,200 schools had received deliveries of test kits, with final deliveries set to continue during the course of this week. We are currently working through the logistics of making the same testing available to stand-alone local authority ELC settings, and settings and services in the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector.

The committee will also want to be aware that, on 15<sup>th</sup> February, a Joint Statement from Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Directors of Public Health on the re-opening of schools and childcare was published which you can find [here](#). This statement supports the Scottish Government's approach of the reopening of schools and childcare, and provides a range of other important observations.

We are asking that education and childcare staff continue to follow the public health guidance, and that the general public continue to follow the stay at home restrictions. By doing so, this will ensure that Scotland's children can continue to return to school and childcare.

We are grateful to all teachers, childcare staff, childminders and the whole education and childcare community for their continued efforts in ensuring children, young people and families are educated, nurtured and cared for, particularly in these challenging times.

Yours Sincerely

**JOHN SWINNEY**

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