

Dumfries and Galloway

Thank you for your letter dated 26 February 2021. I can advise as follows:

- ***What plans, measures and strategy are in place to help pupils “catch up” following the impact of the pandemic on school education, particularly for those moving from Primary 7 into high school:***

The pandemic has had a marked impact on the normal processes of learning, teaching, assessment and skills development of young people. There is a risk to the emotional and mental wellbeing of young people and inadvertently adding to their anxieties and uncertainties by a general reference to a process that focuses on the need to ‘catch up’. Instead, it is a more positive approach to help support young people and their families to see where they are in their learning and for schools and settings to work in close partnership and dialogue with young people and their families to move their learning forward from where they are in ways which meet their individual needs.

In Dumfries and Galloway this includes a number of strategies and approaches. The Rainbow Recovery curriculum support materials help schools and settings plan incremental steps towards recovery in relation to health and wellbeing, mental health, learning, teaching and assessment. There is ongoing work to support P7-S1 transition via virtual guided tours and virtual information sharing. In addition, there are procedures in place for enhanced transition arrangements for identified vulnerable young people.

- ***Confirmation of how blended learning is being delivered in your local authority area:***

Blended learning is being delivered in a proportionate way as schools return. The focus whilst in school is on recovery and particularly reintegration, Health and Wellbeing and social and emotional support for young people in the Broad General Education phase of secondary. In the Senior Phase, the focus additionally is on learning and teaching necessary for SQA courses and assessments.

When pupils are not in school, remote learning continues to provide the continuity of learning experience young people have received throughout the period of learning from home.

- ***Whether any school building capital projects have been delayed as a result of the pandemic***

Yes, nine projects have been delayed.

On your more general points, I would comment as follows:

- ***What will be the immediate priorities as pupils again return to in-school learning?***

Our headteachers are skilled and committed leaders of learning within an empowered system. Headteachers know their children and families best and they will lead their schools to meet the needs of their communities. In general terms, following the return to in-school learning the priority is to help children and young people re-engage and

settle to learn. Dumfries and Galloway's 'Better Relationship, Better Learning' guidance recommends that schools use an educational based nurturing approach to focus on aspects which foster healing and resilience when planning the re-opening of schools. Key aspects will include safety, understanding, wellbeing and inclusion. This is in keeping with international research which has considered how to get academic learning back on track following a crisis situation. Teachers will plan learning and target support to address specific need in line with the recovery curriculum agreed by Elected Members in August 2020.

- ***How and when does the local authority plan to assess impacts of the pandemic on learning and wellbeing?***

School closures and remote learning during lockdown meant that schools were not able to carry out the full range of ongoing assessment, standardised assessments, SNSA assessments and moderation activities they would normally undertake to enable them to gather robust achievement of a level information and pupil progress data in a common format across the authority. This in turn meant that all schools and local authorities nationwide were unable to carry out the annual pupil attainment and progress data collection exercise and no national uplift of Curriculum for Excellence progress and achievement data took place.

In order to enable the local authority and Headteachers across Dumfries and Galloway to gain a wider understanding of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on pupil learning and progress, schools have been asked to record and submit some information about projected pupil attainment at key points along the learner journey at P4, P7 and S3. Schools are being asked to record:

- the number of pupils at each of the selected stages;
- the number of pupils at each stage who are either (a) on track to achieve nationally expected levels by June 2021 in each of four areas: reading, writing, listening & talking, numeracy or (b) currently not on track to achieve expected levels in these areas; and
- The number of pupils at each stage who are currently working towards 'individual milestones' rather than Curriculum for Excellence levels.

This information will enable central education staff to collate responses across the local authority so that the information can be shared with Headteachers. This will enable schools to use this data to:

- have a wider perspective on projected attainment that can be utilised to compare with their own current and historical data to help them better understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on each of these aspects of learning at each of the selected stages;
- identify areas for focus and possible targeted interventions;
- provide cluster level data so schools can understand the projected local impact of Covid-19 on these aspects of learning and attainment and enable clusters to identify, agree and potentially plan any joint approaches and interventions; and
- compare projected attainment data collected in February with actual attainment and progress data to be captured by the local authority in June 2021. This will enable schools to gauge the impact of interventions put in place in response to projections.

Some SQA attainment data was available in August 2020 and following on from this in December, initial local data has been published in Insight and LGBF. There are two releases of data from Insight, the first release, based on local level data can be looked at for individual year groups and has been reported to Elected Members. The second release, due in March 2021, matches the data to school leaver information and national data which gives a more in-depth analysis and will be reported on at a later date.

A six-monthly performance report was agreed Elected Members on 17 March. This is available here:

<https://dumfriesgalloway.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s29177/Directors%20Six%20Month%20Assessment%201%20April%202020%20-%2030%20September%202020%20of%20Education%20and%20Learning%20Business.pdf>

Further reports, including the priorities for the year in line with the National Performance Reporting arrangements, will be considered by Members on 13 May and 18 August 2021.

- ***Does the local authority anticipate providing additional activities, learning opportunities or wellbeing support to pupils? If so, please provide examples?***

Our headteachers will plan additional activities in line with school improvement priorities and the local and national ambitions. There are many examples of innovative practice across our 115 schools, collaborating with each other, with partners, through the RIC and nationally. As you will recognise, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the ways in which we support our young people to ensure they continue to have the best start in life with a rapid shift to learning activities and case work/meetings taking place online and virtually. GIRFEC approaches continue to be used alongside our partners to ensure the identification of need and support for vulnerable young people and their families.

Our Council's Youth Work Service identified that there had been increasing numbers of vulnerable children attending Childcare Hubs throughout the region and whilst there was growing concerns for many of our secondary aged young people, the Childcare hubs were not the most appropriate space for vulnerable young people to receive support. Youth Work spaces were established in all Secondary schools across the Region to provide a safe space for young people aged 12-18 (S1-S6) who were in need of support, diversionary activity or early intervention.

Working in close partnership with colleagues in the Youth Work Service and Social Work through the lockdown period ensured that we reached young people in the greatest need of support. These stronger relationships will be crucial to the support we can offer going forward in working collaboratively with schools to improve attainment outcomes.

Specifically related to senior phase, Dumfries and Galloway has contributed to the

national e-learning resource. Our headteachers will integrate their local arrangements with those available from the Regional Improvement Collaborative and national resources. On e-Sgoil there are 30 subjects which will become available from 6 April and will cover National 5 Higher and Advanced Higher subjects. The Scholar website provides Nat 5 Higher and Advanced Higher support in ten key subjects. This provision will be actively promoted in all of our secondary schools. In addition to this universal offer, schools may offer their own provision.

Despite the challenges of lockdown restrictions, education staff and partners have been able to adapt to provide and deliver a number of wider achievement activities and opportunities including Active Schools activities, Youth Music Initiative activities and Instrumental Music instruction through remote means.

I would also like to take this opportunity to record the response of our staff throughout this challenging period. Despite the pandemic, many professional learning opportunities for teachers went ahead virtually to help them provide the best support for our young people. This included virtual modern languages and STEM conferences and various online webinars. To further support literacy during and post lockdown, a Dumfries and Galloway resource, Literacy Ladders, was created by central education staff working with practitioners. The D&G Health and Wellbeing Tile on GLOW continues to provide a collation of resources to support pupils and staff. Students and probationer teachers have continued to be supported in their learning experiences, supporting the development of our future workforce.

Yours sincerely

Dr Gillian Brydson
Director Skills, Education and Learning