

## Orkney

Please find below a response in relation to your e-mail dated 26 February 2021:

### **1. 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?**

Over the last year, children and young people in Orkney have responded well and engaged positively with the learning offer created by our staff teams. Where there were concerns around engagement these were followed up promptly and, if necessary, appropriate and proportionate interventions took place.

The initial return to school had a very strong focus on well-being and 'readiness to learn'. Most children and young people were keen to be back at school and engaged very positively with the new in-school learning offer. Mindful of the longer-term needs and demands of the curriculum, learning and teaching in primary schools had a clear focus on literacy and numeracy as key 'tools of learning'.

During the most recent lock-down, learning at home and phased and staged return to school has had a similar focus.

The community response to 'learning at home' has generally been positive, with the vast majority of parents in Orkney understanding completely the necessity for the approach and programmes deployed. Setting aside for a moment some of the technical issues associated with on-line learning (particularly in households where learning at home for more than one child is having to share an internet service with one or more parents simultaneously working from home), the majority of our children and young people have adapted well to the new ways of working. For some, consideration now needs to be given to how we might supplement or extend the usual learning offer through digital technologies.

Secondary schools are working with their feeder primary schools on a transition programme. Teacher to teacher information transfer is underway; planning for those with additional support needs is well advanced (including mapping out opportunities for short visits if appropriate); and a range of options are under review for the final term, depending on the prevailing advice and guidance.

We would support a view that 'catch up' is an unfortunate term as we don't believe that most children will have to catch up. The playing field is level and children and young people will progress through their learning in a planned and systematic manner. Where individuals have challenges, these will be addressed by careful planning in order to meet any gaps. We are also aware of the ongoing need to concentrate on the experience of specific groups such as care experienced children and young people.

### **2. Confirmation of how blended learning is being delivered in your local authority area**

Currently this varies across the schools, depending on physical capacity. In our Junior High Schools all S1-4 students are now in school. In our 2 senior secondary schools' students are in schools for approximately 1/3 of the time and continue learning at home for the remainder. As per

guidance, in the senior phase the in-school offer has been prioritised in order to support practical work in relation to certification and awards.

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

Capital projects relating to refurbishment/extension works at both St Andrews Primary School and Glaitness School have been delayed.

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

Building on the previous success (where the focus was on well-being and readiness to learn) health and well-being will be the priority for primary and secondary S1-3. In S3, there will be the additional consideration of and support for 'option choices' as learners look forward to studying within the senior phase.

Continuing to focus on certification and awards will be the short-term focus for the senior phase.

We continue to monitor children's attainment through teacher judgement and will identify gaps through this process. We have been well supported by our Attainment Adviser in relation to this work and our current focus is a more in depth understanding and tracking process for those who are care experienced.

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

Schools and by association, the local authority has been assessing the impact of the pandemic on learning and wellbeing throughout the year. We have closely monitored attendance/engagement of Looked After Children as well as those with Additional Support Needs Pupils. Staff teams have been particularly energetic and creative in developing and sustaining appropriate programmes and support for these more vulnerable learners.

Uptake on an early 'in-school learning' offer has been positive, and this has enhanced the opportunities for these young people. Education staff have also supported and enhanced a regular data gathering process in the wider context of Children's Services.

With the help and support of our Attainment Advisor we are gathering assessment data at local level this year and intend to use this analysis and evaluate of this activity to plan future activity.

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

The Local Authority plans to do things differently as we emerge from the pandemic. This has given us an opportunity to trial long discussed alternatives. We will look carefully at wider achievements and work more closely with colleagues in other agencies to deliver our curriculum differently.

**James Wylie (Executive Director)**