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Dear Parent/Carer

I hope that this letter will find you and your family well and enjoying a well-earned summer break, albeit in rather different circumstances.

Following the recent announcement from the First Minister on the return of schools, I am delighted to be able to furnish you with further detail on our plans to reinstate education for young people in East Ayrshire. I speak for all staff when I say how much we have missed having our young people in our schools. I am very aware that this will be an anxious time for families and young people and hope that this communication will help you as your young people return to school. Our key focus as we return in the immediate sense is to support the wellbeing of everybody involved. At this stage, I wish to express a note of sincere thanks to your Parent Council Chairs who have been an active part of our Local Phasing Plan workstreams and have attended several meetings over the summer break in this regard.

Date of Return of Pupils

As per previous communications, the Health and Safety of all has been our overriding priority. I am also acutely conscious that some of our young people require enhanced transition and many learners will not have visited their new schools until now.

With this in mind, almost all schools in East Ayrshire will undertake a “soft start” approach from Wednesday 12th – Friday 14th August to allow young people to experience what will be a new environment for all of us. **Individual schools will let you know their specific arrangements, including who should attend each day.**

We have asked our schools to prioritise children in P1 and S1 in the first week, and know that the “very first day at school” for P1 is one to be cherished and celebrated. Please know that schools are making individual arrangements to allow parents to arrive with their children and capture this moment in some way. Schools will communicate these arrangements individually.

Given this planned partial attendance of pupils, we would ask that any families for whom this causes difficulty, to please approach the school for assistance, bearing in mind that emergency critical childcare ceases on Thursday 6th August for Early Childhood Centres and Friday 7th August for school-aged children. **All pupils in East Ayrshire should be therefore be attending full-time by Monday 17th August**, other than young people with ongoing health issues, quarantining or self-isolating. We would encourage parents and carers to contact their school if there are any issues or concerns around attendance that schools may be able to help with.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

Each ECC will work towards the delivery of 600 hours of early learning and childcare taking account of the refreshed ELC guidance and public health measures published on 30 July 2020.

ECCs that delivered 1140 hours prior to lockdown will begin to reintroduce the delivery of 1140 hours of funded early learning and childcare on a phased basis. The increased hours will also be introduced in the new build Nether Robertland Early Childhood Centre and the new build Netherthird Early Childhood Centre on the same basis.

Further information for each individual ECC will be published on the Council website during week beginning 17 August, which will set out the timeframe for the delivery of hours in each location. I would ask for your patience while our staff work through these detailed arrangements.

Wellbeing and Learning

Your child's wellbeing will always be our prime concern and staff are ready to welcome your child back to school in a welcoming way that links to our ongoing work on relationships across all of our schools. You can access our pupil wellbeing framework here:

<https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/Resources/PDF/S/Supporting-wellbeing-for-children-guidance.pdf>

In addition, we have been actively seeking views of parents and carers in regards to wellbeing and would welcome any further responses to our wellbeing survey which closes on Friday 7th August:

<https://eastayrshi.re/wellbeingquestionnaire>

Our teams are ready to recommence learning at all levels, but a few activities such as choirs and assemblies are unable to run at this stage, as per guidance. Children will also encounter some adaptations to PE and practical lessons to keep everyone safe. Music tuition will also be delivered in a different way and parents /carers will be contacted where appropriate.

Transport and Arrival of Pupils

School transport will run as normal and pupils should access their assigned transport as normal. Where pupils are dropped off at school by car, we respectfully ask that this is not directly at school gates to prevent entry areas becoming overcrowded. Clearly this will not be the case for young people with additional support needs who require to be dropped off in school proximity. Your child does not require a face covering for school transport, but is absolutely welcome to wear a covering should they prefer to do so. Sanitation of hands will be expected on bus entry (for public and school transport) and staff working as escorts in taxis will be wearing a face mask. Your school will also provide further information on pick-up and drop-off areas at the start and end of the day.

In accordance with government guidelines, parents will not be able to enter the school, and arrangements will be made with you directly should an emergency occur and you require to come to collect your child.

Ongoing Measures to Protect your Child/Children and Your Family

We have worked alongside your Parent Councils, Headteachers, the Council's Health & Safety Team and Facilities & Property Management services over the summer period to ensure a safe return to school.

All schools have a set checklist and risk assessments completed in accordance with our Local Phasing Plan. There are a great deal of practical measures that we seek your support for as our young people return, in addition to the actions that we have undertaken/will undertake as pupils return.

All young people will be asked to wash or sanitise their hands on arrival at school and this will be encouraged throughout the day. We would ask all young people to bring clean tissues to school where possible, and they may bring their own personal sanitiser if parents wish. School clothes should be washed as per normal routine and we ask that pupils limit personal items brought to school to those that are essential.

Clearly our cleaning routines are aligned with guidance, and indeed exceed this, communal areas will be cleaned regularly and access controlled to limit numbers in any toilet or limited space. High traffic and “touch-point” areas will be cleaned regularly through the day. Further information can be found here:

<https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/CouncilAndGovernment/Coronavirus/Schools-ecc.aspx>

With regard to physical distancing, the guidance is clear that there is no requirement for this in primary or secondary settings; however we wish to encourage this in all settings, particularly with our older secondary pupils. We have issued guidance to all of our staff to reduce any unnecessary movement of pupils around schools and will encourage pupils to remain in groupings wherever possible. A list of supporting actions has been issued to Headteachers to keep your young people and our staff as safe as possible, and signage and communications with our young people will reflect this. Assemblies and other large gatherings such as school shows and Parents Evenings are unable to be held in the first term, subject to continued review and scientific advice.

Staff physical distancing from pupils is endorsed by the guidance at the standard 2 metres, and whilst we recognise that this will not be possible in all sectors, please understand that some of our staff will need to wear PPE where this is not possible. We are already taking the most supportive measures that we can in recognising that this will be difficult for some of our pupils.

Catering

Detailed discussions have been ongoing with our Facilities teams and I am delighted to advise that a pre-order system will be in place for young people in our schools, this will take a differing format from primary to secondary. Further details of school catering can be found at this link.

<https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/schoolmeals>.

Schools are arranging a variety of ways to distribute food following detailed discussions between Headteachers and School Catering Managers and all issues around allergies will be taken account of as always. We ask that our pre-order system is supported wherever possible to expedite the distribution of food to our young people and keep everyone as safe as possible.

It is likely that most food will be consumed in classrooms initially to prevent mass gatherings of pupils in dining areas. Food will be pre-packed and will feature hot and cold options and pre-packed cutlery. No breakfast or break food will be available at the very start of term, but this will be under constant review and provision will be expanded in time as we begin to settle back to routine. We therefore ask that parents ensure that young people have access to breakfast and bring a snack, if needed, until further notice. We are happy to assist any parents or carers who may have difficulty with this, please alert your school if this is the case.

Pupils can continue to bring a packed lunch and we ask parents to work with us in actively encouraging young people to remain on the school site for lunch, as we are unable to supervise any provision made outside of school.

COVID-19 Surveillance

A national COVID-19 surveillance system is being initiated for staff and senior pupils involving testing on a voluntary basis, and we have been working with our local Public Health Teams to plan for any scenarios that may arise in our schools or ECCs. We ask that parents and carers support us in the following ways in this regard:

- Please do not send your child to school or ECC if they, or any of your household, have symptoms or a diagnosis of COVID-19. **Please alert school immediately if this situation arises.**

- Please arrange to pick your child up from school immediately if you are contacted to advise that they are symptomatic, and follow subsequent medical advice. Schools have to ensure that any child who is symptomatic is taken home, according to the guidance.

Contingency Planning

Please know that schools have contingency plans ready, should there be any change to this plan for return, either through any change to physical distancing or indeed local or national lockdown being required. Clearly, we do not wish to use these unless necessary, but we hope that parents and carers will be reassured to know that these are readily available.

SQA

There is, as yet, no full announcement on the SQA exam diet for 2021, we continue to canvass on your behalf for clarity for our learners and staff, particularly given that these courses have indeed commenced. A separate communication has been issued to young people receiving results today.

Some Practicalities...

In summary, we absolutely appreciate that this will be a return to school involving a huge mixture of both anxiety, but also indeed joy as young people see their friends and staff again. As a final helpful list to parents, can you please support us by:

- Reinforcing hygiene measures and social distancing with your child(ren).
- Having your child bring tissues to school to capture any coughs or sneezes.
- Ensuring your child does not bring unnecessary items to school.
- Working with your school in a positive way, even if things are difficult, we all want to help.
- Reinforcing positive relationships between children and our staff.
- Using our meal pre-order system and giving your child a break-time snack and breakfast, please let us know if we can help with this
- Not dropping children off directly at school gates (where possible), this will help us prioritise this space for young people with additional support needs who require this access.
- Understanding that we are not permitted to allow visitors to school buildings, other than in emergency or other exceptional circumstances.
- Following individual uniform advice issued by your school, as we appreciate some families will not yet have been able to access this.

Next Steps

Your school will send you a specific communication about their individual return plans within the next 24 hours. Can I please ask that you bear in mind that school staff will return on Tuesday 11th August in regard to any further queries you have specifically.

Can I end by thanking you all so much again for your support of your child's learning. My teams and I simply cannot wait to welcome them all back to school.

Kindest regards



LINDA McAULAY-GRIFFITHS
Head of Education