



9 June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

We have been living in unprecedented times since the start of COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland and we understand how difficult this period has been for you and all our children and young people.

The closure of schools and nurseries, combined with the Government restrictions, have all been disruptive to children and young people in a variety of ways.

For parents and carers, we recognise the significant challenges of supporting learning at home amid all the other changes, pressures and strains of the lockdown. We thank you and all of Stirling's children and young people for being patient and supportive during this unparalleled situation.

Since the national closure of all schools and nurseries on 20 March, in response to the pandemic, we have adjusted quickly to deliver our education services in a more flexible way.

We ensured continuity of learning through a blended approach of digital tools and paper resources, and also put measures in place to continue supporting vulnerable children and young people.

The Scottish Government has now announced its phased route out of lockdown which includes the return of children and young people to schools and nurseries.

As part of a national agreement, all Stirling Council schools will re-open on August 11 – one week earlier than scheduled. We have been advised by Scottish Government that early learning and childcare settings may have the option of re-opening before the schools return. The re-opening of schools and other settings will be subject to scientific advice at the time that is safe to do so.

Due to physical distancing requirements, it will not be possible for children and young people to attend nursery or school full time in August. Our plan is to introduce a model of blended learning from August with pupils attending school on some days and learning at home on others. We are currently working with our school and nursery leaders to develop approaches, and we are also awaiting further guidance from the Care Inspectorate. We will provide more information about our plans as soon as is possible.

Teachers, early years practitioners and other staff have been returning to schools and other early learning and childcare settings in small groups from 1 June to plan and prepare for the reopening of schools and nurseries.

Staff are reviewing and developing learning environments to ensure compliance with physical distancing restrictions and other national guidance. Given the varying sizes, locations and distinct needs of schools and other learning settings across the Stirling area, there won't be a single, unified approach in the application of these necessary health and safety measures.

While schools, classrooms and play settings will have a different appearance than previously to comply with these requirements, we will ensure pupils continue to enjoy an enriching and safe learning environment on their return. We understand these new arrangements will be challenging for some pupils and a wide range of supports will be in place for them.

With smaller class sizes, a blended model of education will be implemented, this time combining in-school/nursery and home learning. This model will rely on an increased use of digital technology, and we will be putting in measures in place to support pupils who require digital devices. Once these have been finalised, settings will be in contact with those affected.

More immediately, schools and nurseries have been using a range of innovative ways to support pupils transitioning to primary or secondary schools in the new term, and arrangements are being organised for an enhanced transition programme for some pupils. Individual schools, nurseries and heads of establishment will continue to be the main source of contact with parents and carers about these activities.

We know you will have lots of questions about how all these arrangements will be put into practice. This remains a fast-moving and complex situation and we are working hard to implement these changes. We will be in touch with you with more details as soon as possible.

While schools and nurseries will continue to relay the latest information to you, parents and carers and young people can access the latest updates, support services and helpline numbers on the Stirling Council website: www.stirling.gov.uk/learning-education/coronavirus-education-updates/

Please be assured that, although the school and nursery experience will be different until we emerge from the crisis, we remain committed to providing the highest quality of education for your children and young people so they can achieve their potential.

Further, as soon as the Scottish Government guidance changes on these restrictive measures, we will ease them to ensure our children and young people can benefit from in-setting learning.

Finally, once again, we would like thank you for your understanding and patience during the pandemic, and we look forward to welcoming Stirling's children and young people back to a safe learning environment in August.

Regards,

Councillor Susan McGill
Convener of Stirling Council's Children and Young People Committee

Councillors Christine Simpson
Vice Convener of Stirling Council's Children and Young People Committee

Kevin Kelman
Stirling Council Chief Operating Officer (People) and Chief Education Officer