SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

Education Resources
Executive Director **Tony McDaid**

Parents/Carers

Our ref: TMcD
Your ref:
Phone: 0303 123 1023
Date: 4 June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to let you know what we have been doing since the announcement by the First Minister which confirmed that schools and early years establishments can begin to plan for a re-start on 11th August 2020.

As has been highlighted nationally, the return of staff and then children and young people needs to take place on a phased basis and when it is safe to do so.

I am aware of questions from both parents and staff in our schools over the last few weeks, asking if we can shed any light on what is happening in terms of our schools reopening. Our most important issue is to make sure your children and our staff are supported as we prepare to re-open our school buildings.

There is no doubt in an ideal world we all want to get our children and young people back into schools and early years' establishments, but it is also clear that any decision to do so must be based on medical and scientific advice and when we have the right safety measures in place.

Our recovery planning is based around what the new normal will look like. What I will say is that we are able to learn from the experiences of our school and early years' emergency childcare hubs in creating safe and nurturing environments, while following appropriate safety measures.

We have been engaging with staff, parents/carers, trade union partners, and our facility teams who are responsible for janitors, cleaners, catering staff and others to enable some staff to come back in June to help prepare our schools for August.

This means considering what we need to do in terms of:

- *cleaning and hygiene in our buildings, hand-washing facilities and sanitisers;*
- *physical distancing;*
- *the layout of classrooms, dining rooms, the street areas in secondary schools;*
- *the potential for smaller groups of pupils being in school for shorter periods and over fewer days, possibly with staggered starts, finishes and break times;*
- *what learning will look like, given that we cannot have the same numbers of children attending or in classes as before, and the practical considerations for children with additional support needs;*
- *how will children travel to and from school;*
- *childcare support;*
- *continuing to support learning at home.*

In August our schools, classrooms and playrooms will look somewhat different to before, with fewer pupils in at the one time, outdoor and alternative classrooms, enhanced hand hygiene and cleaning routines along with clear signage and rules on physical distancing.

Health and safety sits at the heart of our plans, with risk assessments and infection prevention and control measures being put in place. We are also in regular contact with NHS Public Health Lanarkshire to ensure we are informed of the medical advice on personal safety and wellbeing.

This is unchartered territory for all of us. Therefore, we are working together to try and find solutions by enabling our headteachers, staff, parents and young people to contribute to local discussions. We continue to engage with our *Parents as Partners* focus group, Parent Councils as well as other parent groups as a way of ensuring the voice of parents is a core part of how we shape our plans to re-start schools. Next week we plan to host on-line meetings with Parent Councils and steps have been taken to survey pupils and parents across South Lanarkshire.

This week senior staff have returned to their schools with other staff coming back on a phased basis to plan for a return of children in August. We continue to support the children of key workers and as the Scottish Government guidance indicates we are looking at the possibility of some in school experience for late June for children at key transitions points (e.g. due to start P1 or S1). At this stage, no final decision has been made on which pupils may be able to return for this limited activity as we are still looking at the numbers who can return safely, taking account of physical distancing measures.

I understand that supporting learning at home whilst managing other changes to family life has been challenging for parents and carers. I recognise that as we look towards schools returning in August further support in this area is required. As a Council we are looking at how children and young people access digital learning at home and how we can provide further assistance to families in this area.

Last week's Scottish Government advice set out the next steps in the route map which enables us to take forward our plans to begin to re-open our schools safely whilst still supporting you with home learning.

I will keep you updated on developments and in the meantime, take care and keep safe.

Yours sincerely

Tony McDaid
Executive Director (Education Resources)