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Local Authority Chief Executives and
Directors of Education



Copy: Independent Schools
Grant Aided Schools
SOLACE
ADES

Our ref: Covid-19 ELC/Schools Contingency
13th March 2020

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Dear Colleagues,

COVID-19 RESPONSE – PLANNING FOR POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON ELC/SCHOOLS

You will be aware that, as part of the [4 Nations Coronavirus Action Plan](#), an announcement was made yesterday that the UK as a whole will move to the delay phase of our strategy. This will include requirements for individuals to self-isolate for 7 days if they develop symptoms, however mild, consistent with Covid-19.

The Scottish Resilience Partnership Covid-19 Sub Group has written today to local authorities with a Covid-19 Readiness Dashboard, seeking confirmation that appropriate plans are in place at local level to contribute to the aims of the delay phase.

The dashboard makes specific reference to work on readiness in the education sector, which will be vital to mitigate impacts on schools and early learning and childcare settings, and knock-on impacts on our wider society.

In support of that work, we are writing to you to set out some key potential impacts of Covid-19 on the Scottish ELC/Schools system, to help inform your planning activity. These key impacts, and some considerations in respect of mitigations, are set out at **Annex A** to this letter.

If you are confident that you have considered these impacts in full, you should indicate this under the relevant “Developing” field on the Covid-19 Readiness Dashboard that is being returned to the SRP. If you are confident that appropriate plans are in place, this should contribute to your assessment of readiness under the “Prepared” field.



In addition, due to the increasing potential for impacts on schools and ELC, the Scottish Resilience Partnership, along with the Deputy First Minister and Cllr McCabe, would be very grateful if you would review the potential impacts at Annex A and:

- confirm that your local authority has in place plans to mitigate these impacts appropriately and provide a high level description of those plans; and
- provide feedback on any areas of challenge, or any areas where **further support** may be required to strengthen preparations, in order to support the national and local response to Covid-19.

Recognising the burdens you will be operating under, if you have existing documentation that addresses some or all of these issues (e.g. resilience or business continuity planning documents), we would be happy to accept the relevant information in those formats.

Please provide this information by **close of play on Wednesday 18th March**, to SGCoronavirusEducation@gov.scot.

This information will be collated, summarised and shared on a confidential basis with Ministers, Cosla and the Scottish Resilience Partnership to inform ongoing planning. Where local authorities have strengths in specific areas of planning, we may contact you to ask you if you are content to share your expertise with other local authorities.

The Covid-19 pandemic could have significant impacts on our workforce and on children and young people in ELC/school settings. We are clear that the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff must be our primary concern, with educational continuity maintained wherever possible.

Thank you again for all you are doing to prepare for and respond to the potential impact of COVID-19 on the education system. If it would be helpful to discuss any of the issues raised in this letter, or any other aspects of coronavirus planning, please don't hesitate to contact us at any time, using the contact details below.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Drought
Deputy Director, Workforce, Infrastructure and Reform, Scottish Government

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Chief Officer, Children and Young People, Cosla

Annex A: Covid-19 – Potential key impacts on ELC/Schools system

Potential key impact 1: Localised ELC/school closures

On the basis of scientific advice, we are currently not recommending widespread school closures for public health reasons – however, this position will be kept under close, regular review.

However, local public health advice or workforce difficulties/shortages (e.g. due to illness or self-isolation of teachers/staff, or the knock-on impacts of these issues on teacher/staff childcare arrangements) may result in some schools having to close as a result of Covid-19, e.g. for community resilience purposes. Such closures may occur in a piecemeal fashion across local authorities. We believe it will be important to have confidence that the following key issues have been considered and addressed:

- **The ability to monitor, understand and respond to any such impacts in a dynamic way:** SG and ADES are liaising with SEEMIS to ensure that the system (and its linked business intelligence tool) can provide targeted, consistent information about the impact of Covid-19 on pupil attendance. SG also intend to initiate reporting via the school/ELC closures database at an appropriate point in time. and will undertake a test run of the database in the next few days. Local authorities are asked to consider what other monitoring arrangements are in place, particularly with regard to staff, and whether such information could be provided on a regular basis to inform national planning.
- **The way in which all partners will provide consistent advice and reassurance to schools and parents in the event of localised disruption/closures:** SGORR will coordinate national messaging. There will be a requirement for consistent messaging from SG, Cosla, local authorities, schools and teaching unions, with regularly updated public health advice at its core. Such messaging should aim to ensure that public health advice is followed and health and wellbeing is prioritised, while confirming that we aim to maintain educational continuity wherever possible. Local authorities may wish to communicate directly with parent communities, or be assured that schools and early learning and childcare settings have established good channels of communication with their wider school community, and are primed to communicate key messages effectively in the event of disruption.
- **Teacher, practitioner and support staff contractual and resource arrangements help maintain educational continuity and are widely understood and implemented:** The SNCT Joint Chairs are working to update existing agreements with regard to maintaining educational continuity during the Covid-19 outbreak – this work should be completed shortly. It may also be important to consider any requirement for flexible deployment of janitorial/other staff, and that sufficient cleaning resource is available to undertake potential rapid “deep cleans” in line with Public Health Scotland advice.

Potential key impact 2: Knock-on impacts on ability of parents and carers to work

If schools and early learning and childcare settings are required to close due to workforce/public health issues, parents and carers may need to take time off work to look after children during the week. Existing flexibilities could also be reduced if other family members (e.g. grandparents) are unable to provide backstop childcare due to illness or self-isolation. This could have particularly detrimental impacts where **key workers** are concerned, especially those in the health service. The impact on **income** could also be significant for some individuals and families.

We believe it will be important to have confidence that the following key issue has been considered and addressed:

- **Do local authorities have plans in place to mitigate the potential impact of localised school or early learning and childcare closures on working families, particularly key workers?** The potential for, e.g. attendance at alternative schools, or provision of alternative venues for lessons or childcare, may be important. The impact of illness or self-isolation on supply teachers should also be considered carefully, with clear local messaging provided to address any concerns around income/welfare.

Potential key impact 3: Educational continuity (including exam preparedness)

If schools and early learning and childcare settings are required to close due to workforce/public health issues, or if pupils are required to self-isolate in accordance with public health advice, there could be impacts on educational continuity for pupils. **This will be particularly important for those pupils in the senior phase (S4-6) preparing for exams.**

At present, there is no change to the published National Qualifications 2020 examination timetable, and the exam diet remains on track. The Scottish Qualifications Authority have advised that current deadlines for coursework, and other assessments, remain in place. The SQA is continuing to monitor the situation regarding coronavirus closely, in consultation with the Scottish Government, and will provide further guidance if required. A Qualifications Contingency Planning group exists to draw together the Scottish Government, SQA and related stakeholders to consider any significant risks to the exam diet.

We believe it will be important to have confidence that the following key issues have been considered and addressed:

- **Do local authorities have plans in place to ensure educational continuity for pupils in the event of localised school closures or a requirement for pupils to self-isolate?** This will be particularly important for pupils in S4-6. Options may include transport to alternative learning settings, or use of the free tools available in Glow in the event that teachers and pupils cannot physically co-locate. The public facing Glow Connect site includes a page on Contingency Planning - <https://glowconnect.org.uk/contingency-planning/> - which contains practical advice, guidance and support for schools in setting up a range of online learning spaces in Glow. It may be important for teaching staff to be able to access pupil details remotely in a secure way, so remote working arrangements should be discussed with them to ensure they remain effective.
- **Ability to adjust transport arrangements to maintain educational continuity:** In the event that staff and pupils have to move to alternative settings to maintain educational continuity, can transport arrangements be adjusted quickly to facilitate this?

