Impact Assessment: Reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools

Version 1.0
December 2020
Executive Summary

Schools across Scotland reopened in August 2020 following closures in March 2020 due to COVID-19. This was supported by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus): guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020, and the supporting impact assessment and CRWIA. School communities and their leaders have worked hard to embed new safety measures that ensure a safe and supportive environment for learning and teaching. New guidance, Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools, moves beyond the reopening of school settings, and acknowledges the medium-term advised mitigation measures to minimise risk of COVID-19 transmission to Scotland’s school pupils, staff and communities.

This document is intended to assess the impact of the measures in the recent guidance on groups with protected characteristics, and collates the considerations of all of:

- An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)
- A Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment (FSDA)
- An Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)

A Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) is being developed separately where the impact of mitigating measures on children’s rights and wellbeing, particularly in respect of adhering to the UNCRC Articles, is explored in further detail.

Summary

In summary, our previous findings showed that school closures had a predominantly negative impact for most of Scotland’s children and young people due to the wide range of support that education settings provide, from a community, social and wellbeing perspective as well as learning. Therefore, having reopened schools, albeit with mitigating measures in place, the overall impact on children and young people is significantly more positive than keeping schools closed. It is however recognised that some mitigating measures may have a negative impact on some people in the school community when compared to previous school life. Some of these impacts are expected, and this document outlines how we hope to support schools to minimise or overcome any negative impact.

However, some impacts, positive or negative, may not yet be recognised. For this reason, this document, and the guidance it accompanies, will continue to be updated where required, and any future iterations will reflect our increased understanding of these impacts as the amount of data, research and feedback available continues to grow.
Background

The Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group was established in March 2020, and an advisory sub-group on education and children’s issues was established in June 2020 in order to provide rapid, regular and more granular scientific advice on those issues. These groups apply the advice coming to the four nations from the Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE), alongside a wide range of other appropriate sources of evidence and information, and use it to inform decisions in Scotland during the pandemic. This includes providing insight and modelling to ministers and the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG).

The CERG was established in April 2020 to support government decision making through providing insight into the practicalities around reopening schools and ELC settings. The focus of the group was initially on how schools should reopen once the science indicated that it was safe to do so. This focus has since adapted to how schools, now open full-time since August, can balance minimising the risk of COVID-19 alongside enabling children and young people to access school to benefit from face-to-face teaching and the benefits it can bring to wellbeing.

On 23 October 2020 the Scottish Government published the Coronavirus (COVID-19): Scotland’s Strategic Framework. This document sets out how we will continue work to suppress the virus by introducing a levels approach across Scotland. In the context of schools, the expected approach for each level would mean:

| Level 0 | Open – with standard protective measures in place |
| Level 1 | Open – with standard protective measures in place |
| Level 2 | Open – with standard protective measures in place |
| Level 3 | Open – with enhanced protective measures in place |
| Level 4 | Open – with enhanced and targeted protective measures in place |

Further detail on the protective measures to be applied at each level can be found in the aforementioned Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools.

It should be noted that this guidance is available to all schools, including local authority, independent schools and grant aided schools.
The scope of this Impact Assessment

This document considers the impact of recommended mitigating measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in schools on the following groups:

- Children and young people;
- Parents and carers; and
- School staff, both teaching and non-teaching.

In developing this impact assessment, the Scottish Government is mindful of the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Scottish Government recognises that while the measures may positively impact on one or more of the protected characteristics, the introduction of the measures may also have a disproportionate negative impact on one or more of the protected characteristics. Where any negative impacts have been identified, we have sought to mitigate/eliminate these. We are also mindful that the equality duty is not just about negating or mitigating negative impacts, as we also have a positive duty to promote equality. We have sought to do this through provisions contained in the regulations, or by current support and guidance available.

While it is the view of the Scottish Government that any remaining impacts are currently justified and a proportionate means of helping to achieve the legitimate aim of reducing the public health risks posed by coronavirus, the Scottish Government also recognises that these measures are only required to respond to the current set of circumstances, and are only necessary as long as the potential public health benefits can justify any negative impacts caused.

This document combines the government’s commitment to the following impact assessments:

Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)

In line with The Equality Act 2010, the nine protected characteristics being considered are:

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy & maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage & civil partnership

Given the importance of assessing the impact on each of the protected characteristics, the Scottish Government has considered the effect of these measures against the needs of the general equality duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Scottish Government has also considered whether the measures could constitute direct and/or indirect discrimination.

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1 Part 6 Chapter 1 Section 84 disapplies age to the provision of education. However, it is being kept within this document due to the varying impacts of mitigating measures on both pupils and staff of different age groups.

2 Part 6 Chapter 1 Section 84 disapplies marriage and civil partnership (and age) to the provision of education.
Specifically, the EQIA considers impacts on equalities groups based on the three tests it is required to address:

- Does this policy eliminate discrimination for each of the nine protected characteristics? If not is the discrimination justifiable? Can it be mitigated?
- Does this policy advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?
- Does this policy foster good community relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?

**Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment (FSDA)**
In line with The Equality Act (2010), and the Scottish Government’s commitment to Fairer Scotland Duty Assessments since April 2018, this document will also consider members of society experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and how their experience of reopening schools may be differential to other groups.

**Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)**
Although the requirement to carry out Island Community Impact Assessment (ICIA) has not yet been brought into force, the expectation is that, where possible, Scottish Government should be operating in the spirit of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and taking island issues into account when developing or reviewing policies, strategies or services.

Additionally, this document considers pupils, families and staff in the Gaelic medium education (GME) sector. GME is a distinct sector within Scottish education and has its own needs and characteristics, the nature of which are clearly described in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education. GME has much in common with the protected characteristics of standard equality considerations.
**Children and young people**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th><strong>Child protection</strong></th>
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<td></td>
<td>It is likely that child protection concerns may have arisen during lockdown, with reduced or no opportunity for disclosure, particularly for younger children. In these circumstances, and in line with the National and Supplementary National Child Protection Guidance a rights-based, child-centred approach to assessment, intervention, and planning to meet needs is essential, drawing together support from partners and third sector organisations in order to ensure appropriate support for children and young people.</td>
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**Physical distancing**

In line with scientific advice received from the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children’s Issues, primary pupils do not need to physically distance from each other.

The scientific advice also makes clear that distancing is not required for a safe return to secondary schools. However, to provide additional reassurance to young people, staff and parents/carers, secondary schools should encourage distancing wherever practicable between young people, and particularly in the senior phase.

School staff will need to physically distance from each other and, where possible, from children and young people who are not part of the same household. For the majority of staff in schools, personal protective equipment will not be necessary, but guidelines make clear the exceptions to this position.

- It is recognised that for some children, particularly younger children, it may take some time to adapt to staff following physical distancing guidelines. This may impact on wellbeing, and therefore it is made clear that lower primary classrooms may choose to follow ELC guidance to help mitigate this impact.

**Face coverings**

The guidance on the use of face coverings in school settings has been strengthened in the most recent guidance, following updated scientific advice and in light of experience and stakeholder views. The key points are:

a) Being clear that face coverings are just one potentially effective measure amongst a package of mitigations, and should not be seen in isolation.
b) Anyone should be permitted to wear a face covering in school if they wish to do so.
c) Adults should now wear face coverings when they are unable to maintain 2m distancing from children and young people in primary and secondary schools (previous advice was that this was only necessary if distancing was not possible for a sustained period, e.g. 15 minutes or more).
d) Adults should wear face coverings whenever they are in communal areas (e.g. staff rooms, staff kitchens, canteens, corridors, etc.) in both primary and secondary schools. This also applies to young people in secondary schools.
e) In local authority areas where there is high prevalence of the virus (Levels 3-4), as a precautionary measure, adults and young people in senior phase classrooms should also wear face coverings.
Guidance makes clear that:
• some individuals are exempt from these arrangements.
• in order to mitigate any negative impact of adults wearing face coverings in the classroom on younger children, schools may adopt ELC models in P1-2 settings (which do not require the use of face coverings).

The impacts of these measures on children and young people will vary depending on age. In developing guidance, we have had regard to the views of education stakeholders and the scientific advice of the Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children’s Issues, which in turn takes account of up-to-date evidence on the efficacy and impacts of face coverings, including WHO advice.

We have balanced a range of factors in developing our approach to face coverings, some of which have a specific impact on age-related considerations. Those that weighed in favour of use of face coverings in certain situations included:

• Evidence suggesting that infection rates at the time of implementation are slightly higher among 16-17 year olds, and a growing body of evidence about the role of young people in transmitting the virus, with older teenagers transmitting at levels similar to adults.
• Advice from the WHO that children aged 12 and over should wear a mask under the same conditions as adults, in particular when they cannot guarantee at least a 1 metre distance from others and there is widespread transmission in the area.
• Advice from the advisory sub-group that:
  o As we move towards winter and other mitigations such as ventilation and outdoor activity become less feasible, the use of face coverings may become an increasingly important preventative approach.
  o Should the prevalence of the virus in the population start rising, nationally or in parts of Scotland, we would advise that consideration be given to encouraging the wearing of face coverings, especially among adults and older pupils in secondary schools, as part of an enhanced system of approaches to reduce transmission.
  o Should prevalence rise and school-based transmission occur, the wearing of face coverings by all secondary pupils throughout the school day, including in classrooms, might be a commensurate response, advised in national guidance and triggered locally through the established incident management processes.
• Advice from the advisory sub-group on the efficacy of face coverings, which noted that evidence that face coverings are effective at reducing transmission has strengthened, and there is additional evidence that face coverings also reduce the viral load for the wearer.
• The potential challenges with maintaining ventilation during winter (although updated guidance has been provided on this issue).
• The challenges that some secondary schools report with regard to maintaining distancing between students (which is only required by guidance where possible).
• The need to ensure confidence amongst staff, pupils and school communities as prevalence rises in local areas. The importance of this element to keeping schools open must not be underestimated.
Evidence that school closures (which mitigating measures may help to prevent) cause impairment to the physical and mental health of children. Evidence suggests that the mental health of adolescents is particularly affected. The potential emotional and wellbeing impacts of family illness and bereavement on children and young people, which use of face coverings (if effective against transmission of COVID) along with other measures may help mitigate.

Factors that weighed against use of face coverings in certain situations included:
- WHO advice that, for children aged 6-11, a risk-based approach should be applied to the decision about face coverings, taking into consideration issues including local prevalence and transmission rates, social and environmental norms and customs, the child’s capacity to comply, potential impact on learning and psychosocial development, and additional specific considerations.
- Advice from the advisory sub-group on practicalities and compliance issues, and evidence that face coverings may have a number of negative effects, including impairing verbal and non-verbal communication, blocking emotional signalling between teachers and students, and impacting educational attainment and physical activity. This is understood to be particularly important in respect of younger children.
- Anecdotally sub-group members noted the tendency for people to carry and dispose of face coverings unhygienically, and the risks of coverings being shared among friends, or being left lying around on surfaces. They noted there is likely a small increased risk of transmission associated with the intermittent use of face coverings throughout the school day, as they are taken on and off, stored, and disposed of. There is not yet sufficient evidence to know how significant this risk is.

The approach adopted in guidance is intended to balance these factors and minimise the harms to children and young people of the use of face coverings, while ensuring that schools can remain safe and open. Our underlying assumption is that measures that help ensure in-person schooling can continue safely and should be prioritised, and that face coverings can play an effective role in this. We have endeavoured to weight greater use of face coverings towards older age ranges, both because the evidence suggests that infection and transmission risks increase with age, but also because the likelihood of impacts of face coverings on education and emotional/psychological wellbeing is judged to be less at older age levels (whereas the advisory sub-group notes that evidence suggests the mental health of adolescents is particularly affected by school closures).

We will continue to keep these parts of our guidance under particularly close review in light of experience and evidence, and update them where necessary if evidence suggests we have got the balance wrong.

**Senior phase pupils**
A number of measures for the awarding of National Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher in 2020-21 have been confirmed. The SQA are soon to publish guidance on an alternative certification approach for National 5 students, while Higher and Advanced Higher exams will go ahead, but with a contingency plan developed.
- A full impact assessment on the impact of these decisions is being carried out separately.
### Disability

**Shielding and those at highest clinical risk** means that some pupils may have a health condition which requires consideration.

Those at highest clinical risk (previously shielding) will need to be considered in the event of a localised outbreak of COVID-19. At Protection Level 4, the current advice, at date of publication, is that children on the shielding list should not attend school in person – however, we are considering how the use of individualised risk assessments could help maximise attendance.

- In a situation where those at highest clinical risk may be asked to return home for a length of time, there is a risk that these pupils may miss out on classroom time, including social interactions and relationships with their peers and school staff, that their peers may continue to have access to. Risk assessments should be in place, including arrangements for how to continue support and access to learning for affected pupils. These should minimise the risk of loss in relation to learning, by ensuring appropriate learning and support is in place, whilst Level 4 is applied.

### Accessibility

In line with guidance to minimise large gatherings and overcrowding where possible, it is possible that some school buildings may be reconfigured to allow for one-way systems or similar.

- In these circumstances, access to all areas of the school building should remain as accessible as they previously have been, including for those with physical disabilities or accessibility issues. Special consideration should be given where schools may be making use of outdoor space as learning areas, and risk assessments should be completed as appropriate. Access to toilets and regular handwashing facilities should naturally be considered within this.

### Additional support needs (ASN)

Pupils will need to adapt to the mitigating measures in place across schools, including as they move between Protection Level tiers, and some pupils, particularly those with ASN, may find changes more challenging than their peers.

In circumstances where blended learning were to be introduced, or as regions move between Protection Levels, there will be a need to consider how additional support needs will continue to be met, particularly in circumstances where pupils are self-isolating, or are unable to attend school. There may also be increased distress amongst this group of pupils.

- As part of contingency planning the needs of pupils with additional support needs must be considered.

- Local authorities will need to consider support for children with ASN using school transport, and take appropriate actions to reduce risk if hygiene rules, including the wearing of face coverings, and physical distancing are not possible.
The guidance also sets out altered arrangements for staff visiting schools, this includes those providing support as part of a care or educational plan. With appropriate mitigations, this easing of restrictions on these staff will further enhance the support available to children and young people with additional support needs. Support staff, along with pupils and parents, should be involved in any decisions impacting a pupil’s access to support.

In line with guidance on enhanced hygiene and environmental cleaning, attention should be paid to the hygiene of specialist equipment that supports pupils with additional support needs.

**Face coverings**

The factors taken into account in developing guidance on the use of face coverings, and potential impacts on children with additional support needs, are as set out in the section on “Age” above, with the following key additional factors identified:

Weighing additionally in favour of the use of face coverings is evidence that children with additional support needs are very likely to be adversely affected by school closures – therefore, measures which may help to sustain in-person learning may be expected to be beneficial.

The risks for children and young people with additional support needs of greater use of face coverings include:

- for some learners with ASN, the wearing of face coverings may not be appropriate or could be a cause of anxiety or discomfort.
- when staff or young people are wearing face coverings in school this may cause communication difficulties for pupils who depend on facial expressions or lip reading to communicate, for example deaf learners and those with a hearing impairment.

The WHO states that:

> The wearing of masks by children with hearing loss or auditory problems may present learning barriers and further challenges, exacerbated by the need to adhere to the recommended physical distancing. These children may miss learning opportunities because of the degraded speech signal stemming from mask wearing, the elimination of lipreading and speaker expressions and physical distancing. Adapted masks to allow lipreading (e.g. clear masks) or use of face shields may be explored as an alternative to fabric masks.  

To help address these issues, guidance makes clear:

- The exemptions that apply to use of face coverings, which include where a face covering may cause distress, and the ability to remove a face covering when communicating with a deaf person (2m distancing should be maintained whenever possible if doing so). Individuals who may not be able to handle and wear face coverings as directed (e.g. those with additional support needs or

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3 In a recent survey of parents by the National Deaf Children’s Society Scotland, 44% of parents reported that a Teacher of the Deaf is still visiting their child’s school. Over half of parents (56%) reported that Teachers of the Deaf are not currently visiting their child’s school.

disabilities) should not wear them as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission.

- In special schools and units, and where there are groupings of children with complex additional support needs, risk assessments should be conducted in full consultation with staff and their trade unions, aligned to the relevant protection level and reviewed on a regular basis, to consider (amongst other things) the appropriate mitigation measures which should be adopted in situations where opaque face coverings may act as a barrier to communication.

- There is recognition that the impact of wearing opaque face covering for learners with additional support needs, including any level of hearing loss, should be carefully considered. Communication for many of these learners (including hearing impaired young people) relies in part on being able to see someone’s face clearly. This is also important for children and young people who are acquiring English and who rely on visual cues to enable them to be included in learning. Appropriate use of transparent face coverings may help in these circumstances, but does not mitigate the need to take other reasonable adjustments to ensure deaf children are not disadvantaged. Transparent face-coverings or face shields may be supplied by local authorities and used where there is a risk of detriment to the child’s health and wellbeing from opaque face coverings.

The guidance also provides a link to material from the National Deaf Children’s Society for Scotland, which includes a section on face coverings in education. This includes the following points:

- An alternative or additional provision to support deaf pupils is the use of radio aids, to transmit the teacher’s voice directly to a child’s hearing aid or cochlear implant. Qualified Teachers of the Deaf have a key role to play in advising on reasonable adjustments and mitigating steps. Along with parents and deaf learners, they should be involved in any discussions around risk assessments.

- It is possible that, even with mitigating actions in place, deaf pupils may not make the same level of progress as their peers due to the impact of face coverings. In these circumstances, catch-up support should be planned for and provided.

The guidance states that, apart from S4 to S6 pupils in Protection Levels 3 or 4 areas, face coverings are not necessary when in the classroom. However, teachers and pupils can wear face coverings if they wish to. Reasonable adjustments should be made to support learners who depend on clear communication from staff or peers in these circumstances. Teachers should be supported in this endeavour.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th><strong>Academic progress</strong></th>
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<td></td>
<td>A higher proportion of girls than boys achieved the expected Curriculum for Excellence levels across both literacy and numeracy and all stages. In 2018-19, the largest difference in performance at primary was in writing in P7, with girls outperforming boys by 15 percentage points. The smallest differences at primary for the literacy organisers were in reading and listening and talking for P1, at six percentage points each.</td>
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School leaver attainment figures show females are continuing to outperform males at SCQF Levels 4 to 6 or better with the gap being wider at higher SCQF levels. In

2018/19, the gap between females and males achieving one pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better was 1.4 percentage points, with this gap growing to 4.9 percentage points at SCQF Level 5 or better, and further widening to 12.3 percentage points at SCQF Level 6 or better\(^6\).

There is a risk that this gap could have widened as a result of school closures, and that it may increase further if blended learning were required.

- 97% of schools are benefitting through over £250 million of Pupil Equity Funding in 2020/21 and 2021/22. Headteachers have discretion to make decisions about which children and young people would benefit most from any particular intervention or approach, whilst keeping a clear focus on delivering equity.

We see evidence of segregation by sex in participation in different subjects in the senior phase at school with, for example, females more likely to take up subjects such as languages\(^7\) and males tending to take up subjects such as computing\(^8\). This segregation by sex persists in courses in further and higher education\(^9\) and in apprenticeships\(^10\) and in the labour market and leads to women’s poorer labour market outcomes, gendered pay inequality, and the gender pay gap\(^11\)\(^12\).

- There is a risk that, due to mitigating measures in place and the impact on using specialist equipment, that some subjects may be facing greater challenges to deliver the curriculum. Education Scotland is providing subject-specific guidance to support teaching staff to overcome this.

Gender based bullying and harassment\(^13\) impacts young women’s attainment and their participation in non-traditional subjects, such as STEM, normalises violence against women and girls, creating a conducive context for this in wider society. It is unclear whether this has been exacerbated in the context of home learning and lockdown or not, and is not expected to be exacerbated due to the mitigating measures in the Reducing risks in schools guidance.

- Education Scotland’s Improving Gender Balance and Equalities Programme is helping practitioners and school leaders tackle gender segregation and its underlying causes through learning and teaching and whole school approaches. A literature review of the key issues has been published here, and resources for practitioners and sector specific action guides are here.

**Wellbeing**

A central focus of the guidance for reopening schools has been to support and nurture children and young people’s health and wellbeing as they return to school. It is widely recognised and acknowledged that the period of school closures and

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\(^7\) In 2020, 72% of entries into a Higher Modern Languages qualifications were female; the highest sex split was in Higher French with 74% of female entries. Source: SQA August 2020 results

\(^8\) For STEM related subjects in 2020, 48% of entries in STEM Highers were female, with 18% of Higher Computer Science entries female. Source: SQA August 2020 results


\(^13\) [https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/work-young-people](https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/work-young-people)
The impact of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing of pupils and staff has been significant. As lockdown will have increased impacts on mental health and wellbeing, and that pupils and staff may take time to recover from this.

- A number of resources, in addition to the guidance for reopening schools, have been made available through the National Improvement Hub or through online Wakelets for schools and specific guidance on Positive mental wellbeing - resources to support children and young people.
- Guidance on support for continuity of learning and Curriculum for Excellence in the Recovery Phase both reinforce the importance of wellbeing as a critical focus in recovery.
- Education authorities have sought to progress the national commitment to the provision of counselling through schools, to ensure these supports are available when children and young people have been attending school.
- The supplementary guidance for residential boarding/hostel accommodation in educational facilities recommends establishments should make appropriate arrangements for children and young people to be active, creative and nurtured, much as they would be able to do if they were in a home family setting, whilst adhering to public health guidance and taking account of all other Scottish Government and relevant governing body guidance. Where pupils require to leave the boarding facility / residential hall for more than a day trip (for example, during the October break, Christmas, or Leave Out at weekends), they can designate a host family to stay with in Scotland. Although it was announced that there should be no social household visits on 22 September 2020, these designated host families, or guardians, are seen to be the extended household for these young people, in the absence of being able to stay with their own family due to travel restrictions, or other barriers.

It is known that some risks to children and young people will have increased during the pandemic and that it is expected that there will be a rise in the experience of domestic abuse, which typically affects more girls than boys. It also affects the children of parents who experience domestic abuse. Children and young people may not immediately disclose these concerns, and there is a need for a sustained approach, as highlighted in the Guidance on support for continuity of learning.

- £1.5m was provided in March to organisations that support victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and another £4.25m in September in recognition of the impact the pandemic has had on women and children where there is violence in the home.

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<th>Gender reassignment</th>
<th>Pastoral support</th>
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<td>The Online in Lockdown Report indicated that 26% of young people responding to the survey saw prejudice-based posts, comments, attitudes online since the lockdown began which related to transphobia. School staff should be mindful of any long-term impact on the wellbeing of pupils. While there remains the option for schools in Protection Level 4 areas to consider blended learning on a case-by-case basis, there is a risk that in these circumstances, some pupils may lose access to pastoral support. This would impact particularly those who live in households where their gender identity is not accepted.</td>
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If online pastoral support is arranged as an alternative, there is a risk that young people won’t have access to a suitable device or that online support is monitored. Measures should be taken to reduce this impact where possible.

### Pregnancy and maternity

**Support for pregnant pupils and young parents**

It is important that all pregnant pupils should follow advice from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. It is also advised that an individual risk assessment should be conducted for all pregnant young women attending school. Additionally, lead professionals and parent(s) of a pupil (if appropriate), should be involved to help decide how school should continue to best support them. It is also important to bear in mind that young mothers are at increased risk of poverty and poorer socio-economic outcomes as highlighted in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan which in turn can increase the chances of being disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

### Race

**Health**

According to 2019 data, 78% of Scotland’s pupil population is from a White (Scottish) ethnicity, while 12% have a White (other) ethnicity and 8% are from a non-White Minority Ethnic (ME) group

International evidence suggests COVID-19 has affected minority ethnic groups disproportionately. In England, there is consistent evidence of increased risks among many minority ethnic groups. In Scotland, data has been slow to emerge on the risks for minority ethnic groups and initial analyses were contradictory. Since the Covid Ethnicity Expert Reference Group was first established, more recent analyses by Public Health Scotland (PHS) and National Records of Scotland (NRS) has confirmed increased risks associated with COVID-19 in South Asians but robust analyses are still unavailable for several minority ethnic groups.

- Work is ongoing to build upon these data and to improve understanding. The Scottish Government continues to work with experts from a range of fields, including the Covid Ethnicity Expert Reference Group, to take forward the recommendations from the first report published by the group in August.

**Public perception**

Discourse in the media and on social media during the COVID-19 crisis has included narratives which could contribute to prejudice based bullying, including as a result of race.

- Schools should be aware of the ongoing increased risk of racist incidents or bullying against particular groups of children, as well as the possible impact on the mental wellbeing of pupils, and may wish to refer to Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-bullying for Scotland’s Children and Young People.

**Language development**

Pupils who speak English as an additional language may have been disproportionately affected by school closures due to the impact on their proficiency of the English language, particularly if English is not their main home

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language. 2019 data shows that 9.6% of the pupil population have a language other than English as their main home language.\(^1\)

- Given the guidance that staff and young people should wear face coverings in school in certain circumstances, schools may wish to consider the use of see-through face coverings in order to support pupils with English as an additional language who may be dependent upon visual clues or lip-reading for communication.
- Pupils who have English as an Additional Language are considered to have an additional support need. The guidance and support considerations outlined above, will also apply to pupils who have an additional support need as a result of having English as an additional language.

### Religion or belief

**Religious spaces**

For physical distancing to be observed where possible some schools may need to use non-classroom spaces as teaching space. Where rooms are potentially being repurposed, it should be ensured that provision remains available for pupils to access religious spaces for religious observance, spiritual development or reflection time.

**Denominational schools**

Restrictions around large group gatherings may impact upon religious practices and celebrations.

### Sexual orientation

**Pastoral support**

While there remains the option for schools in Protection Level 4 areas to consider blended learning on a case-by-case basis, there is a risk that in these circumstances, some pupils may lose access to pastoral support. This would impact particularly those who live in households where their sexual orientation is not accepted.

If online pastoral support is arranged as an alternative, there is a risk that young people won’t have access to a suitable device or that online support is monitored. Measures should be taken to reduce this impact where possible.

### Socio-economic disadvantage

It is recognised that some groups in society are at greater risk of poverty than others.\(^2\)

**Academic progress**

Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels by SIMD\(^2\) for 2018-19 shows a pre-COVID poverty-related attainment gap between pupils in least and most deprived areas. For primary school pupils, the gaps were 17.1 percentage points for Reading, 19.1 for Writing, 13.0 for Listening and Talking, 20.7 for Literacy and 16.8 for Numeracy. At S3, the gap was 11.5 percentage points for Reading, 12.2 for Writing, 10.0 for Listening and Talking, 13.8 for Literacy and 13.5 for Numeracy.\(^2\)

At national level, evidence does point to an improving system as 92.9% of 2018/19 school leavers were in a positive initial destination (85.9% for 2009/10).\(^3\) In 2018/19, the achievement of CfE Levels data shows that since 2017/18 attainment among the

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\(^1\) https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/
\(^2\) The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is an area-based measure therefore not everyone living in area assessed as deprived will necessarily be at a socio-economic disadvantage, and vice versa.
\(^3\) The Scottish Government, School leaver follow-up destinations June 2020
children and young people from the most deprived areas rose in numeracy at all stages, and in reading and writing for P1, P4 and P7 most deprived pupils

The Year 4 Evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund (2018/19) shows that headteachers are confident that the Attainment Scotland Funding is making a difference and nine out of ten (91%) headteachers reported to have seen an improvement in closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of ASF supported approaches, an increase of 13 points since 2017. Further, nearly all headteachers (98%) reported that they expected to see an improvement in closing the gap over the next five years.

However, all children may have experienced some loss of learning due to school closures. Children from more affluent homes are more likely to have had greater access to home schooling facilities and materials, and to have parents who can assist, to offset lost instruction time (London School of Economics – Centre for Economic Performance).

Similarly, a report published in June 2020 by the Education Endowment Foundation on best evidence of impact of school closures on the attainment gap included key findings such as:

- School closures are likely to reverse progress made to close the gap in the last decade since 2011;
- Supporting effective remote learning will mitigate the extent to which the gap widens;
- Sustained support will be needed to help disadvantaged pupils catch up.

Closing the poverty-related attainment gap remains the defining mission of this government, and various actions are being taken to ensure that COVID-19 has minimum impact on this work:

- In May, it was confirmed that, for the first time, more than £250 million of Pupil Equity Funding will be made available to 97% of schools over 2020/1 and 2021/2.
- The Deputy First Minister has committed to the implementation of an Equity Audit which will deepen our understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and set clear areas of focus for accelerating recovery.
- Through the Attainment Scotland Funding Flexibility Guidance and revised PEF Guidance, it has been ensured that schools are councils are able to redirect Attainment Scotland Funding (ASF) to help mitigate the impact of school closures on Scotland’s most disadvantaged families.

**Wellbeing**

We know that for those affected by poverty and disadvantage, free school meals are a vital measure for families, children and young people across the country and that it

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24 The Scottish Government, Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence 2019
is essential to ensure that children and young people continue to have access to nutritious food during the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to healthy and nutritious school meals is essential, given the clear benefits for pupils’ learning and health. Free school meals provide much-needed support and assistance, saving families, on average, £400 a child, per year.

- local authorities are expected to continue to provide free school meals to all eligible children and young people.
- Additional funding has been agreed to ensure the provision of free school meals during Christmas, February and Easter holidays. This reflects that there will be additional economic impact to families' finances, which may impact particularly during the winter period.

We know that people affected by poverty are more likely to be at risk of illness or death from COVID-19. Therefore pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have experienced illness or bereavement during school closures. Schools should continue to follow existing guidance on supporting pupils in these circumstances.

Ongoing restrictions also mean changes to youth, sports and other community facilities that may have previously taken place after the school day, particularly those in Protection Levels 3 and 4. This is expected to have a negative impact on the wellbeing of children and young people, particularly in community schools and for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. It may also impact lone parents who may depend on these facilities for extended childcare. We know that women are more likely to be lone parents\textsuperscript{27}.

- The positive impact of activities or clubs on the wider health and development of children is recognised, and can be conducted where possible in line with guidelines.

**Digital equity**

*The cost of learning in lockdown*\textsuperscript{28}, a June 2020 report by Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG) showed that families with access to resources such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and Show my Homework amongst others, were grateful for the continued tasks, ideas, learning and support from schools that this enabled.

However, some pupils may be disadvantaged in comparison to their peers through not having access to digital devices, particularly younger children who are more likely to have to share devices with other members of the household. Through accessing the internet, pupils are able to access learning resources, as well as interact with school staff and peers. This is applicable to the period of school closures from March 2020, and will continue to apply if blended learning were to be introduced or if necessary for pupils to self-isolate. In 2018, the ONS reported that 12\% of those aged between 11 and 18 years in the UK (700,000) reported having no internet access at home from a computer or tablet, while a further 60,000 reported having no home internet access at all\textsuperscript{29}.

\textsuperscript{27} https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/analytical_reports/HH%20report.pdf
\textsuperscript{28} https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/The-cost-of-learning-in-lockdown-Scotland-FINAL.pdf
\textsuperscript{29} https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04#how-does-digital-exclusion-vary-with-age
Local authorities and schools should continue the work they have been undertaking in relation to tackling digital exclusion. This includes the provision of devices and connectivity solutions to support educational continuity when children and young people are learning outside of the school environment. This local activity is supplemented by the Scottish Government’s £30m investment in digital devices and connectivity solutions designed to combat digital exclusion. By the end of November, local authorities had used this funding to purchase and distribute nearly 50,000 digital devices to children and young people in schools, along with over 9,000 connectivity solutions.

**Face coverings**
In line with more recent scientific advice, the guidance for the reopening of schools has been amended to reflect the advice that face coverings should be worn by adults and young people in confined communal areas, and by all over the age of five when travelling by public or school transport. This has also been extended to include senior phase pupils in classrooms when in Protection Levels 3 and 4.

Whilst it is reasonable to assume that most children and young people will have access to re-usable face coverings due to their increasing use in wider society, some may not have access to face coverings or be able to arrange for them to be regularly cleaned. To address potential equity issues arising from this, guidance makes clear that:

- Where anybody is struggling to access a face covering, or where they are unable to use their face covering due to having forgotten it or it having become soiled/unsafe, schools should take steps to ensure they have a contingency supply to meet such needs.
- Schools should take steps to minimise any stigma that may become attached to the use of school-provided face coverings, and deal effectively with any associated bullying.

**Ventilation**
In line with scientific advice, local authorities are requested to support schools to identify and implement local approaches to balance the need for fresh air with the maintenance of adequate temperatures. To enable schools to strike this balance, schools are recommended to provide flexibility around permitted clothing.

- Guidance also makes clear that local authorities should ensure that, where individual children and young people cannot access warm clothing necessary for the local strategies adopted, appropriate support is provided on a case-by-case basis.

**Digital equity**
Digital connectivity is a key enabler for education in general, particularly in Scotland’s more remote, rural and island areas. The importance of this has been magnified through the requirement for home schooling owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and where necessary for pupils to self-isolate. The [National Islands Plan](#) recognises that access to good quality digital infrastructure for all is essential to improving the educational outcomes for children and young people on the islands, and good digital connectivity is increasingly vital for education.
**Gaelic medium education**

In 2019 there were 4,631 learners in the GME sector. In the same year there were 541 learners with Gaelic (Scots) as their main home language. Therefore we can assume that a majority of GME learners do not speak Gaelic at home.

Where necessary for pupils to self-isolate, all will be dependent on digital resources for some of their learning whilst at home. Those in the GME sector will naturally require resources to be available in Gaelic.

- There are a variety of online resources available to GME pupils to support with language development and immersion learning through Storlann, E-Sgoil, e-Storas, Education Scotland and BBC ALBA.
- To provide further support while home learning is taking place Storlann has recently extended its site to support parents as well as learners and teachers. Also, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has been working with a range of organisations to develop new online facilities, including ‘Cleachd i aig an taigh’ (‘Using Gaelic in the home’).

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30 [https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/]
### School staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Physical attendance at school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A quarter of the teaching workforce are over the age of 50 and around one in twenty are over the age of 60(^3)(^1). Some of these staff members may also have been in the shielding category prior to 1 August.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• To support educational continuity and ensure resilience and wellbeing in the workforce, guidance encourages local authorities to consider the need to identify additional workforce capacity. This may include:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensuring that teachers who have not yet secured permanent employment are considered as an integral part of planning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensuring that supply staff are fully utilised</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Supporting GTCS registered teachers not currently teaching to return to the workforce.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• £80 million has also been allocated to support the recruitment of additional teaching and support staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The Guidance on reducing the risks in schools sets out a suite of important mitigations that local authorities and schools are asked to implement. These include risk assessments, enhanced cleaning regimes, good hand and respiratory hygiene, ventilation, the wearing of face coverings, use of PPE where appropriate, continuous vigilance for symptoms, and surveillance, testing and outbreak management.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other members of the workforce, including cleaners, catering staff and technicians should also wear face coverings where they cannot keep a 2m distance and are interacting for a sustained period with children, young people or adults. Further considerations will also be needed to ensure staff can work safely, with awareness of factors unique to each role taken into consideration. For example, depending on local and individual circumstances, cleaners who have previously worked across more than one school site, may be restricted to one school site to begin with.

- The Guidance on reducing the risks in schools states that risk assessments should be completed that may consider hygiene, ventilation, staff and pupil movement as well as physical distancing, use of PPE where appropriate, continuous vigilance for symptoms, and surveillance, testing and outbreak management.
- £50 million has been allocated to support local authorities with the additional costs associated with implementing protection measures required to keep schools open, including increased cleaning costs and adjustments to school buildings and other learning spaces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Staff with disabilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It will be necessary for employers to continue to consider the specific needs of staff who have a disability, in line with their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Therefore, guidance highlights that employers should remain mindful of their duties under the Equality Act 2010, and consider additional support from a wellbeing or occupational health angle if appropriate.</td>
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</table>

Some school staff will have underlying health conditions which will mean that they would be considered to be at highest clinical risk. Additional considerations will apply at Level 3 and Level 4 (where shielding considerations are likely to be reapplied).

- In these circumstances the guidance is clear that individualised risk assessment must be reviewed and refreshed, in light of clinical advice.

Some staff may have conditions that do not increase their risk of being disproportionately impacted by COVID, but who do have specific considerations eg. a bespoke work station.

- In these circumstances, schools should continue to accommodate needs, and keep them in mind when implementing the mitigating measures set out in the guidance.

The guidance also sets out additional consideration for clinically extremely vulnerable staff in local authority areas entering protective levels 3 and 4.

**Staff mental wellbeing**

Staff suffering with mental ill health may be more likely to be anxious about attending school than their colleagues.

- Local authorities should ensure that managers in school have sensitive, supportive conversations with staff who have concerns about their mental health with wellbeing support services being promoted as part of that.

**Sex**

**Caring responsibilities**

Women make up an overwhelming majority of the education workforce with around 77% of all teachers being women, ranging from 64% in secondary schools to 89% in primary schools\(^\text{32}\). Women also generally carry out the majority of childcare, particularly if lone parents, who may be without their usual sources of support.

Staff who are parents or carers will be dependent upon childcare being available to enable them to commit to previous working patterns themselves. They may also be dependent on public transport to drop off children or to travel to work, made more challenging if reduced timetables are in place.

Women who are parents or carers, and who make up the wider education workforce, for example learning assistants and cleaners, are also likely to be dependent upon childcare, formal or informal, being available to enable them to return to their contracted working patterns.

**Women's safety and wellbeing**

Self-isolation and social distancing measures that were necessitated by Covid-19 may have exacerbated women’s experience of domestic abuse. Many victim-survivors were cut off from or had limited access to vital support. In some cases, victim-survivors used work as a safe space to access specialist support or support from colleagues.

- Returning to the workplace may be beneficial for many victim-survivors, and it is essential that workplaces have employment policies and practices that best support victim-survivors at work.

Women, who make up a majority of the teaching and school support staff workforce, are also more likely to be dependent on public transport for travelling to work, which increases their risk of exposure to COVID-19 in comparison to people who run their own car or can walk or cycle to work.

**Women’s health**

At any one time, a proportion of the female education workforce will be dealing with the often debilitating effects of the menopause and other menstrual health issues such as endometriosis. Stress – which we know has increased for some as a result of coronavirus restrictions - can exacerbate a number of the symptoms associated with these conditions and returning to a repurposed school estate where access to toilets might have changed may be challenging.

- With workplaces moving towards being ‘menopause friendly’ schools should continue to consider how they offer support in this context.

**Gender reassignment**

Pastoral support

Transgender members of the workforce may be experiencing delays to gender-affirming treatment due to COVID-19, which could have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. There is no data available to know how many members of the workforce may be impacted.

**Pregnancy and maternity**

Current clinical advice states that pregnant women of any gestation are at no more risk of contracting the virus than any other non-pregnant person who is in similar health. Pregnancy itself however, by altering the body’s immune system and response to viral infections in general, can occasionally cause more severe symptoms. Therefore following social distancing guidance is important for all pregnant women and in particular those who are 28 weeks and beyond, in order to lessen their risk of contracting the virus. For women with other medical conditions in addition to pregnancy, this should be considered on an individual basis.

A recent TUC report of 3,400 women who are pregnant or on maternity leave found that 1 in 4 had experienced unfair treatment or discrimination and that low-paid pregnant women were more likely to have lost pay during COVID-19.

- Pregnant members of the workforce should continue to follow the latest guidance from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and employers should conduct risk assessments.
- The Scottish Government has produced COVID-19 Occupational Risk Assessment Guidance and individual risk assessment for the workplace guidance to support employers in these unique times.

**Returning to work**

Some members of staff will be returning to the workforce after maternity leave. Estimates suggest that around 20% of mothers experience poor mental health in the perinatal period and we know from a range of evidence that mental health has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic and that some groups are faring worse than others. Women tend to report worse mental health and wellbeing

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during the pandemic than men\textsuperscript{35}. Consideration should be given to their re-induction to the workforce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Support in the workplace</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International evidence suggests COVID-19 has affected minority ethnic groups disproportionately. In England, there is consistent evidence of increased risks among many minority ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{36} In Scotland, data has been slow to emerge on the risks for minority ethnic groups and initial analyses were contradictory. Since the Covid Ethnicity Expert Reference Group was first established, more recent analyses by Public Health Scotland (PHS) and National Records of Scotland (NRS) has confirmed increased risks associated with COVID-19 in South Asians but robust analyses are still unavailable for several minority ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{37,38}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Work is ongoing to build upon these data and to improve understanding. The Scottish Government continues to work with experts from a range of fields, including the Covid Ethnicity Expert Reference Group, to take forward the recommendations from the first report published by the group in August.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Public perception | Discourse in the media and on social media during the COVID-19 crisis has included narratives which could contribute to racist bullying. Schools should be aware of the ongoing increased risk of racist incidents or bullying against particular groups of children, as well as the possible impact on the mental wellbeing of ME staff. |
|                  | - Therefore guidance highlights that employers should remain mindful of their duties under the Equality Act 2010, and provide additional wellbeing or occupational health support, for example in the form of risk assessments, if requested. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion or belief</th>
<th>Religious spaces</th>
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<td></td>
<td>In order to maximise opportunities for physical distancing, some schools may choose to use non-classroom spaces as teaching space.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Where rooms are potentially being repurposed, it should be ensured that provision remains available for staff to access religious spaces at expected times of day.</td>
</tr>
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| Wellbeing | With the widely recognised impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of pupils and staff, it is likely that staff with a religious role may continue to play a significant role in supporting staff and pupils as schools support pupils and staff with recovery from school closures. |


- The impact of this aspect of the role on the health and wellbeing of those staff should be taken into account when assessing their specific occupational health support needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th>There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Socio-economic disadvantage | **Travel and transport**  
Staff from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be more likely to be dependent on public transport to arrive at work. Due to restrictions in place on public transport, this may be a cause of anxiety or stress for some. Staff who move between schools, such as peripatetic teachers – although this is advised to be kept to a minimum – may particularly feel this impact. |
| Island communities | **Digital equity**  
Digital connectivity is a key enabler for education in general, particularly in Scotland’s more remote, rural and island areas. The importance of this has been magnified through the requirement for home schooling owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and where necessary for pupils to self-isolate. School staff will be dependent on digital connectivity to be able to carry out their jobs in these circumstances.  
The [National Islands Plan](#) recognises that access to good quality digital infrastructure for all is essential to improving the educational outcomes for children and young people on the islands. |
| Gaelic medium education | There are 310 FTE GME teachers in Scotland. In line with the general teaching population around a quarter of them are 50 years of age or older. When considering the teacher workforce, GME teachers will also need to be taken into account. |
### Parents, carers and families

#### Age

**Older parents and carers**

For pupils who live with grandparents, there may be concerns at home around those pupils attending school and interacting with staff and peers. These concerns could impact the mental wellbeing of older parents or carers.

- Hygiene and cleanliness will remain of key importance, for example ensuring that pupils and staff wash their hands with soap and warm water or hand sanitiser as they arrive at school, leave at the end of the day, return from breaks, change rooms and before and after eating. Adequate hand-washing or sanitising facilities should be available throughout the school estate, and guidance on face coverings should be followed.
- Schools and local authorities should ensure that health and safety measures are communicated effectively with all parents and carers to provide reassurance.

### Disability

**Parents of children with a disability**

The Family Fund Impact of COVID-19 survey included 232 families in Scotland seeking to understand how the COVID-19 outbreak is affecting families raising disabled or seriously ill children. The findings showed that two in five families have lost income; the mental health and behaviour of children is being impacted; that the availability of both informal and formal support for children has been seriously reduced and that education is one of the most serious concerns.

**Parents with a disability**

Some parents with a disability may be cautious about their children attending school and interacting with staff and peers, which could also impact their mental wellbeing, this is more likely if the parent has underlying health conditions which may make them at high clinical risk. Parents with a disability may appreciate additional advice and support around arrangements during the course of term.

- Hygiene and cleanliness will remain of key importance, for example ensuring that pupils use hand sanitiser as they arrive at school, and leave at the end of the day, as well as the wearing of face coverings where recommended.
- Schools and local authorities should ensure that health and safety measures are communicated effectively with all parents and carers to provide reassurance.

Updated guidance now requires adults (including parents and carers) to wear face coverings when picking up or dropping off at the school gates. There is the potential for some parents/carers who are exempt from wearing face coverings, or who rely on facial expressions for communication, to be negatively impacted by these requirements.

- Guidance makes clear that the usual exemptions apply, and that schools should implement these policies with sensitivity.

#### Transportation

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In the context of school drop off and pick-up arrangements, it is expected that some schools, depending on their location, may encourage pupils arriving by car to park further away from the school and then walk to avoid congestion.

- Discretion for parents and carers with disabilities should be considered in these circumstances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Caring responsibilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In Protection Level 4 it is advised to pause the provision of non-essential activities or clubs outside the usual school timetable. This does not include regulated childcare operating from school premises.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>With women taking responsibility for a majority of childcare and fewer extracurricular activities generally taking place than previously, there may be additional pressures on female members of the work force who are also parents.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If necessary for pupils to self-isolate or for home learning to take place, this will impact on carers, who are most likely to be women. The impact of the child or young person they care for not physically attending school may impact their ability to work, and could be more challenging for those who are also experiencing poverty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Gender reassignment | There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pregnancy and maternity</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current clinical advice states that pregnant women of any gestation are at no more risk of contracting the virus than any other non-pregnant person who is in similar health. Pregnancy itself however, by altering the body’s immune system and response to viral infections in general, can occasionally cause more severe symptoms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Therefore following social distancing guidance is important for all pregnant women and in particular those who are 28 weeks and beyond, in order to lessen their risk of contracting the virus. This increased risk for this group his may cause anxiety for some parents around the school drop-off and pick-up, particularly those who are dependent on public transport.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reasonable adjustments should be considered in these circumstances, such as alternative transport means or alternative travel times to allow for physical distancing to be observed.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Language and communication</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents and carers who speak English as an additional language risk being disadvantaged through not having a full understanding of the steps being taken to reduce risks within their child’s school setting. For this reason, schools and local authorities should continue to ensure they communicate effectively with all families within their school community.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Local authorities should continue to work with community sources to identify which community languages information should be shared in, and produce communications accordingly.</td>
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</table>

<p>| Religion or belief | There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sexual orientation</strong></th>
<th>There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Socio-economic disadvantage** | **Home learning**  
Research from the Sutton Trust[^40] suggests that parents on lower incomes feel less confident to support home learning. If pupils are self-isolating or in Protection Level 4, where pupils with high clinical risk (shielding) may be advised not to attend school, there are additional issues that may have to be addressed as part of any distance learning arrangements, including access to resources and communication with parents and carers.  
- Following government funding, local authorities are working to ensure disadvantaged pupils have access to a device and internet connection.  
- There is information to support parents with learning from home available through [Parent zone](https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/).  
- Low income families will be supported through the [Winter Plan for Social Protection](#). |
| **Island communities** | There is not sufficient information available to understand whether there is a disproportionate impact on parents of school-age children in island communities, in comparison to parents in other regions of Scotland. |
| **Gaelic medium education** | Throughout lockdown and as schools remain open, it remains vital that parents are informed and updated on policy developments. This applies to the GME sector as well as the English medium sector, with [Comann nam Pàrant](#) taking a key role in supporting this work. |

Methodology

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was evident that decision makers would be faced with unforeseen challenges, and that it would continue to be necessary to take a broad approach to involving key groups in policy development throughout.

For this reason, the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) was formed. It is co-chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Councillor Stephen McCabe, CoSLA’s Children’s and Young People’s Spokesperson. It brings together ministers, Education Scotland, senior officials and expert representatives from unions, local authorities, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Early Years Scotland (EYS) and National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS). The group has met regularly since April 2020 and has contributed to policy development at every stage. A member of the Scottish Youth Parliament has also recently joined the CERG to ensure the views of young people are represented throughout the decision making process.

The Scottish Government has taken a range of steps to ensure appropriate consultation with stakeholders including teachers, parents and learners, and to learn from their experiences as part of the policy-making and decision-making process. While not all of these arrangements were a formal part of the CERG governance arrangements, the discussion at these forums helped to inform the Scottish Government’s awareness of key issues and experiences relating to all stakeholder groups. This includes:

- Discussing international approaches to reopening schools and learning from experiences in other countries. This has been achieved through drawing on the expertise from the International Council of Education Advisers, data gathered regularly by the Scottish Government’s Education Analytical Services team plus meetings with other experts such as e.g. UNICEF Scotland.

- Ongoing liaison and engagement with the National Parent Forum of Scotland in addition to the NPFS’s formal membership of the CERG. This included two open platform live “Zoom Q&A” Sessions between the Deputy First Minister and parents; one on 16 June 2020 (involving 3,000) parents and a follow up session on 10th September 2020.

- Regular meetings of the Deputy First Minister’s Teacher Panel to discuss operational issues, education recovery issues and a variety of broader education issues. This included meetings with the panel on 11 March 2020, 13 May 2020, 14 June 2020 and 23 September 2020.

- Meetings between the Deputy First Minister and learners. This included a session on 17 June 2020 to discuss learners’ experience during school closures in Term 4, 2020/21 and a further session with senior phase learners on 01 October 2020. In order to support future plans and decisions on education recovery, the Scottish Government has created the Education Recovery Youth Panel.

- Officials have sought and listened to views of representatives of groups with protected characteristics across Scotland in developing this document.

[42] https://www.gov.scot/groups/teacher-panel/
It is recognised that the balancing of Covid-related risks and harms in schools has, from the outset, been dependent on decision makers having access to the most up-to-date scientific and medical advice available, in order to protect the health and safety of children, staff and families. Therefore the CERG has sought the views of the Covid-19 Advisory Group and associated sub-group specialising on children’s and education issues. These groups have provided data relevant to the school population, drawn on international comparisons and made recommendations to support education experts in their planning.
Key Findings

Previous findings showed that school closures had a predominantly negative impact for most of Scotland’s children and young people due to the wide range of support that education settings provide, from a community, social and wellbeing perspective, as well as learning. Therefore, having reopened schools with mitigating measures in place, the overall impact on children and young people is significantly more positive than keeping schools closed.

However, as described throughout this document, the introduction of mitigating measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in school settings, does impact on pupils, staff and families. Key findings include:

- Pupils with communication difficulties, for example due to ASN or speaking English as an additional language, are more likely to be impacted directly by wearing face coverings themselves, or indirectly through others following guidance to wear them eg. staff, peers.

- Advice to follow physical distancing guidelines is likely to impact upon all in the school community. For many this may impact wellbeing, and for some pupils this may impact their access to elements of the curriculum eg PE lessons.

- The impact on wellbeing is expected to be particularly challenging for staff or pupils with underlying health conditions or those with close family members who have underlying health conditions.

- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds may face greater challenges than their peers due to measures in place. For example, they may have reduced access to resources for learning if needing to self-isolate, or may have limited access to warm clothing for outdoor lessons or in situations where increased ventilation lowers the classroom temperature.

Conclusion

It has been recognised throughout the pandemic that COVID-19 will have had a negative impact on many children and young people, staff and families across Scotland, particularly groups with protected characteristics and those experiencing disadvantage. The impacts of school closures specifically are recognised in the impact assessment on the closures and reopening of schools. However, with schools having been open across the country since August, we are seeing the broadly positive impact of this, but must remain mindful of the ongoing recovery, as well as the impact of measures in the Reducing risks in schools guidance.

Feedback from CERG tells us that schools are adapting well to mitigating measures brought in since August, which have meant that school life has not yet returned to the previous ‘normal’. Therefore school leaders, staff and pupils have all had to adapt to new guidance, and uncertain situations with regards to COVID-19 transmission in their local communities. This has inevitably impacted the workload of school leaders and staff, as well as the wellbeing of many across the school community, including staff, pupils and families.

In the face of these challenges, the Scottish Government remains committed to excellence and equity in all of Scotland’s schools, and will continue to strive for this as schools recover and into the future.
We welcome your views and evidence. If you are in regular contact with policy makers in the Scottish Government please feel free to use your normal routes of engagement to provide further evidence or comments. If you are not in regular contact with policy makers in the Scottish Government or have any more general comments on both the assessment and mitigation activities please send them to CERG@gov.scot.