Impact Assessment: The closure and reopening of schools as part of the COVID-19 recovery process in Scotland

VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Summary of changes
V1.0	30/7/2020	First version of full document, following publication of the Initial Impact Assessment.
V2.0	25/8/2020	Updated to reflect new guidance on face coverings.

Version 2.0
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Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Executive Summary

The OECD, in *Education responses to COVID-19: an implementation strategy toolkit[1]*, states that 'School closures can have a negative impact on children, on learning and increase inequalities if governments do not effectively implement measures to ensure every child has sufficient resources to learn in good conditions, in particular in countries where non-school factors play a determinant role in learning outcomes'. The Scottish Government recognises this, and this document is an assessment of the impact of school closures and their reopening 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 Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA)

A Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) has been developed separately where the impact of school reopening on children's rights and wellbeing, particularly in respect of adhering to the UNCRC Articles is explored in further detail.

The document considers school closures and two scenarios for reopening:

- A full-time return to school for all pupils. This was announced on 30 July as the government's approach to resuming in-school learning from August 2020. Full guidance available here.
- A blended learning approach, allowing for physical distancing to be maintained if considered necessary. Full guidance was published on 21 May 2020 and is available here. Blended learning was the planning assumption prior to June, and remained the government's contingency plan for if a full-time return is not possible. The approach is superseded by the above document unless future scientific advice states otherwise.

In summary, our findings show that school closures have had an overall 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 the reopening of schools is expected to have an overall positive impact for most children and young people, as well as for their families and education staff. However, we must remain mindful that the negative impact of COVID-19 will not be remedied through reopening schools alone. Children and young people, their families and carers and education staff, may need time and additional support to allow them to adapt and recover.

For this reason, this document will continue to be updated where required, and any future iterations will reflect our increased understanding of these impacts as the amount of data and research available continues to grow.

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[1] https://www.oecd.org/publications/education-responses-to-covid-19-an-implementation-strategy-toolkit-81209b82-en.htm

Background

As part of the Scottish Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Deputy First Minister announced on 19 March 2020 that all local authority schools and nurseries in Scotland would close from the end of the school day on Friday 20 March 2020.

Emergency childcare has been made available across Scotland in a series of -hubs- for vulnerable children[2] and the children of key workers. Schools were asked to support pupils with home learning, where possible.

Professionals from across the education and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) sectors have stepped up to support children and young people through these challenging times. However, school closures are considered to be having a negative effect on all aspects of children's progress and development, their learning, and their wellbeing, including their mental health[3].

The Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group, including a subsequent sub-group on children and education issues[4], was established in March 2020. 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 group 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 is on *how* schools should reopen once the science indicates that it is safe to do so. The group has been supported by ten workstreams, which drew on expertise from across the sectors, to recognise and respond to multiple factors that have already affected or will affect children and young people, families and the education workforce. These include:

- the impact of school closures, home-learning and lockdown more broadly
- the process of reopening schools and the necessary steps to do so
- supporting the sectors to ensure that when face-to-face teaching resumes, that it is done safely

As scientific evidence developed on when it is safe to take a phased approach to reopening schools and ELC settings, the CERG worked alongside government officials to develop a framework for a practical staged reopening. This framework was published on 21 May 2020 and outlines a phased return to schools, with many pupils expected to experience blended learning from 11 August. The intention, in these circumstances, was for most pupils to split their time between experiencing face-to-face teaching in school, and distance learning from home, to allow for physical distancing to be maintained.

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[2] https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-guide-schools-early-learning-closures/pages/vulnerable-children/

[3] *Children's Parliament How Are You Doing wellbeing survey*

Findings from a survey of children aged 8-14 years in Scotland, published on 1 May 2020. The findings show that show being indoors more and learning at home impacts on the physical and mental health of children. There are indications that children do not feel enough control over what they are learning or that they are not enjoying and worrying about learning at home, this is especially true for 12 to 14 year olds. 36% of children in the survey worry about doing their school work, 32% worry about future exams and 28% are worried about learning at home.

[4] The sub-group was formed in June 2020 to strengthen the connection between medical and education experts and leaders.

However, since this time, scientific data and guidance has continued to evolve and the Scottish Government has continued to adapt its approach accordingly. Due to the ongoing suppression of the virus, it is now expected that almost all pupils will be able to return to school full-time from August 2020. The full guidance underpinning this return to school is published here. This full-time return remains conditional upon the continued suppression of the virus and therefore the plans for blended learning remain in place as a contingency.

The scope of this Impact Assessment

This document considers the impact of:

- school closures;
- the decision to reopen schools full-time from 11 August 2020; and
- the associated contingency plan of 'blended learning', that we know may still need to be used if the infection rates increase again, at a national or local level.

All three elements are being assessed for their impact 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[5]

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[5] Part 6 Chapter 1 Section 84 disapplies marriage and civil partnership (and age) to the provision of education.

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.

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.

Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA)

A BRIA is designed to assess the costs, benefits and risks that may impact the public, private or third sector. In the context of school closures and their reopening, this document considers the impact on independent schools.

Children and young people

Age	1) It is acknowledged that school closures are likely to have generally had a negative impact on the wellbeing and development of most children and young people. As schools reopen full-time as planned, or for 'blended learning' if necessary, this will likely impact different age groups in a variety of ways;
	2) It is likely that child protection concerns may have arisen during school closures, 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[6] a rights-based, child-centred approach to assessment, intervention, and planning to meet needs will be essential, drawing together support from partners and third sector organisations in order to ensure appropriate support for children and young people.
	Physical distancing 3) In line with scientific advice received from the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues, primary pupils will not need to physically distance from each other.
	The scientific advice also made clear that distancing is not required for a safe return to secondary schools. However, as an additional precautionary measure, the guidance on reopening schools says that where possible secondary schools should take practical, proportionate steps to encourage distancing between young people, particularly in the senior phase, provided it does not introduce capacity constraints. This goes beyond the requirements of the scientific advice, and represents an additional measure to minimise risk.
	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.
	a) However, physical distancing between all children and young people in schools may be required in the event of a national or local outbreak of the virus. Schools may need to introduce their plans for blended learning or close temporarily to help control transmission.
	Face coverings 4) In line with the latest scientific advice, the guidance for the reopening of schools was amended on 25 August 2020 to reflect the advice that face coverings should be worn by adults and young people in secondary schools

[6] https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland/ and
https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-supplementary-national-child-protection-guidance/

when moving about the school in corridors and confined communal areas (including toilets), where physical distancing is particularly difficult to maintain. The amended advice also provides that face coverings should be worn by all passengers over the age of five when travelling on dedicated school transport (in addition to the existing requirement for wearing them on public transport). The use of face coverings in these circumstances should be seen as just one mitigation within a package of measures. The other mitigation measures including physical distancing for adults, environmental cleaning, personal hand and respiratory hygiene, grouping of young people and maintaining distancing between young people in secondary schools where possible, remain vitally important.

a) This amendment to the guidance will impact all school age pupils who are advised to wear masks in communal areas at school, and all who travel by public or dedicated school transport. The increasing use of face coverings in public spaces in wider society is expected to ease this adjustment for most. However, theguidance provides that some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. Further information on exemptions can be found in wider Scottish Government guidance. Schools will need to be mindful of and responsive to the potential for bullying of pupils unable to wear a face covering.

Transition years

5) All pupils may find the transition to the next academic year more challenging than previous years due to missing out on preparation in the summer term. However, those entering key transition years in August 2020, i.e. P1 and S1, may feel that impact most greatly and will be at risk of having missed out on important transition support that previous year groups have received. Transition is key for supporting learning, wellbeing and the development of relationships for pupils with both peers and teachers, and it is recognised that if blended learning were necessary, rather than a full-time return, it would be likely to take longer for pupils to settle into new routines and settings.

a) As part of the [Educational Continuity Direction](#), schools were able to be opened for the purposes of supporting the transition of pupils into P1, S1 and for other pupils who would benefit from enhanced transition, including those with additional support needs. Guidance on continuity in learning[7] supported education authorities and schools in preparing for transitions - in a different way - during the pandemic.

b) Where pupils may have missed out on transition visits, schools are expected to consider mapping and signage to support pupils with familiarisation. This should be considered in the context of different age

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[7] https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-continuity-in-learning/

groups and special consideration should be given to pupils with Additional Support Needs[8].

Senior phase pupils

6) Pupils who were due to sit national qualification exams in summer 2020 have missed out on that opportunity. There is anecdotal reporting from stakeholders that this has resulted in a sense of loss and a negative emotional impact.

    a) The cancellation of the exam diet was unavoidable due to the pandemic and the risks to public health. SQA has worked with the wider education system to deliver an alternative certification approach to replace the planned summer 2020 exam diet. The SQA has based its approach on the core principles of ensuring fairness to all learners, the safe and secure certification of qualifications, and maintaining the integrity and credibility of our qualifications system. The SQA has been clear that it will publish further detail underpinning its approach and the impact of any moderation it has had to make to estimates on results day, and in advance of that they have engaged with the education system, parents and young people. It has also committed to fulfilling its obligations to complete and publish an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on its approach.

7) Pupils who are due to sit national qualification exams in 2021 will understandably be nervous about the reduced in-school learning they will have received during school closures and any impacts from further necessary disruption.

The *Lockdown Lockdown* survey, conducted by the Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot, found that around half of 2,418 respondents stated they are moderately or extremely concerned about exams and coursework[9].

    a) The framework for reopening schools made clear that planning for the 2021 examination diet is under way, and we will ensure that further guidance is in place for when schools return on 11 August. Consideration is being given to slightly delaying the 2021 exam diet to ensure full learning and teaching entitlements for senior phase candidates are met. We are also considering any other flexibilities and contingencies that may need to be in place to accommodate prevailing public health advice.

    b) Education Scotland is expanding its partnership with eSgoil to develop a strong national e-learning provision. During lock-down, Education Scotland produced resources to support pupils and teachers with home learning.

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[8] The Coronavirus (COVID-19): reopening schools guidance, p18 states that "Education authorities and schools should consider how they will support staff and children to orientate themselves to the revised layouts and circulation patterns..."
[9] https://youngscot.net/news-database/lockdownlowdown-results

	c) If blended learning is required, schools are encouraged to use additional available space as classroom space, where safe to do so, in order to maximise the amount of face-to-face teaching that pupils receive[10]. **School leavers** 8) Pupils transitioning to a new stage may find it harder to adapt, including those starting college and university, with a different learning environment. The Lockdown Lowdown survey also found that two-thirds of respondents are moderately or extremely concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their future[11]. a) Transition arrangements for all children and young people returning to school or moving into new learning environments such as college or university, will require careful planning and consideration. Guidance on transitions may be found in Coronavirus (COVID-19): support for continuity in learning guidance.
Disability	**Clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable pupils** may have a health condition which would be considered as a disability. 9) In the context of both a full-time reopening of schools and if blended learning is necessary, pupils who are clinically vulnerable or extremely clinically vulnerable (broadly those with pre-existing conditions), should continue to adhere to the latest medical advice on whether or not to attend a school setting. We expect all children, young people and staff who are shielding to be able to return to school in August, unless given advice from a GP or healthcare provider not to. There is further information available here. a) There will be some pupils whose health prevents them from returning to school settings. In these circumstances appropriate provision should be made for remote learning pursuant to local circumstances. School leaders should continue to support these pupils to ensure they have the same opportunities to learn as their peers[12] in line with statutory responsibilities to provide education elsewhere than a school for children unable to attend school due to ill health[13]. b) There will be some pupils for whom health reasons may prevent them from being able to wear a face covering in environments where others

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[10] The Coronavirus (COVID-19): Re-opening schools guidance, page 9 "Where safe and appropriate to do so, education authorities and schools should endeavour to use all available spaces within facilities (and alternative facilities) to assist in the provision of high quality learning and teaching in a positive learning environment, whilst supporting measures to minimise the risk of infection and transmission."

[11] https://youngscot.net/news-database/lockdownlowdown-results

[12] The Coronavirus (COVID-19): reopening schools guidance, p10 states that "The needs of individual children should be carefully considered. Some children may require additional staffing, resource or space to ensure they can benefit from a positive learning environment."

[13] https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-education-children-unable-attend-school-due-ill-health/#:~:text=For%20children%20and%20young%20people%20unable%20to%20attend%20school%20or,parents%2C%20and%20the%20pupil%2C%20to

are recommended to do so. Schools should remain mindful of this, and may wish to consult wider Scottish Government guidance on exemptions.

Accessibility

10) If physical distancing measures are introduced to school settings, it is possible that some school buildings may be reconfigured to allow for one-way systems or similar.

   a) 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)

11) Pupils with additional support needs have had to adapt to a changed learning environment, whether at home or through attendance at an education hub or specialist setting. Many will require individual transition support for their return to school. Whilst there are anecdotal reports of some pupils, including some with ASN or anxiety, finding benefits to home learning, many will be missing out on the additional support that they receive when in school. Some pupils with ASN may also find changes to routine more challenging than their peers, which could be emphasised if blended learning were introduced. It should also be recognised that some children and young people will have new needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

   a) The emotional wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and young people as they re-connect with learning will require careful planning, including discussion with them and their parents and carers. Simply attending any formal provision will be a challenge for some. A first step will be to review plans, including co-ordinated support plans, to ensure that planned approaches build upon and recognise any additional needs which have arisen. In planning these approaches, engagement with parents and carers, as well as the children and young people themselves will be key. Support may be drawn from other partners such as Social Work Services, Allied Health Professionals, agencies such as Skills Development Scotland, and third sector organisations. This process should take into account communication of routine changes where appropriate.

   b) Local authorities will need to consider support for children with ASN using school transport, and take appropriate actions to reduce risk if hygiene rules and physical distancing is not possible.

   c) It should be acknowledged that, for some learners with ASN, the wearing of face coverings may not be appropriate or could be a cause of anxiety

	or discomfort. Schools should remain mindful of this, and may wish to consult wider Scottish Government guidance on exemptions. 12) 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. a) Guidance will point to the increasing use of transparent face coverings as one way of mitigating any negative impacts in these circumstances. It will also be important that instructions around the wearing, removal and disposal of face coverings are made clear for all pupils and staff, including those with additional support needs.
Sex	**Academic progress** 13) 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[14]. 14) 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[15]. 15) 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. 16) We see evidence of gender segregation in participation in different subjects in the senior phase at school with, for example, females more likely to take up subjects such as languages and males tending to take up subjects such as computing. This gender segregation persists in courses in further and higher education and in apprenticeships and in the labour market and leads to women's poorer labour market outcomes, gendered pay inequality, and the gender pay gap. We do not know if gender segregation in subjects and the sexist bullying and harassment which can contribute to this segregation will have been exacerbated in the context of home learning and lockdown or not. a) 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.

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[14] https://www.gov.scot/publications/achievement-curriculum-excellence-cfe-levels-2018-19/
[15] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-attainment-initial-leaver-destinations-no-2-2020-edition/

	Wellbeing 17) A central focus of the guidance for reopening schools is 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 lockdown will have increased impacts on mental health and wellbeing. 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.[16][17] 18) Almost 4000 children took part in the Children's Parliament's *How are you doing?* survey in April and May 2020. Across all areas there was a small but noticeable decline in the wellbeing of children. This was particularly true for girls, and especially for girls aged 12-14[18]. 19) It is known that some risks to children and young people will have increased during the pandemic and that risks increase as a result of school closure, and that it is expected that there will be a rise in the experience of domestic abuse, which typically affects more girls than boys[19]. 20) We know that it is important for young women to have access to period products, and pupils have welcomed the Scottish Government's initiative to make period products available for free in schools, colleges and universities[20]. a) The Scottish Government continued to fund access to free period products during lockdown and asked local authorities to make alternative arrangements to ensure products could still be accessed. Products were made available to take home in the last few days of school before COVID-enforced closure, in some places there was provision of products in food boxes, and products were accessible via schools that remained open and community hubs. Some local authorities put in place home delivery options through Hey Girls and in one area products could be collected for free from a number of local convenience stores.
Gender reassignment	**Pastoral support** 21) Young people who are transitioning may benefit from pastoral support from school, which may not be available as a result of school closure and therefore may negatively impact their wellbeing. Additionally, transgender young people may regard school as a place of safety, which would be unavailable during school closure or a blended learning model. The return to school full-time will enable the resumption of this pastoral support to pupils in due course.

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[16] https://wakelet.com/wake/b6dcd28c-00be-4f64-a313-1eeb5bc89954

[17] https://education.gov.scot/improvement/

[18] https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/How_are_you_doing_Results_April_May_2020_Childrens_Parliament-1.pdf

[19] https://www.gov.scot/publications/domestic-abuse-forms-violence-against-women-girls-vawg-during-covid-19-lockdown-period-30-3-20-22-05-20/

[20] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cee5bd0687a1500015b5a9f/t/5e709ce9b8d046580053e034/1584438530347/YS_Access_Period_Products_Report_UPDATED.pdf

	22) 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.
Pregnancy and maternity	**Support for pregnant pupils and young parents** 23) Pupils who experience pregnancy and parenthood whilst at school should receive additional support to be able to continue to attend school. These measures are unlikely to have been able to continue during school closure – this also applies to pregnancies that might have occurred during school closure of which schools might be unaware of. It may be challenging for schools to continue to provide the right support to young pregnant pupils and young parents at school age. Regular contact with school is likely to be reduced if blended learning is necessary, and this could lead to poor engagement or even a disengagement from education among this group of pupils. This could have a profound long-term impact on, not only young people's health and wellbeing, but also their socio-economic circumstances. 24) While a return to school on full-time basis could restore the support this group of young people need, careful consideration should be given to pregnant pupils who might be at higher risk. As the evidence around the impact of COVID-19 on pregnant women is still evolving at this point in time, it is important that all pregnant pupils should follow medical advice on whether or not to attend a school setting. It is also advised that an individual risk assessment should be conducted for all pregnant young women returning to 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.
Race	25) 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[21]. There is evidence to suggest that COVID-19 impacts disproportionately on South Asian communities in Scotland[22], however there is not sufficient data to say whether the same applies to other ME groups. **Public perception** 26) 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 increased risk of racist incidents or bullying against particular groups of children, as well as the possible impact on the mental wellbeing of ME pupils. 27) 1,015 young people from across Scotland took part in a survey issued by the Time for Inclusive Education Campaign during the period of lockdown. The survey explored the impact of lockdown on young people's emotional wellbeing, as well as the rates of online bullying and online prejudice during the lockdown

[21] https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/
[22] https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/covid19/ethnicity-deceased-covid-19-june20.pdf

	period. Overall, the survey found that instances of online bullying increased during the lockdown period, and young people reported witnessing more online prejudice than usual - the most common forms of which were racism and homophobia[23].
	
	    a) Schools will want to consider how learning and teaching in the curriculum and whole school approaches can help all pupils develop an awareness and understanding of human rights and equality with a specific emphasis on race, both now and in Scotland's past.
	
	    b) Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People provides the overarching framework for all adults working with children and young people. A resource is also available that was prepared on behalf of the Scottish Government by the Coalition of Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) on effectively challenging racist bullying in schools in line with 'Respect for All' [24]
	
	Language development
	28) Pupils who speak English as an additional language risk being disproportionately affected by school closures and limited classroom time if blended learning is required due to the impact on their proficiency of the English language, particularly if English is not their main home language. 2019 data shows that 9.6% of the pupil population have a language other than English as their main home language[25].
	
	    a) 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.

Religion or belief	**Religious spaces** 29) If physical distancing were to be required, to enable it to be implemented, many 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** 30) Denominational schools are defined by their religious ethos which permeates through the life and culture of the school. School closures have negatively impacted upon denominational schools' ability to support pupils' spiritual development via participation in religious practices and religious education. Timetable constraints may continue if blended learning is implemented.

[23] https://www.tiecampaign.co.uk/reports
[24] http://respectme.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Addressing-Inclusion-Effectively-Challenging-Racism-in-Schools.pdf
[25] https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/

	31) The closure of denominational schools may also have delayed some pupils' faith journey, for example, preparation for the Sacraments in Catholic schools is likely to have been negatively affected and so some pupils and families may require additional support with this when returning to school. 32) Restrictions around large group gatherings may impact upon religious practices and celebrations.
Sexual orientation	33) 36% of young people who responded to an online survey indicated that they had seen prejudiced based posts, comments or attitudes online related to homophobia. 52% of LGBT+ young people described their emotional wellbeing as being negative due to being away from their place of education. These findings were published in the Online in Lockdown Report.

Marriage & civil partnership	34) There is a risk that throughout school closures some pupils may experience enforced marriage.
	    a) The Children Missing from Education guidance and resources supports local authorities in dealing with cases where children are not attending school.
	    b) The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland provides a framework for agencies and practitioners at local level to agree processes for working together to safeguard and promote child wellbeing. This will be supplemented by guidance for Chief Officers, professional leaders in children's services and child protection committees, who should ensure it is taken account of within local partnerships.

Socio-economic disadvantage	**Academic progress** 35) Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels by SIMD[26] 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[27]. **School closures** 36) All children may experience some loss of learning. Children from more affluent homes are more likely to have 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*[28]).

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[26] 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

[27] https://www.gov.scot/publications/achievement-curriculum-excellence-cfe-levels-2018-19/

[28] https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/blog/covid-19-divide-national-strategy-disadvantage-poverty-lockdownschools-voice-1/

37) Similarly, a report published earlier in June 2020 by the Education Endowment Foundation on best evidence of impact of school closures on the attainment gap[29] 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.

38) Children from more affluent households across the UK are more than twice as likely to have had more than £100 spent on their education since the lockdown (19% of middle-class children verses 8% of working class). Almost 1 in 10 children have had £150 spent on their education at home, and just under a quarter of children have had £50 spent on them[30].

39) The numbers of children receiving private tuition have gone down, with 8% of children stopping tuition and only 4% taking it up. However, use of online tuition is growing among better off households (*Sutton Trust – School Closures: Parent Polling*[31]).
   a) Throughout lockdown school hubs have been open with places available for vulnerable children and young people. Pupils attending these will also have had access to school resources.

Wellbeing

40) 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 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.

   a) To mitigate the potential effect of COVID-19 to pupils and families who rely on free school meals, the Scottish Government and local authorities worked to provide free school meals whilst schools were closed. This was supported by £15m of funding from the Scottish Government Food Fund to support families unable to access food as a result of COVID-19. This has meant more than 175,000 families have been reached with a free school provision Monday to Friday. These have been provided through direct payments, vouchers, delivery and provision of food directly, including to those attending hubs. In recognition that families

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[29] https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-ofschool-closures-on-the-attainment-gap/
[30] https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-closures-parent-polling/
[31] https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-closures-parent-polling/

need for this support will continue as the pandemic continues during the summer month and before the return to school, the Scottish Government has agreed to provide a further £12.7m to support local authorities to continue these arrangements. When schools reopen local authorities will be expected to continue to provide free school meals to all eligible children and young people. £15m in funding has also been provided to local authorities to support wider food support in households up to the end of September [32].

41) We know that it is important for young women to have access to period products, and pupils have welcomed the Scottish Government's initiative to make period products available for free in schools, colleges and universities[33].

    a) Where payments were made to families in lieu of free school meals, £5 was added monthly where pupils are also eligible for period products. Where students are eligible for free school meals, food for the whole family was delivered to the door and these packs also included other essential such as period products.

42) 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 follow existing guidance on supporting pupils in these circumstances.

43) School closures have also meant the closure of youth, sports and other community facilities that may have previously taken place after the school day. This is expected to have had a negative impact on the wellbeing of children and young people, particularly in community schools and for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

    a) School leaders should work with a range of youth work partners to explore what is possible within their school and community[34].

Digital equity

44) *The cost of learning in lockdown*[35], 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.

45) However, some pupils may be disadvantaged in comparison to their peers through not having access to digital devices, particularly younger children who

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[32] https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-guide-schools-early-learning-closures/pages/free-school-meals/

[33] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cee5bd0687a1500015b5a9f/t/5e709ce9b8d046580053e034/1584438530347/YS_Access_Period_Products_Report_UPDATED.pdf

[34] https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/4627/covid-19-education-recovery-youth-work.pdf

[35] https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/The-cost-of-learning-in-lockdown-Scotland-FINAL.pdf

	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. 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[36]. a) To help ensure as many children and young people as possible are able to connect with their schools, continue their learning, access support and engage with their peers, we are investing an initial £9m that will provide devices and connectivity for 25,000 learners across Scotland. We are committed to delivering digital equity for our most disadvantaged children and young people and this is the first phase of our £30m commitment to support digital inclusion for children and young people. We are working closely with local authority partners to deliver this. A separate impact assessment is being developed specific to this area of policy, and will be published in due course. **Face coverings** 46) In line with the latest 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. 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. a) 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. b) 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.
Island communities	**School transport** 47) Without adequate transport links to and from an island and between islands, the island community will be in a disadvantaged position compared to similar mainland communities and islands have been heavily impacted due to the required capacity restrictions on transport to ensure public safety as a result of COVID-19. Transport links within an island or from island to island have also

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[36] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04#how-does-digital-exclusion-vary-with-age

	been affected and the potential remains for restrictions and/or limitations to be reintroduced, thereby affecting school transport. a) The updated Reopening Schools Guidance recognises the particular challenges for island communities in relation to school transport and advises local authorities to explore options with local operators, to inform what pattern and location for in-school learning may be practicable in the immediate term. **Digital equity** 48) 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 will continue to be critical in the event of any future requirements for a blended learning approach. 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	**Immersion learning** 49) 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[23]. Therefore we can assume that a majority of GME learners do not speak Gaelic at home, and consequently school closures will have had a negative impact on the language development of these pupils, particularly younger pupils who may not yet be confident engaging with the written language independently. Therefore, catch-up for GME pupils will need to consider language support as well as curriculum support. 50) Throughout school closures, and into the future if blended learning were to be required, all pupils will be dependent on digital resources for some of their learning whilst at home. GME pupils will naturally require resources to be available in Gaelic. a) All local authorities have been offered grant funding for devices and connectivity as part of our £25m investment to tackle digital exclusion. b) There are a variety of online resources available to GME pupils to support with language development and immersion learning through Storlànn, E-Sgoil, e-Storas, Education Scotland and BBC ALBA. To provide further support while home learning is taking place Storlànn 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').

Transitions

51) In Gaelic medium education (GME) transitions between early years, primary and secondary and specifically between Secondary BGE and Senior Phase may present additional challenges that could be detrimental to pupil numbers, which will need to be carefully monitored.

Further to the supportive work undertaken by Education Scotland and at local authority level, a number of Gaelic bodies have significant potential to strengthen and broaden language acquisition and this is very important in GME. These bodies have worked with GME schools and classes for some time and have a contribution to make in any back to school arrangements.

| **School staff** | |

Age	**Returning to school buildings**

	52) The trajectory of the virus has been such that shielding will be paused from 1 August. We expect that children, young people and staff who are shielding will be able to return to school in August, unless given advice from a GP or healthcare provider not to, and can follow the same guidance as the rest of Scotland.
	
	53) For the teaching workforce and classroom assistants, it will therefore be important for school leaders to consider practical options for these members of the workforce as staff and pupils return to school buildings or how these members of staff may best support home learning, and the proportion of their staff this may affect. The impact of these measures should also be considered in the context of staff wellbeing.
	A quarter of the teaching workforce are over the age of 50 and around one in twenty are over the age of 60[37].
	
	   a) To support with educational continuity, whilst allowing for teachers to stay at home where necessary, and ensuring teacher workload doesn't grow, local authorities will be supported to identify additional workforce capacity. This may include:
	     • Supporting GTCS registered teachers not currently teaching to return to the workforce.
	     • Ensuring that supply staff are fully utilised
	     • Ensuring that teachers who have not yet secured permanent employment are considered as an integral part of planning
	
	   b) The Return to School guidance sets out a suite of important mitigations that local authorities and schools will be asked to implement. These include risk assessments, enhanced cleaning regimes, good hand and respiratory hygiene, ventilation, use of PPE where appropriate, continuous vigilance for symptoms, and surveillance, testing and outbreak management. On 25 August 2020 the guidance was updated to reflect the latest scientific guidance that recommends for adults to wear face coverings in contexts where they cannot keep a 2m distance and are interacting for a sustained period (15 minutes or longer) with adults and/or children and young people.
	
	   c) £50 million has been allocated to support the recruitment of additional teaching staff.
	
	54) 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

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[37] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/

	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, cleaners who have previously worked across more than one school site, may be restricted to one school site to begin with. a) The Return to School guidance 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. b) £20 million has been allocated to support local authorities with the additional costs associated with the reopening of schools, including increased cleaning costs and adjustments to school buildings and other learning spaces.
Disability	**Staff with disabilities** 55) It is likely that a higher number of school staff with physical disabilities will need to take precautions about returning to school compared to school staff without a disability. a) Therefore, guidance on preparing for the new school term 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. 56) For members of staff with additional support needs it will be important for any changes to routine to be clearly communicated. This should include clear communication on the wearing of face coverings. **Staff mental wellbeing** 57) Staff suffering with mental ill health may have found school closures to have a greater negative impact on their wellbeing than their peers. The same group of people may be more likely to be anxious about the reopening of schools.
Sex	**Caring responsibilities** 58) 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[38]. Women also generally carry out the majority of childcare, particularly if lone parents, who may be without their usual sources of support. 59) Women who are teachers are therefore more likely to have been juggling caring responsibilities with supporting home learning whilst working from home or whilst working in school hubs. As schools reopen, staff who are parents or

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[38] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/

carers will be dependent upon childcare being available to enable them to return to previous working patterns themselves.

60) 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 being available to enable them to return to their contracted working patterns.

Women's safety and wellbeing

61) There is a risk that there has been an increase in domestic abuse during lockdown. For women impacted by this, a return to the workplace is likely to have a positive impact overall, but support should be available to support these members of staff.

Women's health

62) 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 lockdown - 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 consider how they offer support in this context.

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Gender reassignment	63) Transgender members of the workforce may have experienced 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	64) The health impact of COVID-19 on expectant mothers and unborn children is inconclusive at this stage. However 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[39]. a) Pregnant members of the workforce should continue to follow the latest guidance, and employers should conduct risk assessments. **Returning to work** 65) Some members of staff will be returning to the workforce after maternity leave and will not have experienced home learning in the same way as their colleagues. Experts have warned Covid-19 has had a negative impact on maternal mental health beyond that seen in the general population, where reported rates of anxiety have more than doubled. Consideration should be given to their re-induction to the workforce.

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[39]

https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/pregnant-and-precarious-new-and-expectant-mums-experiences-work-during

Race	**Support in the workplace** 66) Discourse in the media and on social media during the COVID-19 crisis has included narratives which contribute to racial stereotypes. Schools should be aware of the increased risk of racist incidents or bullying against particular members of staff, as well as the possible impact on the mental wellbeing of staff. Minority Ethnic (ME) communities make up approximately 1.8% of Scotland's teaching workforce[40]. There is evidence to suggest that COVID-19 impacts disproportionately on South Asian communities in Scotland, and insufficient evidence to determine if it does for other ME groups. a) Therefore guidance on preparing for the new school term 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.
Religion or belief	**Religious spaces** 67) If it is necessary to implement physical distancing, many schools may need to use non-classroom spaces as teaching space. a) 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. **Wellbeing** 68) With the widely recognised impact of school closures on the wellbeing of pupils and staff, it is likely that staff with a religious role may play a significant role in supporting staff and pupils as schools reopen. a) 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.
Sexual orientation	69) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic
Marriage & civil partnership	70) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Socio-economic disadvantage	71) Whilst the closure of schools has caused for some members of staff to be furloughed, which may have decreased their monthly income, it is expected that reopening schools will allow for those people to return to work and to their previous salary.
Island communities	**Transportation** 72) When considering the teacher workforce, staff working in rural locations, including on islands, will need to be taken into consideration at a local authority

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[40] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/pages/4/

	level. This may be a particular issue when a member of staff is required to undertake inter-island travel in order to get to work, if restrictions are required on public transport. a) The updated [Reopening Schools Guidance](#) recognises the particular challenges for island communities in relation to transport and advises local authorities to explore options with local operators.
Gaelic medium education	73) 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[41]. When considering the teacher workforce, GME teachers will also need to be taken into account.

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[41] 2019 Teacher Census Supplementary Statistics - https://www.gov.scot/publications/teacher-census-supplementary-statistics/

Parents, carers and families

Age	**Older parents and carers**
	74) For pupils who live with grandparents, there may be concerns at home around those pupils returning to the school buildings and interacting with staff and peers. These concerns could impact the mental wellbeing of older parents or carers.
	a) 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
	b) 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**
	75) 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[42].
	Parents with a disability
	76) Some parents with a disability may be cautious about their children returning to school and interacting with staff and peers, which could also impact their mental wellbeing. Parents with a disability may appreciate additional advice and support around both the return to schools and subsequent arrangements during the course of term.
	a) 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 covering where recommended.
	b) Schools and local authorities should ensure that health and safety measures are communicated effectively with all parents and carers to provide reassurance.

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[42] https://www.familyfund.org.uk/News/health-and-wellbeing-of-disabled-children-at-risk-under-pandemic-as-government-announces-extra-10-million-funding-for-children-with-complex-needs

	Transportation 77) 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[43]. Discretion for parents and carers with disabilities should be considered in these circumstances.
Sex	**Caring responsibilities** 78) With women taking responsibility for a majority of childcare, a full-time return for schools and reopening of both registered and informal childcare options is expected to have a positive impact on their ability to return to previous working patterns. 79) However, if blended learning is necessary, many children will continue with home-learning for a portion of their time. Young children in particular may require supervision when at home, and it is likely that a greater part of this responsibility will fall to female members of the family.
Gender reassignment	80) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Pregnancy and maternity	**Transportation** 81) The impact of COVID-19 on expectant mothers and unborn children is inconclusive at this stage. An increased risk for this group his may affect their decision to send older children back to school/nursery or make the journey to school/nursery more challenging if they are dependent on public transport.
Race	**Language and communication** 82) Parents and carers who speak English as an additional language risk being disadvantaged through not having a full understanding of the steps being taken or the approach to school reopening 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. a) Local authorities should continue to work with community sources to identify which community languages information should be shared in.
Religion or belief	83) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Sexual orientation	84) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.

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[43] The Coronavirus (COVID-19): reopening schools guidance, p17 states that "... for those arriving by car, parents may be encouraged to park further away from the school and then walk with their children to avoid congestion, or alternatively use active travel routes where feasible. Car-sharing with children of other households should be discouraged."

Marriage & civil partnership	85) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Socio-economic disadvantage	**Home learning** 86) Research from the Sutton Trust[44] suggests that parents on lower incomes feel less confident to support home learning. There are additional issues that may have to be addressed as part of any long-term blended learning arrangement including access to resources and communication with parents and carers. **Free School Meals** 87) Throughout school closures, there had been a risk that eligible pupils may miss out on free school meals. This could also have had negative impact on parents and carers through causing them worry or to go without food or other necessities themselves. a) The flexibility afforded to local authorities to put in place a provision or provisions to continue free school meals has supported families, around 175,000 at the end of June, throughout the lockdown period. Free school meal provision will continue for all eligible families when schools reopen. 88) A report by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has found that[45]: • Families have appreciated support with food costs from their schools and local authorities in alarming and difficult times. • Families had positive experiences of all methods of FSM provision, but by far the highest levels of satisfaction were with direct payments to people's bank accounts. 81 per cent of families receiving payments say this works extremely or very well, and 90 per cent of these • During the period of school closures local authorities statutory duty to promote the availability of free school meals to eligible families continued. **Transition** 89) Parents are slightly less likely to be concerned about the transition from primary to secondary school if they have higher levels of education, live in less deprived areas or live in higher income households.
Island communities	90) 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	91) Throughout lockdown and as schools reopen, 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.

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[44] https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/
[45] https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/The-cost-of-learning-in-lockdown-Scotland-FINAL.pdf

Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment

The closure and reopening of schools, as highlighted above, impacts all children and young people and the education workforce across Scotland, and the impact of this has been assessed throughout this document. This section looks specifically at the differential impact on independent schools because they, like businesses, are dependent on the income generated by providing education.

92) The independent sector in Scotland consists of 94 schools, educating around 28,000 learners and employing around 4,000 teachers. The 94 may be broken down into the following:

- 22 special residential schools
- 13 special day schools
- 22 mainstream boarding schools
- 37 mainstream day schools

93) From 11 August all schools will be able to reopen subject to current reopening guidance. There will however be costs associated with reopening in terms of required health and safety arrangements. The economic impact of Covid-19 may well have an impact on pupil numbers going forward, and indeed this may be a worsening situation. Boarding pupils, in particular from other countries, may also not return in the same numbers.

94) Independent schools are expected to continue to experience financial challenges as they reopen due to:
- potential lower demand from overseas students;
- increased operating costs as a result of implementing enhanced hygiene measures and potentially as a result of operating at less than full capacity to accommodate public health measures; and
- unwinding of existing financial support.

95) Independent schools continue to be concerned about their future sustainability, but reopening should help schools achieve a more stable financial footing, and the following mitigating actions will be in place to support them:

a) We are delaying the commencement of section 17 of the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 until 1 April 2021 to assist mainstream independent schools as they deal with the impacts of Covid-19. Section 17 of The Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 (which removes charitable rates relief from mainstream independent schools) was planned to commence on 1 September 2020 and will now commence on 1 April 2021 instead.

b) All non-domestic properties including independent schools will benefit from a 1.6% rates relief in 2020-21 which will be applied automatically by councils.

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.

Advice and views have also been gathered from other groups, including:

- 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 .

- As well as being invited to represent the voice of parents on the Education Recovery Group the Scottish Government has also supported the NPFS to produce a range of parent-friendly guidance which explained a number of the policy and legal directions and developments regarding school closures and adapted learning support in a parent-friendly manner. NPFS also hosted an online Q&A session between DFM and parents on 16 June 2020 which attracted an audience of over 3000 parents. Topics covered included: school safety and hygiene measures; blended learning; school transport and the effects of social distancing; the impact of COVID-19 on children with additional support needs; the impact of COVID-19 on exams and the future planning of exams for the 2020/21 school term; and digital and home learning support.

- The Deputy First Minister hosted a meeting with learners on 17 June 2020 to hear the views of children and young people. Topics discussed included: learners' experiences of learning at home; additional support that schools, local authorities and government can provide to help overcome barriers to learning during COVID-19; learner concerns regarding a return to school in August; learner hopes for the new school term in August; the mental health and wellbeing of learners during COVID-19; and any positive impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on learning or learners. In addition, reviews have been carried out by key groups including Children's Parliament, The Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot, as well as valuable feedback from the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS). The views of children and young people will continue to be included in the consideration of ongoing issues affecting the full-time return to schools.

- Officials have sought and listened to views of the Gaelic medium sector through meeting with representatives from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comunn na Gàidhlig. This has allowed the nuances of the GME sector to be considered alongside policy development.

- It is recognised that decisions about *when* to reopen 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. This has proved invaluable when making decisions around physical distancing in school buildings and transport.

- Throughout the development of both the Strategic Framework and the updated guidance on reopening schools, key stakeholders have been consulted. This includes members of the CERG, and wider representatives of groups with protected characteristics to comment of draft versions of this document.

Key Findings

The closure of all schools has impacted across the workforce, and on children and young people. It has also negatively impacted on parents, particularly mothers, who are required to juggle child care, home schooling, and paid work.

The initial stages provided for school staff to return to schools and increased the number of children accessing critical childcare provision. It also signalled that transition support should be made available to P1 and S1 students, where possible.

Throughout the summer term only critical provision remained in place for the children of keyworkers and children identified as more vulnerable. Negative impacts were therefore identified for children and young people not attending school hubs because of the loss of learning and experiences school typically provides, including the opportunity to associate with their peers. Negative impacts were also identified for some children not accessing critical provision for whom their school setting was a place of safety and consistency, where home does not present the same stability.

Many schools moved learning on-line for the remainder of the academic year 2019/20 to mitigate impacts for children and young people where possible. However, evidence shows that disabled children, those with additional support needs, and those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, remained negatively impacted because they may not have had the same range of resources and parental support for home learning.

Evidence suggests that children and young people will experience poorer mental health and wellbeing and are likely to experience anxiety as they prepare to return to school. Other wellbeing impacts may also have occurred, including increased exposure to domestic abuse, and potentially increased child protection concerns. While there have been efforts to mitigate these impacts (for example, vulnerable children have continued to have the opportunity to attend school in person throughout the summer term; free school meals have been continued through the school summer holidays until August) it is likely that long-term impacts will remain.

School closures have highlighted digital inequity across Scotland and its impact on children and young people's ability to access learning resources and interact with peers. As part of efforts to address this gap ahead of the academic year 2020-21, devices and data are being made available to socio-economically disadvantaged and care-experienced children to ensure they can participate in home learning if required. This is expected to be beneficial to all pupils in receipt of a device beyond COVID-19, as it will also support in levelling out digital inequity across the country.

Women are particularly impacted because they comprise the majority of the education workforce. For women who are also parents, a return to school will require them to juggle work with caring responsibilities. In addition, evidence shows that as women in society tend to be the primary carers, mothers have experienced a much harder time balancing work and caring, which could have long term impacts on gender equality in the workforce. The extended household may help lone parents if they previously used this type of relationship to obtain additional support.

Conclusion

This document, alongside the CRWIA, has attempted to set out an overview of the range of impacts of school closures and reopening schools on the groups of society most affected by these decisions. We know that school provides, amongst many other things, opportunities, support and safety for Scotland's children and young people when they are open and running as we have known in the past. Therefore, it is widely accepted that, whilst school closures have been necessary for the safety of all members of society at this challenging time, there has been a negative impact on many children and young people who have been missing out on the wide-ranging benefits that attending school can provide.

In terms of children and young people, we can conclude that reopening, provided that it is managed carefully and with an appropriate focus on wellbeing, will have an overall positive impact for the majority. Wellbeing is one of three core themes within Curriculum for Excellence alongside literacy and numeracy. This provides both the permission and the requirement to ensure that wellbeing is supported during Term 1 in 2020/21.

There should be an appropriate focus on recovery and support rather than immediate "catch-up" without adjustment or recognition of the experience during Term 4, 2019/20, particularly in the early phase of the return.

A full-time reopening of schools will also have benefits for wider society. School staff will be able to return to work directly supporting young learners. Families will also be to return to work, supporting the wider economy and enabling parents and carers to return to previous working patterns.

However, it should also be noted that the impacts of COVID-19 will be felt into the future, and our children and young people, their families and the education workforce will require ongoing support to help them adapt to returning to school and to recover from the negative impacts of school closures. 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.