

TEACHER PANEL

EDUCATION RECOVERY AND SAFE SCHOOLS

Purpose

1. This short paper is intended to assist the Teacher Panel with its discussion on topical education recovery issues. In particular it reflects the themes of safe teaching and learning, the importance of wellbeing and next steps, which have arisen during discussions with teachers and unions on safe learning and teaching throughout the pandemic.

Background

2. The safety and wellbeing of staff and pupils in schools is paramount. There is a collective commitment to do all that we can to ensure everybody is – and feels – safe and supported in school. Feedback from teachers, including the recent EIS survey, indicates the majority of teachers supported the Scottish Government decision to prioritise keeping schools open where possible. This is supported by the evidence which shows us how well local authorities, teachers, other school staff and pupils, have worked to mitigate the risks of Covid-19. This is also reflected in feedback from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) who undertook a programme of school compliance checks in the first term.
3. The Scottish Government seeks and welcomes regular feedback from partners via forums such as the Education Recovery Group and we are keen to ensure we receive timely and constructive feedback from all involved about what is working well and what is not. As a collective we are all committed to deliver improvements, ensure guidance reflects latest advice and improve support for staff and pupils.

Arrangements in schools over Christmas/New Year

4. A decision has been announced not to make any changes to the planned Christmas and New Year holiday dates. This was supported by advice from Chief Medical Officer, Public Health and the Covid-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues.
5. Advice in relation to this announcement focused on there being less transmission of Covid-19 through children and young people being in school than mixing out of school; vulnerable children potentially being at greater risk if they are out of school for an extended period; and the extension to the school holidays potentially causing significant difficulties for working parents.
6. There is broad consensus around the need to minimise school staff being required to support contact tracing activities over the holiday period. Some local authorities have already consulted staff to develop solutions. These include: (i) named individual volunteers to be on-call for a local area in exchange for appropriate

overtime payments, with access to information to support contact tracing if required; or (ii) a central local authority team who are on duty or on call over the relevant period and can access the relevant information. The National Contact Tracing Centre has also indicated that it stands ready to support work to contact affected individuals in the event of a case being identified in a school during this period. Public Health Scotland will agree with each Local Health Protection Team on the preferred approach.

Summary of key issues and suggested points for discussion

7. Staffing levels in schools and support for wellbeing

- Work is under way to increase the number of teachers, classroom support staff and admin staff up to the end of the 2020-21 school year.
- Local authorities are still working through their recruitment processes, and current figures indicate that over 1,300 additional teachers have already been recruited, with plans in place to recruit around another 100.
- There is a wide range of support to protect the wellbeing of school staff and increase confidence, skills and knowledge to build capacity in the system. This includes a range of coaching/mentoring opportunities (on the Education Scotland Professional Learning and Leadership web page), new mental health support for staff focused on reflective supervision (Barnardo's, Place2Be), and new professional learning opportunities for post-probation teachers (Blethers, Stepping Stones). In addition, the Columba 1400 leadership programme has been extended.

Suggested points for discussion

- Are arrangements in place and are they flexible enough to ensure learning and teaching is maintained in response to local circumstances?
- Are staff aware of the available support and opportunities on Education Scotland's Professional Learning and Leadership web page?
- How do we ensure that any challenges are identified and addressed quickly at a local level?
- Do teachers feel supported and listened to?

8. Access to online learning options

- The Scottish Government is working with regional partners to enhance the online learning options for pupils, helping them to continue learning when pupils or their families need to self-isolate.
- One initiative within the new offer utilises e-Sgoil, which has extended its range of study support courses to 23, including for the very first time, live webinar lessons for Advanced Higher pupils.
- Further innovative work is under way via the West Partnership, and further projects are being developed in other regional collaborative areas

Suggested points for discussion

- Are arrangements in place and are they flexible enough to ensure learning and teaching is maintained in response to local circumstances?

- Are there good processes in place at a local level to ensure that any challenges are identified and addressed quickly?
- Do teachers feel supported and listened to?

9. Clinically vulnerable staff living in level 4 areas

- The Chief Medical Officer wrote on 20 November to those on the shielding list and living in protection level 4, to set out the arrangements at that protection level.

Suggested points for discussion

- Are arrangements in place to support anxious staff and those on the shielding list?
- How can we help and build confidence in what scientific evidence tells us about risk?

10. Access to asymptomatic testing and extension of testing programmes

- Asymptomatic staff in schools are able to access testing where they think they have been exposed.
- The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has announced plans to undertake pathfinder testing work from January, evaluating the deliverability of asymptomatic testing in the school environment with the objective of establishing a sustainable programme of asymptomatic testing amongst school staff.

Suggested points for discussion

- Are teachers receiving the necessary information, for example about testing, and support for those who need to self-isolate?
- Are there good processes in place at a local level to ensure that any challenges are identified and addressed quickly?