

EDUCATION, LEISURE & HOUSING

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Dear Parent/Carer

The Scottish Government Guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools and early learning and childcare provision, published on 30th October, and has implications for all school and early years communities across Orkney.

As with all previous iterations of the Guidance, Orkney Islands Council is asked to interpret the advice of the Scottish Government in the context of the environment in which we all live, work and study. You will, by now, be aware that Orkney has been placed at Level One in the Scottish Government hierarchy of COVID-19 protection and this fact is considered when ensuring that our approach to mitigating the risks of COVID-19 remains pragmatic and proportionate. The Scottish Government continues to monitor the situation daily and, should the situation in Orkney significantly alter, will contact us with further advice and guidance.

In my previous letter, sent prior to the October break, I shared with you guidance on changes to the requirements for face coverings both on school transport, and on school premises. I am pleased to report that compliance with that advice has been extremely positive across the County and I am very grateful to all for engaging so positively. This engagement allows us to ensure that, despite the experience of the pandemic, we can keep schools and childcare settings safe, open and welcoming.

The key developments emerging from this latest review of Scottish Government Guidance are, for the most part, a further refinement of the position in relation to face-coverings. As a consequence of this Guidance the following changes will be necessary:

- Face coverings will always be worn by adults in school *settings where they are unable to maintain 2M distance*;¹
- Face coverings should be worn by parents/carers when dropping off and collecting children;
- Face coverings will be worn by all adults in primary schools, and all adults and young people in secondary schools, when moving through communal areas in the school. These include corridors, offices, canteens and toilets;
- As was previously the case, adults in nursery settings will not routinely wear face coverings when working directly with children
- No child or young person will be excluded from education solely on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering. Schools will continue to maintain a

¹ General exemptions apply, and there are specific exclusions to this rule detailed in the SG Guidance. These exclusions include the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) model whereby staff and children operate in a strictly maintained bubble.

limited supply of face coverings for use if a pupil or member of staff has forgotten or mislaid their own

Looking beyond face coverings, I am pleased to report that, with the winter weather now upon us, Physical Education, including contact sports, will now be permitted both indoors and out for those local authorities regarded as being at Level Zero through to Level Three. Similarly, we will continue to review the potential for reintroducing extra-curricular activities during this term.

The winter weather will also bring fresh challenge to schools and nurseries as they seek to ensure that adequate ventilation is maintained. This will, inevitably, require us to keep windows open more frequently than would ordinarily be the case. Whilst we will make all efforts to mitigate the heat loss it is likely that temperatures may, on occasion, drift downwards and I would encourage you to ensure that your child carries brings an extra layer with them that they can add should it become necessary.

Finally, I am pleased to report that the Scottish Government has provided an assurance that children eligible for benefits-related free school meals will continue to receive support² during holidays up to and including Easter 2021. Back payments for the October 2020 break are currently being processed and will be made direct into the bank accounts of the parents/carers of eligible children.

Yours sincerely



James Wylie
Executive Director

² The level of support will continue to be £3 per child, per day