

6 July 2020

Dear Ms Grant

HM Inspectors of Education review of The Highland Council local authority phasing delivery plan

HM Inspectors of Education have carried out a desk top review of your local authority phasing delivery plan. HM Inspectors of Education acknowledge that you may have additional information or guidance not contained within the plan submitted.

In reviewing your plan, HM Inspectors of Education have considered the criteria set out in [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): strategic framework for reopening schools, early learning and childcare provision](#) and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): reopening schools guide](#).

Your plan has set out clearly the following:

- Sets out how you intend to support staff in the reopening of early learning and childcare (ELC) settings and schools. This includes advice on how primary and secondary schools will endeavour to provide high-quality learning through the a model of blended learning. There is an emphasis on maximising time for children and young people to experience face-to-face learning and teaching.
- The key guiding principles focus on equity, health and wellbeing, learning, teaching and assessment, and attainment. Eleven groups have been set up to coordinate delivery of all work associated with reopening schools with a set of ten key milestones identifying roles and responsibilities clearly. These groups consist of a range of partners and stakeholders who are developing operational plans and risk assessments as well as a shared approach to completing the agreed milestones.
- The curriculum offer during the initial return to school. Your plan articulates clearly the guidance and expectations for all stages and curriculum areas including Gaelic Medium Education. This will support a consistent baseline of entitlements while at the same time providing scope for shaping the curriculum to take account of the needs and interests of learners in each unique context.
- Well set out risk assessments which place high importance on ensuring ensure that health and safety legislation and guidance is adhered to. Relevant guidance on physical distancing, safety and hygiene measures and school transport are provided. Your plan provides considerable detail on minimising both the risk of infection and transmission. The ongoing cleaning and hygiene protocols that need to be in place within a school from August onwards are also being developed.
- The importance placed on the wellbeing of the school community. The well-planned approach to promoting and securing wellbeing also supports every child receiving the same opportunity to succeed regardless of other challenges they may face. Your local

authority has also considered carefully the wellbeing of staff as they plan for the delivery of learning experiences through a blended learning model.

- Reference to the importance of reviewing individualised plans for children and young people with additional support needs. Support arrangements are planned for children and young people who attend special schools. Children and their families are to be involved in the recovery planning. Any changes to the school environment will take account of the needs of children with complex needs or disabilities.
- Establishments will use the local authority strategic planning and determine arrangements that take full account of their unique context. There are arrangements in place for local authority officers to provide support and challenge to school leaders to ensure they are maximising the face-to-face experience for children and young people. The plan outlines that where possible half of the learners time will be face to face in school, and half learning at home.
- Your local authority has explored the potential use of additional provision where practical, within financial constraints and other challenges.
- The process of stakeholder consultation, engagement and co-production. This includes involvement in strategic and operational planning. As a result, there is a shared approach to progressing the return to schools. Individual settings have also, maintained helpful contact when considering more specific information. For example, parents have been involved in planning their child's needs around transport. This also includes engagement where parents may prefer to educate children who are shielding at home.
- The use of digital technology in place. Your local authority has given careful consideration to, and has actions in place to ensure device access or connectivity is not an issue for children, young people and families. The use of online resources and facilities has been critical for maintaining good communication. Online safety training has been provided to a significant number of staff to support this work.
- High level messages with regard to the additional costs associated with supporting your plan and the challenges that this brings. This is helpful for supporting stakeholders' understanding of your local authority's context, the priorities identified and actions put in place as a response to the challenges it faces.
- As you continue to engage in your contingency planning it would be helpful to include or signpost information relating to the following:
- Your plan indicates that work is underway to ascertain the requirements that need to be in place to achieve 50% face-to-face learning for all children and young people from August. Early examination of models show at present, variations across sectors and within individual establishments within sectors. You indicate that 50% face-to-face-learning for all children and young people may prove to be a significant challenge without additional staffing, improvements to transport arrangements and additional building capacity. It will be important to share results of your recent 'Education settings

planning/support checklist for August 2020 Recovery and Reconnecting'. Outlining further information around additional costs that would be incurred to enable your plan to succeed would be helpful in supporting your aim of creating as much capacity as possible for children and young people.

- It may be helpful to indicate, how the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers and trade union representatives are engaged in your planning for recovery.
- The importance of outdoor learning is referenced well in the ELC and in primary school documentation. Further consideration of this for the secondary sector would be helpful. In addition, it may be appropriate to explore alternative local learning spaces available for learners and any costs that would be incurred as a result of this.

**HM Inspectors of Education
July 2020**

DRAFT