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Option A was the preferred Scottish Government option with schools due to re-open fully in August 2020 with a 100% return to school and no social distancing. Other options available had been option B for a 100% return to school with one metre social distancing and option C for a 50% return to school with two metre social distancing and a blended method of learning. However, reassurance was given that crucial work on risk assessments was being undertaken with operational plans should social distancing measures come back into force.

There were challenges and pressure points within the provision of school transport. With social distancing a bus that would normally carry 70 passengers would only be able to carry 14 passengers.

An intensive programme of engagement had begun with many consultation events. Eleven sub groups had been set up through the Programme Office covering transport, catering, facilities and local agencies to ensure school settings were ready for August and information was being received daily from the Scottish Government and CoSLA. A webpage had also been created which included frequently asked questions (FAQs) for parents and carers at [www.highland.gov.uk/backtoschool](http://www.highland.gov.uk/backtoschool). This site would be updated as new information became available.

The HMIE had given positive endorsement of the Highland plans for the return to school in their draft report. The finalised report would be issued later this month and reported to the HC Education Committee in August.

Members took the opportunity to recognise the huge contribution made to education in their communities by the Area Education and Learning Manager Norma Young who was due to retire this month. They praised her commitment, energy and work ethic, her exceptional knowledge and the very high respect she was held in across the whole area. Members wished Norma a happy retirement.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Information was requested on transport, John Finlayson and David Summers were currently working on a transport study and the results would be reported in due course;
- Information was requested and provided on a replacement Area Care and Learning Manager for the area and interim arrangements would be announced in the following week; and
- Information was requested and provided on previously proposed renovation work to schools during the summer recess.

Members thanked Paul Senior for his presentation and welcomed him to the Highlands.



