

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 12 AUGUST 2021

EDUCATION RECOVERY - RETURN TO SCHOOL ARRANGEMENTS (AUGUST 2021)

REPORT BY KELLY MCINTOSH, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

ABSTRACT

This report provides members of the Children and Learning Committee with an update on the steps taken to support the return to school following the 2021 summer holiday period.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Notes the actions taken by the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate to support the return to school in August 2021.
- (ii) Agrees that the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning will bring further update reports to the Committee, detailing any other significant changes to the guidance and steps being taken to support Angus schools as required.
- (iii) Notes the removal of charges for core curriculum areas and Instrumental Music Tuition.

2. ALIGNMENT TO CORPORATE PLANNING

This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan 2017-2030:

- The best start in life for children
- Improved physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing
- More opportunities for people to achieve success

The Tayside Plan for children young people and families 2017-20

- Reduce inequalities and disadvantage;
- Protect the most vulnerable from harm;
- Take the right action to prevent needs arising in the first place;
- Provide the right support to meet needs at the earliest appropriate time;
- Deliver individualised, proportionate and whole family-based support;
- Provide services which are experienced as integrated and consistent;
- Improve outcomes.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 19 April 2021, Angus Council schools reopened for the majority of children, young people and staff to attend on a full-time basis. Individuals previously advised to 'shield' were supported to resume attending school in person from 26 April 2021. Physical distancing was not required in schools between children and young people, however a range of additional safety measures were in place including enhanced cleaning, a focus on hygiene and adherence to protocols around self-isolation and testing for Covid-19. Schools remained fully open for the duration of the summer term.
- 3.2 On 03 August 2021 it was confirmed that Scotland would move 'beyond Level 0' on 09 August 2021. Many major Covid-19 restrictions are being removed from that date.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government also published updated guidance for schools on 03 August 2021.

4. CURRENT POSITION

At the time of writing Angus schools continued to be scheduled to reopen for staff on 10 August 2021 and for children and young people on 11 August 2021. This section sets out key actions being taken in response to the latest Scottish Government guidance for schools and other important steps to support the return to school.

Updated Return to School Guidance

- 4.1 The updated return to school guidance was published on 03 August 2021. In general terms, local authorities are expected to continue with the mitigations that were in place at the end of term in June, with some limited exceptions. This approach is to remain in place for a period of up to six weeks (until the end of September) to enable the impact of the school return to be appropriately assessed. Enhanced cleaning regimes will remain in place as will the continued use of hand sanitisers and the promotion of good hand hygiene.
- 4.2 Existing ventilation guidance has been strengthened. Angus Council provided CO2 monitors and guidance materials to schools prior to October 2020. Due to the increased expectation outlined in the updated guidance, an order has been placed for an additional 1200 CO2 monitors to be installed across all Angus schools and ELC settings.
- 4.3 Physical distancing of at least one metre is to be retained between all adults, and between adults and children where possible. Face coverings should continue to be worn by adults, and by young people aged 12 and over. In a slight change to previous arrangements, children between the ages of 5 and 11 will no longer be required to wear a face covering on dedicated school transport. The use of groupings or 'bubbles' is now no longer required. The other major change to the mitigations relates to self-isolation and contact tracing and is outlined in more detail from paragraph 4.5 below.
- 4.4 Angus schools have been provided with advice regarding the latest guidance and are working to implement changes as soon as practical. All Covid-19 risk assessments and guidance are being updated. Union representatives will be consulted as part of this work.

Arrangements for Contact Tracing

- 4.5 The previous Education Recovery update report ([Report 143/21](#) refers) advised members of 92 confirmed Covid-19 cases as at 18 May 2021. Similar to other local authorities, Angus Council experienced a significant increase in the number of Covid-19 cases between May and the end of term on 24 June 2021. An additional 118 confirmed cases were reported during this period. Absence data reported to Scottish Government shows that 766 children and young people were absent from school due to self-isolation on 11 June 2021. Reported figures for staff absence show 77 were absent for reasons connected to Covid-19 in the same week. Self-isolation numbers fluctuate and not all isolations will be connected to cases in schools. School and directorate staff worked closely with the Tayside Health Protection Team (HPT) and Test & Protect Teams throughout this period to ensure children and staff were advised to self-isolate as appropriate. The increased cases in Angus schools emerged at the same time as the increase in wider community prevalence of Covid-19 and should be considered in that context. No concerns were raised by HPT colleagues regarding the mitigations and measures in place in Angus schools.
- 4.6 The school-based arrangements for Covid-19 case management and contact tracing from 09 August 2021 have been amended to come into line with wider society. The key principles of the new arrangements are:
 - Any individual who develops symptoms of Covid-19 should self-isolate immediately and go for a PCR test.
 - Adults (18+) identified as close contacts will be required to self-isolate and book a PCR test. If the test is positive, the individual continues to self-isolate. If the test result is negative, the individual has been fully vaccinated for at least two weeks and remains free of symptoms, self-isolation ends.
 - Children and young people aged 5-17 who are identified as a close contact should self-isolate immediately and book a PCR test. If their test is positive, the individual should continue to self-isolate. If their test result is negative and the individual remains free of symptoms, self-isolation ends.

- Children under the age of 5 who are identified as a close contact are exempt from self-isolation. These children are encouraged to take a PCR test, but it is not a requirement to end self-isolation.
- From 09 August only close contacts under the age of 18 who are at the highest risk of being exposed to infection will be directly contact traced by Test and Protect. The focus will be on the identification of household, overnight or clear and prolonged close contacts.
- Schools and ELC settings will no longer be as extensively involved in supporting contact tracing. A protocol has been developed between Angus Council and NHS Tayside's Test & Protect in support of these new arrangements.

Vaccinations

- 4.7 Planning is underway for the 2021 flu vaccination programme. This year, the offer of the flu vaccine is being extended to include young people in secondary schools and employees working in a school or early learning and childcare setting. The purpose of the expansion is to maintain the resilience of educational services, the NHS, and social care services during the Scottish Government's response to Covid-19 and to reduce the risk of infection and transmission of the flu virus. The vaccination programme is coordinated by NHS Tayside and we anticipate arrangements will be underway shortly after the start of term.
- 4.8 At the time of writing, the plans to offer the Covid-19 vaccine to young people in Scotland are in line with the recommendations from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. On 04 August 2021 it was confirmed that all young people aged 16 and 17 in Scotland would be offered a first dose of the Pfizer vaccine for Covid-19. In addition, young people over the age of 12 who are higher risk of falling ill from the virus, or who live with other vulnerable people, are to be offered the vaccine. The vaccine programme is being coordinated by NHS Health Boards and is not likely to require direct involvement for schools.

Asymptomatic Testing Programme

- 4.9 The voluntary Lateral Flow Testing programme will continue for schools and ELC settings from the start of term in August 2021. All individuals employed in a school or ELC setting are eligible to participate. In addition, all young people attending secondary schools can choose to participate. We are encouraging individuals to participate where possible and have shared information about the programme via our social media channels as part of our 'return to school' communications.

Support to Children and Families

- 4.10 During the summer holiday period 2,620 children and young people eligible for free school meals were supported with direct payments. This support will continue for future holiday periods. During term-time, free school provision will be delivered via our in-school catering service. Free school meals, including holiday provision, are funded by Scottish Government on an annual basis.
- 4.11 From the start of term in August there will be no charge for Instrumental Music Tuition, or for delivery of the core curriculum. The Scottish Government has allocated funding of £239,000 to Angus Council to meet these costs for session 2021/22. The Scottish Government will carry out further engagement with local authorities to agree a longer-term approach to funding both these areas beyond 2022.

5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 Members of the Children and Learning Committee are asked to note the steps being taken to support the return to school in August 2021.
- 5.2 Members of the Children and Learning Committee are asked to agree that the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning will bring further updates in the event of significant changes to the information in this report.
- 5.3 Notes the removal of charges for core curriculum areas and Instrumental Music Tuition.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The enhanced cleaning and hygiene regime for schools have financial implications for Angus Council. These have been subject to a separate report and all additional costs for session 2021/22 were agreed at Angus Council on 24 June 2021 ([Report 213/21 refers](#)).
- 6.2 The Scottish Government has confirmed £10m of funding is being made available to local authorities to fund the purchase of additional CO2 monitors.
- 6.3 Free School Meals, including school holiday provision, are funded on a recurring basis by Scottish Government.
- 6.4 Scottish Government funding to meet the cost of removing charges for core curriculum areas and Instrumental Music Tuition is confirmed for the 2021/22 academic session. Longer-term funding details are still to be confirmed.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Director of Children, Families & Justice, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, the Director of Finance and the Director of Legal & Democratic Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

NOTE: The background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) which were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report are:

- [Report 143/21](#)
- [Report 213/21](#)

REPORT AUTHOR: Beth Reader, Manager – Support Services

EMAIL DETAILS: childrenandlearning@angus.gov.uk