

Frequently asked question on the re-opening of schools and Early Learning and Childcare Centres

Following the Scottish Government's announcement that schools in West Dunbartonshire are to reopen on Wednesday, 12 August, we understand parents and carers will have questions about how this will work for their children.

We have compiled a list of frequently asked questions below, which we hope will help answer some of your queries.

Our staff have worked really hard to ensure all of our buildings are fully prepared and meet all new health and safety requirements before pupils return to their in-school education from August 12.

If you have any additional questions that are not answered below, please don't hesitate to contact your Head Teacher or Head of Centre who will be happy to help.

Questions relating to all children:

When is my school re-opening?

Pupils in West Dunbartonshire will begin their phased return to school from Wednesday, 12 August, and all children back full time by Monday, 17 August. Headteachers will contact parents to let them know the detail for each school and early learning centre.

Teachers will return to school on Tuesday, 11 August for an in-service day.

Who can I contact for support?

Your Headteacher and teachers are available to support you in your child's learning and they can signpost you to additional services for further support if required. Please do continue to ask for help. We would actively encourage parents/carers to contact us at any point to ensure we can swiftly arrange further support if required.

How will you ensure the safety of my child when at school or ELCC?

The Council is being guided by and will stringently follow the scientific evidence and advice from Public Health Scotland.

We are committed to the safety of all our pupils and every decision we take will consider the health and wellbeing of your child first and foremost. Regular hand washing will be undertaken by all young children, pupils and staff and hand sanitiser stations will be in place with additional sinks installed where required.

In addition, some schools will have staggered lunch and intervals, as well as staggered start and finish times to reduce the number of children arriving and leaving at one time. Your school will provide further information on this.

Early years guidance advises there is no requirement to physically distance whilst caring for younger children. ELCC staff will work with groups and make maximum use of outdoor space. Our ELCC workers will still need to physically distance from their colleagues, parents and carers when collecting children and arrangements will be in place to stagger drop off and pick up times to help ensure this guidance can be followed.

We're asking parents and carers to protect our children and communities by maintaining physical distancing when dropping off and picking up children too, and not to congregate at entrances or exits.

We will also have enhanced cleaning in schools and ELCCs which will be focussed on frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, railings, sinks and toilets.

Will staff or children need to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

Children will not be required to wear PPE while in class or during breaks. All schools will have a stock of PPE which can be used by staff if required.

My child uses school transport to and from school. Will this change?

Every child entitled to receive school transport prior to the closure will continue to receive this when the schools return in August, and this will include anyone whose change of circumstances now entitles them to school transport such as those moving to secondary school. Pupils using school transport to and from school do not need to physical distance or to wear a face covering.

Pupils travelling to school by public transport (bus, train or taxi) will need to physically distance and wear a face covering.

Where possible, we would ask parents who are able to make their own arrangements to take and collect their children from school to do so. We would also encourage any pupils, where it is safe to do so, to walk or cycle to and from school.

How will the cleaning and hygiene of schools and ELCCs be managed?

All educational establishments will be fully cleaned prior to pupils returning. The Council is recruiting 55 additional cleaners to enhance the cleaning routines in schools and ELCCs. Every primary school will have a cleaner on site during the day to undertake regular and enhanced cleaning of high priority areas and frequently touched surfaces. The five secondary schools and Kilpatrick, which already have day cleaners, will be allocated a second day cleaner to increase the impact during the busy school hours. The cleaning teams will prioritise touch-points including door handles, stair-rails and main door panels.

A cleaning procedure in line with Health Protection Scotland Guidance, is also in place for disinfecting areas where a suspected or confirmed case of the virus is identified. Regular hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds remains as the single most effective means of prevention. Pupils will be reminded of the importance of good hand hygiene. Regular hand washing will be undertaken by all young people, pupils and staff and hand sanitiser stations will be in place with additional sinks installed where required.

How can we protect pupils and parents/carers classed as high-risk?

A small number of children and/or parents/carers will fall into the extremely vulnerable category, and will have received a shielding letter. In these circumstances parents/carers should seek and follow medical advice. Further information is available from <https://www.nhsinform.scot/>

We know the scientific evidence has shown the effects of Covid-19 are typically less severe in children than in adults, but we appreciate the concerns from families who have underlying medical conditions. We are also aware of pupils who share homes with individuals whose circumstances, such as age or medical conditions, mean they will be more at-risk than others. We would encourage you to speak to your Head Teacher or Head of Centre about your individual circumstances to see how best we can support you.

I'm anxious about Covid-19 and don't want to send my children to school/ELCC. Will I be penalised?

Children have now been off school since March. The Scottish Government's plans for reopening schools are based on scientific evidence and advice and they have decided it is safe to return to full time education. Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child receives an education and we would encourage parents to send their children to school. Learning at school and ELCC improves all aspects of children's progress and development including their wellbeing.

We are committed to the safety of all our pupils and we will adhere to all Scottish Government and Public Health advice and guidance to keep our children safe and prevent the spread of the virus.

Does my child need to wear their uniform on the days they are in school?

Children and young people should wear their school uniform when they return to school. This ensures our pupils are easily identifiable and is still the most cost effective way to dress your child for school. It also takes away peer pressure of wearing branded clothes at school.

Headteachers can offer support and advice where required.

What happens if my child takes unwell at school/ELC?

If any of our pupils take unwell at school or ELC, they will be kept in isolation in a well ventilated room until they can be safely collected. Any young person, pupil testing positive would need to self-isolate at home for at least 10 days. We would also ask pupils who have been in close contact with someone testing positive for Covid19 to self-isolate for 14 days in line with NHS guidance and arrange a test. Your whole household should follow the [stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection](#) provided by the NHS.

What wellbeing supports will be available to pupils when they return?

The current pandemic has impacted every one of us and we understand pupils will have experienced some level of additional stress and pressure during lockdown. All our educational staff have been trained in mental health and wellbeing to support pupils. Our psychological services will offer help and support where required and parents should be encouraged to speak to their school for further support if they have any concerns over the health and wellbeing of their child.

Pupils can also access togetherall, a free online confidential support service available to residents aged between 16-24. Please visit www.togetherall.com This service is completely anonymous.

My child has additional support needs (ASN). What support will there be for ASN pupils?

Your child will start a phased return to school from 12 August. Work is ongoing to plan transport and any specialist support your child requires. Education will work in partnership with colleagues in Health and Social Care Partnership to offer support to children with ASN. All children with healthcare plans will have these reviewed for returning to school to reassure parents.

All required safety assessments will be in place and will outline how we will support programmes of care for your child which will include administering medication, feeding, exercising and physiotherapy.

We will continue to support families and carers to ensure the new safety measures are introduced and maintained with minimum upset or inconvenience to you child.

If you have any questions related to your child, please contact your Head Teacher for further reassurance.

Will free school meals/clothing grants still be provided?

You are eligible for free nursery/school meals and a school clothing grant if you receive benefits. For more information and to find out if you qualify visit <https://bit.ly/2XwFjkl>

Free school meals will be available in August to all P1-P3 pupils and all eligible P4 – S6 pupils while attending school. The funding on Farmfoods voucher cards provided to parents / carers during the school closures will end on Tuesday 11 August.

Following this date there will be no further credits to your card.

If your circumstances have changed and you consider yourself eligible for free school meal provision you are able to apply at any time.

Changes have been made to the school meals menu to facilitate the provision of healthy and nutritional meals whilst overcoming the challenges of cross contamination, queuing at the servery and to facilitate the necessary meal sittings. We hope to be able to provide a full menu of hot meals from Mon 17th August but there may be occasions where lunch provision may need to be limited to a sealed sandwich option or cold salad/pasta option. Please speak to your Headteacher if your child has a Special Medical Diet.

I have paid for child's school trip and it has been cancelled. What happens now?

In line with advice from the Scottish Government, all school trips were cancelled. The Council is in the process of providing refunds to parents who made payments towards trips cancelled because of the pandemic. Headteachers or the Central Education Team will/have contacted those parents affected.

Questions relating to ELCC's:

When is my Early Learning and Childcare Centre (ELCC) re-opening?

ELCCs will open to children on the same day as schools, Wednesday, 12 August.

What days will my child be in ELCC?

There will be a phased return to our establishments starting from Wednesday, 12 August and your Head of Centre will be in touch to confirm which days of the week your child will be attending school.

Previously if your child's entitlement was the equivalent of 1140hrs you will receive this entitlement when your child returns. All other children will receive 600hrs of childcare per year.

Returning from 12 August: This will be on a phased basis for first three days of the new term for children who attended nursery before lockdown. For children who are new to nursery a phased start will be provided over a longer period and parents will be given dates and times for this. Nursery children who attended before lockdown will require to resettlement at nursery. The time taken for this will depend on the individual child. All other children starting nursery for the first time will be given an individual settling period.

Returning during September 2020: All children who were due to start their placements in April 2020.

Returning during September: All children who were due to start their placements in August.

This phasing will ensure that children are safely returned and that new children are given time to settle.

My child was in nursery all day in March. Can I get the additional hours at my nursery when we return?

The Scottish Government has removed the legal duty on councils to provide 1140 hours of early learning and childcare to all eligible two-year-olds and three and four-year-olds by August 2020. This decision was made to support councils providing frontline support in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

All children who received 1140 hours in March will get 1140 hours when they return. All other children will receive 600 hours a year of early learning and childcare.

We will also update you on the estimated delay to our original timeline for our new build centres as work had to be suspended due to the lockdown.

When will I find out about my child's nursery place?

We will be in a position to offer further advice and will be in touch with parents and carers directly to provide an update on applications.

How do I get a childcare place for my child at school or ELCC?

If you meet the criteria above but haven't applied for a place, please visit our website to [apply for a place](#) or contact 01389 737309 and leave a message. If you no longer require your place, please contact us as soon as possible so we can offer this place to another family.

Questions relating to Secondary Schools:

What plans are there for senior phase pupils due to sit exams next year?

Preparations for the 2021 exam diet are underway and the Scottish Qualifications Authority will provide further advice to schools to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to capture, on an ongoing basis, the learning outcomes met by young people in the Senior Phase in school year 2020/21. This will provide a strong evidence base to support assessment and certification and we await further details on how this will be structured. We encourage all of our pupils to continue to study and maintain their efforts on all assignments to ensure they are well prepared in the event that continuous assessment throughout the academic year is used to determine qualifications.