

EMBARGOED until 14:00 - Thursday, 28 May 2020

Minister announces phased re-opening plans for schools, colleges and nurseries

The Education Minister has today announced the details on the re-opening of schools, colleges and nurseries, from 8 June, for certain year groups.

Under a carefully phased approach, teachers will initially welcome back pupils in Years 6 in primary schools; and Year 10 and 12 in secondary schools. They will join the children of critical workers and vulnerable children who are already in school.

Private Nurseries will be able to welcome back a set number of children into “bubbles” or small groups and children will also be allowed to return to their childminder or nanny, in accordance with established guidance agreed with Public Health.

It follows the latest advice from the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) and the Medical Officer for Health, who have advised that:

- Schools are safe to start re-opening as soon as possible prioritising the year groups suggested by education professionals and ensuring that measures are in place for them to do so safely
- the risks to children of being away from school currently outweigh the health risk from COVID-19 of them being in school
- children should return to school as soon as is practically possible, while ensuring that public health measures can be maintained
- growing evidence that children are not super spreaders and that when infected, the level of the virus appears to be no less/greater than adults
- it is in children’s best interests to return to school, reassured that it is safe for them to do so.

Officials will continue to seek and assess the medical evidence and advice available from the STAC to understand whether it will be appropriate and feasible for additional pupils

to attend primary school two weeks later. The situation for other secondary age pupils will also be kept under continuous review.

To enable children to return safely to schools, the Department for Children, Young People, Education and Skills is working closely with colleagues in public health to ensure successful safety measures are put into place in all schools.

These will include:

- Strict requirements that no symptomatic children or staff attend school
- Implementing a bubble approach, where groups of children and their teacher (s) remain together
- Where the bubble approach is not appropriate, adherence to 2m physical distancing between pupils and staff will in classrooms, corridors, etc.
- Where bubbles are used, observing strict physical distancing between the bubbles
- No interaction between bubbles of children
- Marking of corridors / stairwells to maintain distancing
- Staggering start, lunch, breaks and pick-ups
- Not using shared equipment (playground, music, PE, tablet devices, books) where it cannot be cleaned between users
- Making PPE available to staff if a child or staff member becomes symptomatic in school
- Increasing the frequency of cleaning

Senator Tracey Vallois has praised teachers, support staff and those in the education and early years sector for all their hard work throughout the pandemic.

Senator Vallois said: "The safety of children, staff and their families remain the absolute priority. I would like to thank pupils, parents and schools for patiently waiting for an update. I am immensely grateful for all the hard work that has gone on since we closed schools, colleges and nurseries, on 20 March. This has been an extremely complex piece of work.

"As a parent myself, I know how extremely difficult this situation has been for families across the Island. Your fortitude is recognised and appreciated. I am also so proud of how our schools, teachers, support staff, childminders, nurseries and nannies have adapted to the changes and continued to put children first. I know how much children have all missed their friends, teachers and schools, which is why we are working hard, following the health advice, to ensure that more children can return to school as soon as is practically possible, while ensuring that public health measures can be maintained."

Dr Susan Turnbull, Medical Officer of Health, added: "International experience has taught us so much about Covid-19 in the last five months since it first was recognised as a global threat. Covid-19 is less easily spread by children than adults – unlike 'flu where children have always been known to be super spreaders. We know now, too, that most

children with Covid-19 infection experience only minor symptoms, and very rarely need hospital treatment.

“On the other hand, there is accumulating evidence of worrying collateral harm from Covid-19 restrictions, to children and young people worldwide, and no less so in Jersey. This includes harm to their education and life chances, worsening educational inequalities, adverse childhood experiences building up, such as the impact of parental mental health problems, domestic violence, alcohol misuse, passive smoking, and possible unrecognised abuse of children behind closed doors. We know too that there have been worsening mental health problems in children and young people themselves, needing more hospital admission in Jersey since lockdown.

“Children and their families should feel confident, about Covid-19, about getting back to school as soon as they can. Covid-19 poses very little risk to children and there is so very much to gain in terms of their general health, wellbeing and safety of returning to school. I am delighted that Jersey has reached a position of such effective suppression of Covid-19 in our Island that it is right, and very timely, to confidently enable children to return back to schools under a careful phased approach.”

Ends

For more information please contact the Press Office on 440430 or email pressoffice@gov.je

From the 8th June:

- Primary Schools will re-open to Years 6 full-time
- Secondary schools will re-open and provide some face-to-face teaching for years, 10 and 12 students.
- Highlands College will re-open and provide some face-to-face teaching for years 12 and 13 students
- Each school, college and early years setting will have a detailed plan for re-opening to ensure that arrangements are tailored, within the guidance.
- Private Nurseries will be able to welcome back a set number of children into bubbles
- And children will also be allowed to return to their childminder or nanny, in accordance with established guidance agreed with public health.

- Officials are also ensuring that the options put forward and any decisions proposed are made in the light of a rolling Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA). The framework for this consists of a number of key tests that officials have identified for a safe return, augmented by advice received from the trades unions and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner. They will also consider the views expressed by children and young people in a recent joint survey.

- Guidance will be published on gov.je by the Department of Children, Young People, Education and Skills on how schools can open in a way which is safe for children, teachers and parents.