Impact Assessment: School reopening arrangements for January 2021

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Executive Summary

The OECD, in *Education responses to COVID-19: an implementation strategy toolkit*[1], states that 'School closures can have a negative impact on children, on learning and increase inequalities if governments do not effectively implement measures to ensure every child has sufficient resources to learn in good conditions, in particular in countries where non-school factors play a determinant role in learning outcomes'. These findings are in line with Scottish Government findings from the *impact of school building closures equity audit*[2] in relation to COVID-19.

The Scottish Government recognises this, and made the difficult decision to implement remote learning for the majority of pupils in Scotland from January 2021, with schools remaining open for vulnerable and key worker children. Details of this policy have been published in the School reopening arrangements for January 2021 guidance and they are supported by the Education Continuity Direction[3].

The Scottish Government recognises that a shift to remote learning, albeit not the same as school closures, is likely to have a negative impact on many of Scotland's pupils and will create new challenges for the education workforce, and is taking measures to minimise that impact. Lessons have been learned from school closures in 2020, yet it is not possible to negate all negative impacts of a move to remote learning for most pupils. This document aims to explore the impacts, both positive and negative, of a move to remote learning for most pupils, with the intention of supporting ongoing policy development.

Background

On 19 December 2020 the First Minster announced a phased start to the spring term 2021. These exceptional arrangements were intended to ensure sufficient time to assess the impacts of the festive period on community transmission in light of a new strain of the virus having emerged, prior to the full reopening of schools. Following a reassessment of COVID-19 cases across Scotland, and in line with emerging evidence on the new strain of COVID-19, the First Minister confirmed in her statement[4] on 4 January that remote learning would extend until the end of January. In a subsequent statement[5] on 19 January 2021, It was updated that this period would extend until mid-February.

In summary:

- After the festive break, schools were to reopen in line with their previously agreed term dates (starting from Tuesday 5 January 2021). However, during this first week of opening (5 January to 8 January), attendance in schools should be restricted to:
    - o Vulnerable children and children of key workers only.
    - o All staff who, in the judgement of the local authority and schools, are required to attend in person to give effect to these revised school reopening arrangements.

- The expectation was that provision during this first week of operation may be limited to in-school childcare and wellbeing support for vulnerable children and key worker children.

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[1] www.oecd.org/publications/education-responses-to-covid-19-an-implementation-strategy-toolkit-81209b82-en.htm
[2] Coronavirus (COVID-19): impact of school building closures - equity audit - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[3] Coronavirus Act 2020: educational continuity direction - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[4] Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement - 4 January 2021 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[5] Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement - 19 January 2021 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

- With the exception of those children meeting the definitions of vulnerable children, or children of key workers, the school holiday period was effectively extended for all children until Monday 11 January.

- From Monday 11 January, vulnerable children and the children of key workers continued to attend school in person. Schools were to switch from offering childcare and wellbeing support to offering learning and teaching.

- All other pupils to be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning from Monday 11 January.

- These arrangements were originally intended to apply until 18 January, in line with Educational Continuity Direction (ECD) No.6[6].However this has since been extended under ECDs No.7 and No.8 in line with scientific advice.

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[6] [Coronavirus Act 2020: educational continuity direction - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](www.gov.scot)

The scope of this Impact Assessment

This document considers the impact of the extended school holiday period by a week, and the introduction of remote learning from January 2021 in light of COVID-19 on the following groups:
- Children and young people;
- Parents and carers; and
- School staff, both teaching and non-teaching.

This document collates the considerations of groups with protected characteristics in line with:
- An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)
- A Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment (FSDA)
- An Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)
- A Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA)

It should be noted that this impact assessment considers the impact of a move to remote learning, and does not consider specifically the mitigating measures that are in place to protect staff and pupils who are currently attending school in person. Mitigating measures are outlined in the Coronavirus (COVID-19): Reducing risks in schools guidance[7], and the impact of those measures have been considered previously and separately in the associated impact assessment.

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[7] Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on reducing the risks in schools - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Children and young people

Age	
	1) It is acknowledged that the move to remote learning is likely to have generally a negative impact on the wellbeing and development of most children and young people. As remote learning continues, for some or most groups, this will likely impact different age groups in a variety of ways.

2) We know that on 28 January 2021, across all sectors and local authorities, the percentage of pupils physically in school was 7.3%, with a majority being in the primary age range. Around 37% of children in attendance are vulnerable children and 63% are children of key workers[8].

Child protection
3) With the extension of the holiday period (for most pupils) and a period of remote learning (again, for most pupils) there is an additional risk of exposure to abuse, with likely reduced or no opportunity for disclosure, particularly for younger children.

- In these circumstances, and in line with the National and Supplementary National Child Protection Guidance a rights-based, child-centred approach to assessment, intervention, and planning to meet needs will be essential, drawing together support from partners and third sector organisations in order to ensure appropriate support for children and young people.
- In order to support Scotland's most vulnerable pupils, the approach to school openings is different to in 2020 when 'hubs' were open for pupils across a geographical area. Throughout remote learning from January 2021, all schools are open to vulnerable pupils, as well as children of key workers. We consider that vulnerable pupils are more likely to attend their own school, with familiar staff in a familiar setting. Therefore concerns are more likely to be noticed or disclosed.

4) There is increased awareness of learners, who were not previously identified as vulnerable, but who may have experienced child protection issues in this time. Due to continuing social/economic stresses, as well as the pause of breakfast and after-school clubs, there is the potential for more pupils to "become" vulnerable.

- The Scottish Government published guidance for local authorities and schools in January to inform the period of reopening schools, this guidance provided clarity on arrangements for school education, including support for vulnerable children and young people. Local authorities have been prioritising support for children and young people who are considered vulnerable and have ensured that arrangements are in place to ensure that contact is maintained. A number of authorities have also used surveys to understand children and young people's wellbeing needs, as well as a support from educational psychologists and partnerships with third sector organisations and children and health services. |

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[8] COVID19 - Schools and Childcare Information 2021 - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public

	Transition years 5) All pupils may find the transition to the next academic year more challenging than previous years due to reduced in-school learning since the start of the pandemic. The introduction of remote learning may contribute to this negative impact. Those within key transition years in session 2020/2021, i.e. those starting P1, P7 and S1 in August 2021, those learners making subject choices and those planning on leaving school during, or at the end of, session 2020/21, may feel that impact most greatly and may, depending on a school's calendar of activities, be at risk of missing out on support that previous year groups have received. • Schools may be able to provide support to some pupils via remote learning, and it is hoped that many will be able to compensate for any time lost towards preparing for transitions as a phased return is introduced. **Senior phase pupils** 6) Pupils who are due to sit national qualification exams in 2021 will understandably be nervous about the reduced in-school learning they will have received during remote learning. The *Lockdown Lowdown* Survey from November 2020 reports that the most pressing concern for respondents was the impact of coronavirus on their exams[9]. The continuation of remote learning will (a) reduce face-to-face teaching time (b) more negatively impact practical-portfolio based subjects due to reduced time to demonstrate skills to inform teacher assessment. • Consideration is being given to flexibilities and contingencies that may need to be in place to ensure certification of 2020/2021 learning and to accommodate prevailing public health advice. This includes the work of the National Qualifications 21 Group and the Alternative Certification Model being developed.
Disability	**Clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable pupils** may have a health condition which would be considered as a disability. 7) Guidance for January 2021 states that children and young people at the highest clinical risk (individuals on the shielding list) should not attend school in person. As schools moved to remote learning for most pupils from January, this is not expected to have a differential impact on pupils at the highest clinical risk in comparison to the majority of their peers. 8) Some learners with physical disabilities which make it difficult for them to access school may be positively impacted by the move to remote learning if they have the appropriate support in place at home. However, those with more severe physical disabilities may be missing out on the use of specific equipment or resources to support them.

[9] Dec2020-LockdowLowdown-V2-Survey-Final.pdf (squarespace.com)

	Additional support needs (ASN)
	9) Pupils with additional support needs have had to adapt to many changes throughout the pandemic, and it is recognised that there are anecdotal reports of some pupils, including some with ASN or anxiety, having found benefits to home learning in 2020.
	10) Some pupils with ASN may be entitled to attend school in person through being either vulnerable or the child of key worker parent(s)/carer(s). However for pupils with ASN who are not eligible to attend school in person while remote learning is in place, there is a risk that they will be impacted by not receiving face-to-face teaching more than their peers without ASN. This impact may be greater for pupils who usually benefit from the support of Learning Support Assistants when in school.
	• The emotional wellbeing of our pupils with ASN as they engage with remote learning will require careful planning, including discussion with them and their parents and carers. A first step will be to review plans, including co-ordinated support plans, to ensure that planned approaches build upon and recognise any additional needs which have arisen. In planning these approaches, engagement with parents and carers, as well as the children and young people themselves will be key. Support may be drawn from other partners such as Social Work Services, Allied Health Professionals, agencies such as Skills Development Scotland, and third sector organisations. This process should take into account communication of routine changes where appropriate.
Sex	**Academic progress**
	11) A higher proportion of girls than boys achieved the expected Curriculum for Excellence levels across both literacy and numeracy and all stages. In 2018-19, the largest difference in performance at primary was in writing in P7, with girls outperforming boys by 15 percentage points. The smallest differences at primary for the literacy organisers were in reading and listening and talking for P1, at six percentage points each[10].
	12) School leaver attainment figures show females are continuing to outperform males at SCQF Levels 4 to 6 or better with the gap being wider at higher SCQF levels. In 2018/19, the gap between females and males achieving one pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better was 1.4 percentage points, with this gap growing to 4.9 percentage points at SCQF Level 5 or better, and further widening to 12.3 percentage points at SCQF Level 6 or better[11].
	13) Factors, inherent in remote learning, which may further widen this gap include the suitability of subjects to on-line learning and any gender bias in uptake rates within these subjects. Examples would be delivery of certificated PE – especially with indoor sports, and the ability to support pupils when coding in Computing (normally done with teacher and pupil in close proximity at a computer). It is therefore possible that male pupils may be more greatly impacted by the move to remote learning, and this may be reflected in course outcomes.

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[10] https://www.gov.scot/publications/achievement-curriculum-excellence-cfe-levels-2018-19/
[11] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-attainment-initial-leaver-destinations-no-2-2020-edition/

14) We see evidence of gender segregation in participation in different subjects in the senior phase at school with, for example, females more likely to take up subjects such as languages and males tending to take up subjects such as computing[12]. This gender segregation persists in courses in further and higher education and in apprenticeships and in the labour market and leads to women's poorer labour market outcomes, gendered pay inequality, and the gender pay gap. We do not know if gender segregation in subjects and the sexist bullying and harassment which can contribute to this segregation will have been exacerbated throughout the pandemic. If so, there is a risk that this impact augments with the implementation of remote learning.

- Education Scotland's Improving Gender Balance and Equalities Programme is helping practitioners and school leaders tackle gender segregation and its underlying causes through learning and teaching and whole school approaches. A literature review of the key issues has been published here, and resources for practitioners and sector specific action guides are here.

Wellbeing

15) It is widely recognised and acknowledged that the period of school closures and lockdown in 2020 will have had increased impacts on mental health and wellbeing. It would be reasonable to think that a similar impact may be felt from the move to remote learning.

- The Scottish Government and Education Scotland has continued to engage with all education authorities about the support that they have in place for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. All education authorities have arrangements for this in place. These include a wide range of approaches such as telephone helplines, education psychology support, bespoke support packages and resources and virtual and telephone counselling, as well as whole-school approaches. Scottish Government and Education Scotland have worked jointly to ensure that advice and guidance including sources of quality support from external organisations is available. This has included the publication of learning resources, hosting of webinars, professional learning opportunities and signposting to key resources and organisations.

16) Almost 4000 children took part in the Children's Parliament's *How are you doing?* survey in April, May and November 2020[13]. There was a noticeable improvement in positive responses amongst 12-14 year olds to 'Generally, I feel cheerful and I am in a good mood', in the period where schools were open. Although boys were more likely to respond positively than girls both during and after lockdown[14].

17) It is known that some risks to children and young people will have increased during the pandemic and that risks increase as a result of not attending school in person. With children and young people spending more time at home due to remote learning, it would be fair to expect a rise in the numbers who experience domestic abuse, as well as a possible intensification of abuse for previous victims.

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[12] SQA Statistical qualification reports 2020 - SQA
[13] Children and Coronavirus - Children's Parliament
[14] How are you doing_Survey_Final (childrensparliament.org.uk)

	This typically affects more girls than boys[15], and also affects the children of parents who experience domestic abuse. Several approaches have been introduced since lockdown in March 2020 to minimise this impact: - A central focus of schools guidance throughout the pandemic has been to support and nurture children and young people's health and wellbeing as they engage with remote learning and return to school. - On-line learning and check-ins, as outlined in Education Scotland's guidance on remote learning[16], may provide opportunity for identification of concerns and/or provide disclosure opportunities - Supplementary guidance[17] for residential boarding/hostel accommodation in educational facilities issued. - All local authorities have access to a school counselling service in place and due to the impact of the pandemic have altered how this is service is being made available to meet local needs and circumstances. 18) We know that it is important for young people to have access to period products, and pupils have welcomed the Scottish Government's initiative to make period products available for free in schools, colleges and universities[18]. - The Scottish Government continues to fund access to free period products during lockdown and, as during school closures in 2020, asks local authorities to make alternative arrangements to ensure products can still be accessed by those who need them.
Gender reassignment	**Pastoral support** 19) Young people who are transitioning may benefit from pastoral support from school. The same level of support may not be available as a result of remote learning and therefore may negatively impact wellbeing. Additionally, transgender young people may regard school as a place of safety. Some may be deemed as vulnerable and will continue to be able to attend school in person, others may be newly vulnerable, and there is a risk that this group will not have the same access to in-person support. Vulnerable pupils are invited to attend school in person through remote learning. 20) The Online in Lockdown Report indicated that 26% of young people responding to the survey saw prejudice-based posts, comments, attitudes online since the lockdown began which related to transphobia.
Pregnancy and maternity	**Support for pregnant pupils and young parents** 21) Pupils who experience pregnancy and parenthood whilst at school should receive additional support to be able to continue with their education. It may be challenging for schools to continue to provide the right support to young pregnant pupils and young parents at school age. Regular contact with school is likely to be reduced during remote learning, and this could lead to poor engagement or even a

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[15] https://www.gov.scot/publications/domestic-abuse-forms-violence-against-women-girls-vawg-during-covid-19-lockdown-period-30-3-20-22-05-20/
[16] CERG guidance | COVID-19 education recovery | National Improvement Hub
[17] Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on reducing the risks in schools - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[18] YS_Access_Period_Products_Report_UPDATED.pdf (squarespace.com)

	disengagement from education among this group of pupils. This could have a profound long-term impact on, not only young people's health and wellbeing, but also their socio-economic circumstances. • Extending holidays and time spent at home through remote learning may require additional consideration as to how these supports are offered by appropriate staff. 22) While attending school in person, as a vulnerable or keyworker child, could restore the support this group of young people need, careful consideration should be given to pregnant pupils who may be at higher risk of developing more severe symptoms of COVID in their third trimester. • It is important that all pregnant pupils should follow advice from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists[19] • It is also advised that an individual risk assessment should be conducted for all pregnant young women returning to school. • Additionally, lead professionals and parent(s) of a pupil (if appropriate), should be involved to help decide how school should continue to best support them.
Race	23) According to 2019 data, 78% of Scotland's pupil population is from a White (Scottish) ethnicity, while 12% have a White (other) ethnicity and 8% are from a non-White Minority Ethnic (ME) group[20]. 24) An analysis of hospitalisations and more severe outcomes among people who have tested positive for COVID-19 has been updated with more recent data to further improve precision of statistical estimates of risk among ethnic minority groups. These results point to further evidence of around a 2-fold increase in risk of admission to critical care or death due to COVID-19 among those of South Asian origin. This increased risk was particularly evident among the Pakistani group and was still apparent after accounting for deprivation, residential care home status and diabetic status. There is evidence of an increased risk of hospitalisation due to COVID-19 among those of Caribbean or Black ethnicity[21]. **Public perception** 25) Discourse in the media and on social media during the COVID-19 crisis has included narratives which could contribute to racist bullying. Respectme[22], Scotland's National Anti-Bullying service has published updated resources to support local authorities and schools to address any incident of racist bullying, they are also developing enhanced professional learning to support staff in schools recognise and address any incident of racist bullying. 26) 1,015 young people from across Scotland took part in a survey issued by the Time for Inclusive Education Campaign during the period of lockdown in March to June 2020. The survey explored the impact of lockdown on young people's emotional wellbeing, as well as the rates of online bullying and online prejudice during the lockdown period. Overall, the survey found that instances of online

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[19] Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection and pregnancy (rcog.org.uk)
[20] https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/
[21] COVID-19 statistical report 2 December 2020 - Data & intelligence from PHS (isdscotland.org)
[22] respectme | Scotland's anti-bullying servicerespectme

bullying increased during the lockdown period, and young people reported witnessing more online prejudice than usual - the most common forms of which were racism and homophobia[23].

- Schools will want to consider how learning and teaching in the curriculum and whole school approaches can help all pupils develop an awareness and understanding of human rights and equality with a specific emphasis on race, both now and in Scotland's past.

- A new race equality in education programme has been established to address curriculum reform, racism and bullying, diversity in the teaching profession, and professional learning and leadership.

- Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People provides the overarching framework for all adults working with children and young people. A resource is also available that was prepared on behalf of the Scottish Government by the Coalition of Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) and Respectme on effectively challenging racist bullying in schools in line with 'Respect for All' [24]

Language development
27) Pupils who speak English as an additional language risk being disproportionately affected by the introduction of remote learning and reduced face-to-face teaching time due to the impact on their proficiency of the English language, particularly if English is not their main home language. 2019 data shows that 9.6% of the pupil population have a language other than English as their main home language[25].

Religion or belief	**Denominational schools** 28) Denominational schools are defined by their religious ethos which permeates through the life and culture of the school. School closures in 2020 negatively impacted upon denominational schools' ability to support pupils' spiritual development via participation in religious practices and religious education. This impact is expected to continue for most pupils during remote learning. 29) Restrictions around large group gatherings may impact upon religious practices and celebrations.
Sexual orientation	**Pastoral support** 30) For some LGBT+ young people, the family home may not feel like a safe environment, and so they may have experienced increased levels of abuse due to spending more time at home. There is a risk of this leading to homelessness; we know that LGBT+ young people are disproportionately represented in the young homeless population, with as many as 24% of young homeless people identifying as LGBT+[26].

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[23] https://www.tiecampaign.co.uk/reports
[24] http://respectme.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Addressing-Inclusion-Effectively-Challenging-Racism-in-Schools.pdf
[25] https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/
[26] LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Coping of Cause, Prevalence, Response and Outcome (2006). The Albert Kennedy Trust.

	31) A significant number of LGBT+ young people displayed indicators of poor mental health prior to the pandemic[27], and this may be heightened with reduced access to support through school or other resources. 32) 36% of young people who responded to an online survey indicated that they had seen prejudiced based posts, comments or attitudes online related to homophobia. 52% of LGBT+ young people described their emotional wellbeing as being negative due to being away from their place of education. These findings were published in the [Online in Lockdown Report](#). • Extending holidays and time spent at home through remote learning may require additional consideration as to how supports are offered. Attendance at school if a young person is vulnerable and/or check-ins will support learners.
Marriage & civil partnership	33) There is a risk that with most pupils not attending school in person, some pupils may experience enforced marriage. • Pupils identified as vulnerable are invited to attend school in person. • The Children Missing from Education [guidance and resources](#) supports local authorities in dealing with cases where children are not attending school. • The National Guidance [for Child Protection in Scotland](#) provides a framework for agencies and practitioners at local level to agree processes for working together to safeguard and promote child wellbeing. This will be supplemented by guidance for Chief Officers, professional leaders in children's services and child protection committees, who should ensure it is taken account of within local partnerships.
Socio-economic disadvantage	It is recognised that some groups in society are at greater risk of poverty than others[28], including single women with children, people from non-white minority ethnic groups, and households with a disabled family member. **Engagement, academic progress & digital equity** 34) Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels by SIMD[29] for 2018-19 shows a pre-COVID poverty-related attainment gap between pupils in least and most deprived areas. For primary school pupils, the gaps were 17.1 percentage points for Reading, 19.1 for Writing, 13.0 for Listening and Talking, 20.7 for Literacy and 16.8 for Numeracy. At S3, the gap was 11.5 percentage points for Reading, 12.2 for Writing, 10.0 for Listening and Talking, 13.8 for Literacy and 13.5 for Numeracy[30]. 35) Extending time spent at home through remote learning may disproportionately affect more deprived households through reduced engagement with learning and/or reduced access to digital resources. An appropriate (comfortable, warm, well lit, quiet etc.) physical space may be more limited in more deprived households.

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[27] Lough Dennell, B.L., Anderson, G. and McDonnell, D. (2018) Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People. LGBT Youth Scotland.

[28] [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2016-19 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](#)

[29] The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is an area-based measure therefore not everyone living in area assessed as deprived will necessarily be at a socio-economic disadvantage, and vice versa

[30] https://www.gov.scot/publications/achievement-curriculum-excellence-cfe-levels-2018-19/

- On 30 November, the First Minister announced that all families in receipt of free school meals would receive a £100 payment to support families in winter with the economic impact of the pandemic[31].
- For the first time, more than £250 million in Pupil Equity Funding will be available to 97% of schools in 2020/21 and 2021/22.
- A new £45 million package will support with the provision of further digital devices and connectivity solutions, additional staffing as necessary and any further support needed by families.
- It is recognised that schools know their learners best, and therefore headteachers have the flexibility to develop localised plans to mitigate the impact of remote learning on the most disadvantaged pupils and families.

Remote learning

36) Throughout school closures in 2020, all children were at risk of experiencing some loss of learning. However, we know that children from less deprived homes were more likely to have greater access to home schooling facilities and materials, and to have parents who can assist, to offset lost instruction time (*London School of Economics – Centre for Economic Performance*[32]). With remote learning in place, this impact is expected to continue, albeit hoped to a lesser extent, with the improving quality of remote learning provision.

37) Similarly, a report published in June 2020 by the Education Endowment Foundation on best evidence of impact of earlier school closures on the attainment gap[33] included key findings such as:

- School closures are likely to reverse progress made to close the gap in the last decade since 2011;
- Supporting effective remote learning will mitigate the extent to which the gap widens;
- Sustained support will be needed to help disadvantaged pupils catch up.

38) Children from less deprived households across the UK were more than twice as likely to have had more than £100 spent on their education during school closures in 2020 (19% of middle-class children verses 8% of working class). Almost 1 in 10 children have had £150 spent on their education at home, and just under a quarter of children have had £50 spent on them[34]. It is presumed that pupils from less deprived households will continue to benefit from this over time.

Wellbeing

39) We know that for those affected by poverty and disadvantage, free school meals are a vital measure for families, children and young people across the country and that it is essential to ensure that children and young people continue to have access to nutritious food during the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to healthy

[31] Winter support fund for families and children - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[32] https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/blog/covid-19-divide-national-strategy-disadvantage-poverty-lockdownschools-voice-1/
[33] https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-ofschool-closures-on-the-attainment-gap/
[34] https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-closures-parent-polling/

and nutritious school meals is essential, given the clear benefits for pupils' learning and health. Free school meals provide much-needed support and assistance, saving families, on average, £400 a child, per year.

- Guidance makes clear that local authorities and schools should continue to provide free school meals or alternatives, for children and young people who are eligible for free school meals. These can be provided using a range of methods in line with family preference including: cash payments to families of eligible children; supermarket vouchers; home deliveries or through attendance at school. These options are not exhaustive and there may be alternatives which would better suit local needs and circumstances. Local authorities and schools will use different approaches depending on their individual circumstances and in response to local need. These approaches may also need to change due to health protection advice.

40) We know that people affected by poverty are more likely to be at risk of illness or death from COVID-19. Therefore pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have experienced illness or bereavement since the start of the pandemic.

- Schools should follow existing guidance on supporting pupils in these circumstances.

41) The move to remote learning, coupled with further restrictions across society due to COVID-19, will have meant the closure of youth, sports and other community facilities that may have previously taken place after the school day. This is expected to have a negative impact on the wellbeing of children and young people, particularly for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Digital equity
42) The cost of learning in lockdown[35], a June 2020 report by Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG) showed that families with access to resources such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and Show my Homework amongst others, were grateful for the continued tasks, ideas, learning and support from schools that this enabled.
- It is estimated that with the rollout of digital devices and the increasing quality of remote learning resources, that a growing number of families would feel similar benefits.

43) However, some pupils may be disadvantaged in comparison to their peers through not having access to digital devices, particularly younger children who are more likely to have to share devices with other members of the household. Through accessing the internet, pupils are able to access learning resources, as well as interact with school staff and peers. In 2018, the ONS reported that 12% of those aged between 11 and 18 years in the UK (700,000) reported having no internet

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[35] https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/The-cost-of-learning-in-lockdown-Scotland-FINAL.pdf

	access at home from a computer or tablet, while a further 60,000 reported having no home internet access at all[36].
	- To help ensure as many children and young people as possible are able to connect with their schools, continue their learning, access support and engage with their peers, £25 million is being invested to support digital inclusion amongst school-aged children. - At end-January 2021 over 63,000 devices and over 11,000 connectivity solutions had been distributed to learners across Scotland. Over 70,000 disadvantaged children and young people are expected to benefit as devices continue to be distributed by local authorities. - In addition, a further £45 million of funding was made available to councils in January 2021. This funding can be used flexibly for additional devices, additional staff and wider family support measures.
Island communities	**Digital equity** 44) Digital connectivity is a key enabler for education in general, particularly in Scotland's more remote, rural and island areas. The importance of this has been magnified throughout 2020, and again as remote learning is introduced. The National Islands Plan recognises that access to good quality digital infrastructure for all is essential to improving the educational outcomes for children and young people on the islands, and good digital connectivity is increasingly vital for education. Some island communities may have more experience of delivering remote learning due to the development and delivery of e-Sgoil prior to the pandemic, which may have a positive impact on the confidence amongst staff and pupils to adapt to remote learning. However, this is dependent on access to digital devices and connectivity.
Gaelic medium education	**Immersion learning** 45) In 2019 there were 4,631 learners in the GME sector. In the same year there were 541 learners with Gaelic (Scots) as their main home language[37]. Therefore we can assume that a majority of GME learners do not speak Gaelic at home, and consequently school closures in 2020 will have had a negative impact on the language development of these pupils, particularly younger pupils who may not yet be confident engaging with the written language independently. It is reasonable to expect this impact to continue as schools deliver remote learning to most pupils. - A variety of online resources are available to GME pupils to support with language development and immersion learning through Storlànn, E-Sgoil, e-Storas, Education Scotland and BBC ALBA. - Most GME resources can be found on the Comann nam Parant website[38]. - To provide further support while remote learning is taking place Storlànn has recently extended its site to support parents as well as learners and teachers. Also, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has been working with a range of

[36] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetand socialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04
[37] Pupil census: supplementary statistics - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[38] https://www.parant.org.uk/index.php/covid-19-resources-top

	organisations to develop new online facilities, including 'Cleachd i aig an taigh' ('Using Gaelic in the home'). 46) Throughout school closures, and into the future if blended learning were to be required, all pupils will be dependent on digital resources for some of their learning whilst at home. GME pupils will naturally require resources to be available in Gaelic. - All local authorities have been offered grant funding for devices and connectivity as part of our £25m investment to tackle digital exclusion. - There are a variety of online resources available to GME pupils to support with language development and immersion learning through Storlànn, E-Sgoil, e-Storas, Education Scotland and BBC ALBA. To provide further support while home learning is taking place Storlànn has recently extended its site to support parents as well as learners and teachers. Also, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has been working with a range of organisations to develop new online facilities, including 'Cleachd i aig an taigh' ('Using Gaelic in the home').

School staff

Age	Attending school in person
	The recently issued [Coronavirus (COVID-19): school re-opening arrangements for January 2021](#) contains further information on supporting clinically vulnerable staff.

47) A quarter of the teaching workforce are over the age of 50 and around one in twenty are over the age of 60[39].

48) Following consideration by clinicians of the increased risks of transmission of the new strain of coronavirus, new guidance for individuals on the shielding list has been issued for the duration of the lockdown period. Staff at the highest clinical risk (individuals on the shielding list) should work from home, and if they cannot do so, they should not work.

49) For the teaching workforce and classroom assistants, it will therefore be important for school leaders to consider practical options for members of the workforce supporting pupils currently attending school.

- To support with educational continuity, whilst allowing for teachers to stay at home where necessary, and ensuring teacher workload doesn't grow, local authorities are supported to identify additional workforce capacity. This may include:
  - Supporting GTCS registered teachers not currently teaching to return to the workforce;
  - Ensuring that supply staff are fully utilised; and
  - Ensuring that teachers who have not yet secured permanent employment are considered as an integral part of planning.
- The [Guidance on reducing the risks in schools](#) sets out a suite of important mitigations that local authorities and schools will be asked to implement. These include risk assessments, enhanced cleaning regimes, good hand and respiratory hygiene, ventilation, use of PPE where appropriate, continuous vigilance for symptoms, and surveillance, testing and outbreak management.
- £50 million has been allocated to support the recruitment of additional teaching staff.

50) For other members of the workforce, including cleaners, catering staff and technicians, similar considerations will need to be taken to ensure staff can, when required, return to work safely, with awareness of factors unique to each role taken into consideration. For example, cleaners who have previously worked across more than one school site, may be restricted to one school site to begin with.

- The [Guidance on reducing the risks in schools](#) states that risk assessments should be completed that may consider hygiene, ventilation, staff and pupil movement as well as physical distancing, use of PPE where appropriate, |

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[39] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/

	continuous vigilance for symptoms, and surveillance, testing and outbreak management.
Disability	**Staff with disabilities** 51) It is likely that a higher number of school staff with physical disabilities will need to take precautions when returning to school compared to school staff without a disability. • Therefore, guidance on preparing for the new school term highlights that employers should remain mindful of their duties under the Equality Act 2010, and consider additional support from a wellbeing or occupational health angle if appropriate. 52) For members of staff with additional support needs it will be important for any changes to routine to be clearly communicated. **Staff mental wellbeing** 53) Staff suffering with mental ill health may have found the move to remote learning to have a greater negative impact on their wellbeing than their peers. The same group of people may be more likely to be anxious about supporting face to face teaching for vulnerable and key worker pupils. • Local authorities should ensure that managers in school have sensitive, supportive conversations with staff who have concerns about their mental health with wellbeing support services being promoted as part of that.
Sex	**Caring responsibilities** 54) Women make up an overwhelming majority of the education workforce with around 77% of all teachers being women, ranging from 64% in secondary schools to 89% in primary schools[40]. Women also generally carry out the majority of childcare, particularly if lone parents or grandparents with a caring role, who may be without their usual sources of support. 55) Women who are teachers are therefore more likely to have been juggling caring responsibilities with supporting remote learning whilst working from home or whilst working in school. With schools open to vulnerable and keyworker pupils, staff who support that in-school learning, who are also parents or carers, will be dependent upon childcare being available to enable them to work from school. 56) Women who are parents or carers, and who make up the wider education workforce for example learning assistants and cleaners are also likely to be dependent upon childcare being available to enable them to return to their contracted working patterns. • Employers are to be cognisant of caring responsibilities and shape responsibilities and expectations accordingly. **Women's safety and wellbeing**

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[40] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/

	57) There is a risk that there has been an increase in domestic abuse during lockdown. For women impacted by this, a return to the workplace is likely to have a positive impact overall, but support should be available to support these members of staff. **Women's health** 58) At any one time, a proportion of the female education workforce will be dealing with the often debilitating effects of the menopause and other menstrual health issues such as endometriosis. Stress - which we know has increased for some as a result of the pandemic - can exacerbate a number of the symptoms associated with these conditions and returning to a repurposed school estate where access to toilets might have changed may be challenging. With workplaces moving towards being 'menopause friendly' schools should consider how they offer support in this context. 59) It is also worth noting that early research indicates that women aged 50-60 are at the highest risk of developing long-COVID[41].
Gender reassignment	60) Transgender members of the workforce may have experienced delays to gender-affirming treatment due to COVID-19, which could have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. There is no data available to know how many members of the workforce may be impacted.
Pregnancy and maternity	61) Current clinical advice states that pregnant women of any gestation are at no more risk of contracting the virus than any other non-pregnant person who is in similar health. Pregnancy itself however, by altering the body's immune system and response to viral infections in general, can occasionally cause more severe symptoms. Therefore following social distancing guidance is important for all pregnant women and in particular those who are 28 weeks and beyond, in order to lessen their risk of contracting the virus. For women with other medical conditions in addition to pregnancy, this should be considered on an individual basis. 62) A TUC report of 3,400 women who are pregnant or on maternity leave found that 1 in 4 had experienced unfair treatment or discrimination and that low-paid pregnant women were more likely to have lost pay during COVID-19[42]. - Pregnant members of the workforce should continue to follow the latest guidance from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and employers should conduct risk assessments. - The Scottish Government has produced COVID-19 Occupational Risk Assessment Guidance and individual risk assessment for the workplace guidance to support employers in these unique times. **Returning to work**

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[41] Attributes and predictors of Long-COVID: analysis of COVID cases and their symptoms collected by the Covid Symptoms Study App (medrxiv.org)
[42] https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/pregnant-and-precarious-new-and-expectant-mumsexperienceswork-during

	63) Some members of staff will be returning to the workforce after maternity leave and will not have experienced home learning in the same way as their colleagues. Experts have warned Covid-19 has had a negative impact on maternal mental health beyond that seen in the general population, where reported rates of anxiety have more than doubled. Consideration should be given to their re-induction to the workforce, with individual risk assessments to be completed where appropriate.
Race	**Support in the workplace** 64) Discourse in the media and on social media during the COVID-19 crisis has included narratives which contribute to racial stereotypes. Schools should be aware of the increased risk of racist incidents or bullying against particular members of staff, as well as the possible impact on the mental wellbeing of staff. Minority Ethnic (ME) communities make up approximately 1.8% of Scotland's teaching workforce[43]. 65) An analysis of hospitalisations and more severe outcomes among people who have tested positive for COVID-19 has been updated with more recent data to further improve precision of statistical estimates of risk among ethnic minority groups. These results point to further evidence of around a 2-fold increase in risk of admission to critical care or death due to COVID-19 among those of South Asian origin. This increased risk was particularly evident among the Pakistani group and was still apparent after accounting for deprivation, residential care home status and diabetic status. There is evidence of an increased risk of hospitalisation due to COVID-19 among those of Caribbean or Black ethnicity[44]. • Therefore guidance highlights that employers should remain mindful of their duties under the Equality Act 2010, and provide additional wellbeing or occupational health support for example in the form of risk assessments if requested.
Religion or belief	**Wellbeing** 66) With the widely recognised impact of school closures on the wellbeing of pupils and staff, it is likely that staff with a religious role may play a significant role in supporting staff and pupils as schools reopen. • The impact of this aspect of the role on the health and wellbeing of those staff should be taken into account when assessing their specific occupational health support needs.
Sexual orientation	67) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Marriage & civil partnership	68) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Socio-economic disadvantage	69) Some members of the workforce, including those with lower incomes, may be more dependent upon the use of public transport to travel to work. Employers should be aware of the impact of wider restrictions across Scotland.

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[43] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/pages/4/
[44] COVID-19 statistical report 2 December 2020 - Data & intelligence from PHS (isdscotland.org)

Island communities	**Transportation**
	70) When considering the teacher workforce, staff working in rural locations, including on islands, will need to be taken into consideration at a local authority level. This may be a particular issue when a member of staff is required to undertake inter-island travel in order to get to work, if restrictions are required on public transport.
	Digital equity
	71) Staff within remote, rural and island areas, if working from home and engaging in remote learning from January will require digital connectivity.
Gaelic medium education	72) There are 310 FTE GME teachers in Scotland. In line with the general teaching population around a quarter of them are 50 years of age or older[45]. When considering the teacher workforce, GME teachers will also need to be taken into account.

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[45] 2019 Teacher Census Supplementary Statistics - https://www.gov.scot/publications/teacher-census-supplementary-statistics/

Parents, carers and families

Age	**Older parents and carers** 73) Grandparents who are carers may find it more challenging to support remote learning. • The distribution of devices and connectivity solutions may support these families.
Disability	**Parents of children with a disability** 74) The Family Fund Impact of COVID-19 survey, published in May 2020, included 232 families in Scotland seeking to understand how the COVID-19 outbreak is affecting families raising disabled or seriously ill children. The findings showed that two in five families had lost income; the mental health and behaviour of children is being impacted; that the availability of both informal and formal support for children has been seriously reduced and that education is one of the most serious concerns[46]. **Parents with a disability** 75) Some parents with a disability may be cautious about their children adapting to remote learning, which could also impact their mental wellbeing. • Parents with a disability may appreciate additional advice and support around how best to support their children through remote learning, or on whether their children may be eligible to attend school.
Sex	**Caring responsibilities** 76) With women taking responsibility for a majority of childcare, the move to remote learning from January 2021, alongside reduced provision of breakfast and after-school clubs, is expected to have a greater impact on women and their working patterns than men. 77) Young children in particular may require supervision when at home, and it is likely that a greater part of this responsibility will fall to female members of the family. This is expected to impact on parents' ability to work, and may be particularly challenging for those who are experiencing poverty or who are lone parents, of whom the majority are women.
Gender reassignment	78) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that could disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Pregnancy and maternity	79) Experts have warned Covid-19 has had a negative impact on maternal mental health beyond that seen in the general population, where reported rates of anxiety have more than doubled. With school-age children spending a greater amount of time at home, this could increase pressure on pregnant parents/carers who are supporting remote learning.
Race	**Language and communication**

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[46] https://www.familyfund.org.uk/News/health-and-wellbeing-of-disabled-children-at-risk-under-pandemic-as-government-announces-extra-10-million-funding-for-children-with-complex-needs

	80) Parents and carers who speak English as an additional language risk being disadvantaged through not having a full understanding of the steps being taken or the approach to remote learning. • Schools and local authorities should continue to ensure they communicate effectively with all families within their school community. • Local authorities should continue to work with community sources to identify which community languages information should be shared in.
Religion or belief	81) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Sexual orientation	82) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Marriage & civil partnership	83) There are not considered to be any areas of this policy area that disproportionately impact groups with this protected characteristic.
Socio-economic disadvantage	**Home learning** 84) Research from the Sutton Trust[47] suggests that parents on lower incomes feel less confident to support home learning. It is also important to address access to resources, digital connectivity and communication as part of remote learning arrangements. • Following government funding, local authorities are working to ensure disadvantaged pupils have access to a device and internet connection. • There is information to support parents with learning from home available through Parent zone. **Free School Meals** 85) For pupils not attending school in person, there is been a risk that eligible pupils may miss out on free school meals. This could also have had a negative impact on parents and carers through causing them worry or to go without food or other necessities themselves. • Free school meal approaches have continued to be provided to all eligible children and young people throughout the period of school closures. Local authorities have also enabled anyone who, due to personal circumstances, thinks that they are eligible can apply for free school meals at any point. Latest data suggests that around 156,000 children and young people are currently in receipt of a free school meal approach – direct payment, voucher or home delivery. 86) A report by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has found that[48]: • Families have appreciated support with food costs from their schools and local authorities in alarming and difficult times. • Families had positive experiences of all methods of FSM provision, but by far the highest levels of satisfaction were with direct payments to people's

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[47]https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/
[48] https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/The-cost-of-learning-in-lockdown-Scotland-FINAL.pdf

	bank accounts. 81 per cent of families receiving payments say this works extremely or very well, and 90 per cent of these • During the period of school closures local authorities' statutory duty to promote the availability of free school meals to eligible families continued.
Island communities	87) There is not sufficient information available to understand whether there is a disproportionate impact on parents of school-age children in island communities, in comparison to parents in other regions of Scotland.
Gaelic medium education	88) Throughout lockdown and as schools reopen, it remains vital that parents are informed and updated on policy developments. This applies to the GME sector as well as the English medium sector, with Comann nam Pàrant taking a key role in supporting this work. 89) Throughout remote learning, it remains vital that parents are informed and updated on policy developments. This applies to the GME sector as well as the English medium sector, with Comann nam Pàrant taking a key role in supporting this work.

Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment

The move to remote learning impacts all children and young people and the education workforce across Scotland, and the impact of this has been assessed throughout this document. This section looks specifically at the differential impact on independent schools because they, like businesses, are dependent on the income generated by providing education.

90) The independent sector in Scotland consists of 92 schools, educating around 28,000 learners and employing around 4,000 teachers. The 92 may be broken down into the following:
- 21 special residential schools
- 13 special day schools
- 22 mainstream boarding schools
- 36 mainstream day schools

91) From January 2021 all schools are to follow the school reopening guidance and the introduction of remote learning for most pupils. This move may have an impact on pupil numbers going forward, and indeed this may be a worsening situation. Boarding pupils, in particular from other countries, may also not return in the same numbers.

92) Independent schools are expected to continue to experience financial challenges as the pandemic progresses due to:
- potential lower demand from overseas students;
- increased operating costs as a result of implementing enhanced hygiene measures and potentially as a result of operating at less than full capacity to accommodate public health measures; and
- unwinding of existing financial support.

93) In order to support independent schools:

a) We are delaying the commencement of section 17 of the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 until 1 April 2021 to assist mainstream independent schools as they deal with the impacts of Covid-19. Section 17 of The Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 (which removes charitable rates relief from mainstream independent schools) was planned to commence on 1 September 2020 and will now commence on 1 April 2021 instead.

b) All non-domestic properties including independent schools will benefit from a 1.6% rates relief in 2020-21 which will be applied automatically by councils.

Methodology

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was evident that decision makers would be faced with unforeseen challenges, and that it would continue to be necessary to take a broad approach to involving key groups in policy development throughout.

For this reason, the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) was formed. It is co-chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Councillor Stephen McCabe, CoSLA's Children's and Young People's Spokesperson. It brings together ministers, Education Scotland, senior officials and expert representatives from unions, local authorities, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Early Years Scotland (EYS), the Scottish Youth Parliament, and National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS). The group has met regularly since April 2020 and has contributed to policy development at every stage.

It is recognised that the balancing of Covid-related risks and harms in schools has, from the outset, been dependent on decision makers having access to the most up-to-date scientific and medical advice available, in order to protect the health and safety of children, staff and families. Therefore the CERG has sought the views of the Covid-19 Advisory Group and associated sub-group specialising on children's and education issues. These groups have provided data relevant to the school population, drawn on international comparisons and made recommendations to support education experts in their planning.

Whilst it has been necessary to take decisions at pace in response to the new variant of COVID-19, the Scottish Government has sought the views of equality stakeholders in the development of this document.

Key findings

Previous findings showed that school closures had a predominantly negative impact for most of Scotland's children and young people due to the wide range of support that education settings provide, from a community, social and wellbeing perspective, as well as learning. Therefore, it was a particularly challenging decision to take to introduce remote learning for most pupils from January 2021.

Key findings also include the impact on parents and carers, particularly working parents and carers, as well as those experiencing poverty. Throughout remote learning, parents and carers, especially those of younger pupils, have often been required to juggle working life with caring responsibilities. This has been especially challenging for lone parents.

However, the government, as outlined in the [Framework for Decision Making – Assessing the four harms of the crisis](), has taken a decision based on the balance of the four harms.

It is not yet possible to determine whether there is a very different impact on pupils, staff and families in comparison to the school closures in 2020. However, it is reasonable to assume that some of the negative impacts felt during throughout the pandemic and earlier school closures, may continue or be compounded by the move to remote learning:

- It is widely acknowledged that remote learning, while improving in quality, is no replacement for face-to-face teaching. Therefore the attainment gap is expected to continue to widen between the most and the least disadvantaged pupils.
- Due to another period of children and young period spending most of their time at home, and the impact this may have on working parents, there is a risk of more families experiencing poverty and the stress this can cause.
- Another period of children and young people spending a majority of their time at home, unable to interact face-to-face with their peers or school staff, may have a negative impact on the mental health of some. These may be new symptoms, or may be the reappearance or worsening of previous symptoms.

Conversely, it is also reasonable to assume that, in comparison to school closures in 2020, some negative impacts may be reduced:

- Throughout school closures in 2020, vulnerable and key worker children had access to 'hub' schools only. By allowing all schools to be open to vulnerable and key worker children, this allows those children to attend a familiar setting with familiar staff.
- This also allows for a greater number of pupils to attend school on a national level while adhering to physical distancing guidelines.
- It is assumed that due to the passage of time and the experience of lockdown in 2020, that most members of the education workforce will feel more confident with delivering remote learning, and there are more resources available to support them.
- With significantly reduced numbers attending school in person and the impact this has on community transmissions (e.g. drop off and pick up times), there is an overall positive impact on the health of school communities due to reduced cases of COVID-19.
- For pupils, staff and families who have been concerned about transmission of COVID-19 (e.g. those who are clinically vulnerable, or whom live with someone who is clinically vulnerable), the move to remote learning may also provide some relief.

Conclusion

It has been recognised throughout the pandemic that COVID-19 will have had a negative impact on many children and young people, staff and families across Scotland, particularly groups with protected characteristics and those experiencing disadvantage. We know that school provides, amongst many other things, opportunities, support and safety for Scotland's children and young people, and it is acknowledged that schools are less able to provide this range of services with remote learning in place for the majority of pupils.

It is widely recognised that remote learning for most is not a preferred long-term approach to educating and supporting children and young people as they develop. For this reason, the government has made clear its intention to prioritise the reopening of schools for some or all pupils as soon as the science indicates that it is safe to do so.

As we progress through remote learning, and move towards the reopening of schools for more pupils, the findings in this document support the view that there should be an appropriate focus on recovery and support, with recognition that the impacts of the pandemic will be felt into the future.