

Leas Phrìomh Mhinistear agus Rùnaire a' Chaibineit
airson Foghlam agus Sgìlean
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for
Education and Skills



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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02 November 2020

Dear Larry,

Thank you for your letter of 26 October, confirming the continued support from you and your members for schools to be safe, open and welcoming and setting out your thoughts on the Strategic Framework. Since the Framework was published on Friday work has been on-going, in partnership with local government, unions and the wider education sector to test and identify refinements across all community-wide protection measures in each Level. As you know the Framework was debated in the chamber this afternoon and I can assure you that we have listened very carefully to all views offered on the overall direction and detail of the Strategic Framework.

Throughout our response to the pandemic, and specifically since schools reopened in August, we have been transparent and reassuring in our efforts to protect the safety, health and wellbeing of our school staff as part of the overall approach to preventing the spread of coronavirus. Communication and dialogue with trade unions, staff, parents/carers and children and young people remains a central element of preserving confidence in the arrangements that have been put in place to protect pupils and staff.

Over the course of the past seven months schools and local authorities across Scotland have worked hard to deliver online and remote learning successfully where required. I am confident that, in the event of local outbreaks, arrangements are in place for localised remote learning for individuals or groups. Education Scotland has worked with key partners to develop a shared national offer for schools to draw on which coordinates and works alongside local contingency plans for learning by schools, teachers and Local Authorities.

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire
Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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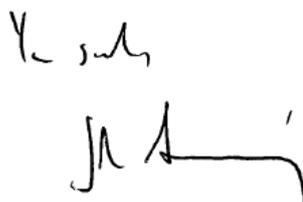
In delivering all of this I have been clear that if capacity in the teaching workforce is insufficient to meet the current challenges, action will be taken to quickly mobilise additional teachers. You will be aware that I asked the General Teaching Council for Scotland to make contact with individuals whose teacher registration has lapsed within the last 3 years, including recently retired teachers, to establish their willingness and availability to return to teaching. The GTCS have done this and stand ready to engage with local authorities to mobilise these additional teachers should this be required based on local need. We will continue to work with COSLA to monitor progress, and we expect that a breakdown of the number of additional teachers recruited by local authority will be available at the end of November.

Overall, the evidence we have to date suggests these and other arrangements are working well. It is now necessary to reflect on our collective experience and views on the Strategic Framework so that the decisions we make achieve the necessary balance required to tackle the four harms we know the virus causes.

Neither the Strategic Framework nor our updated guidance on reducing risks in schools, which was published last week, require any automatic move to blanket school closures or remote or blended learning. The measures we have put in place in wider society will help protect that. All such decisions will continue to be made in partnership with local incident management teams and on the independent advice of local Directors of Public Health, who will take full account of school safety and wider public health considerations within their locality in line with their statutory duties.

By keeping the virus under control in our communities, we significantly reduce the likelihood of it entering our schools. This inevitably involves strengthening protection measures where necessary, and ensuring effective plans are in place should any move from full time in-school learning be required. I am grateful for your support in this matter.

I very much welcome our continued discussions on the issues of school safety and I am determined to ensure that every measure that can practicably be taken is taken to ensure this is the case.



JOHN SWINNEY

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