

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Joyce White, Chief Executive

Subject: Council Motion: Review of the maximum COVID Safe Capacity in Secondary Schools

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to advise Council of the outcome of the review of the maximum COVID safe capacity of pupils and staff in secondary schools and the potential impact of blended learning as a further mitigation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** Council is asked to:
- (a) note the significant efforts of teachers and support staff in maintaining school based education since the re-opening of schools in June 2020.
 - (b) note the Public Health and Health and Safety contents within the report.

3. Background

- 3.1** On Wednesday 25th November, West Dunbartonshire Council agreed the following motion:

This Council believes that education is best delivered in the classroom but that making schools safe for pupils, teachers and staff must remain a top priority. However, the Council is concerned that there continues to be a rise in the number of cases in Education settings.

The Report shows that there have been 117 recorded COVID-19 positive cases, with 1,873 persons classed as close contacts in terms of Test and Protect. This is worrying for pupils, parents, teachers and other school staff.

Council requests that the Chief Executive conducts an urgent review of the maximum COVID Safe Capacity of pupils and staff in secondary schools; during level 4 restrictions and taking into consideration concerns of staff and trades unions that social distancing is really difficult when schools are filled to 100% capacity.

- 3.2** On Monday 23rd November the local branch of the EIS wrote to the Chief Education Officer requesting implementation of blended learning as soon as practicable because teachers are anxious about the risk of COVID-19 to their health. Our understanding of the EIS position is that it reflects the views of teachers. The letter stated:

“EIS policy is that schools in Level 4 areas should move to blended or remote learning.

We continue to support the fact that schools should remain open as we share the understanding of their importance.

However blended learning would crucially allow for social distancing and tighter control measures for pupil movement in schools. This would improve safety for all within the school and support measures to suppress the virus in the wider community.

Current government measures are designed to create some level of opportunity for families to gather at Christmas, yet teachers are forced to be in schools with large numbers of pupils and colleagues, and suffer the increased risk as a consequence.

With numbers of infections among pupils having rocketed from around 400 in September to around 5,000¹ in mid November, teachers are now even more anxious about the impact on their health.

The move would also emphasise the gravity of the situation for pupils and parents and hopefully reduce the present culture of parties and sleep overs which the government are blaming for increased Community infection levels. For these reasons we are now formally requesting that the plans for blended learning are put in place as soon as practically possible.”

- 3.3** In August 2020 West Dunbartonshire schools opened full time to all pupils, following a period of school closures from March to June 2020 due to the pandemic. The Service developed plans to support recovery from any loss of learning resulting from the period of school closures and contingencies for any COVID-19 cases and resultant absences.
- 3.4** West Dunbartonshire Schools are COVID-19 safe adhering to Health and Safety Executive Policy and Scottish Government COVID-19 guidance for schools, ‘*Reducing the Risks from COVID-19 in Schools*’ (updated 30 October 2020). This guidance aligns with Scotland’s COVID-19 Strategic Framework and is updated on a regular basis. Scotland’s COVID-19 Strategic Framework prioritises keeping schools open because it recognises the impact of the pandemic on children and young people. West Dunbartonshire schools presently meet the safety requirements as specified in Scottish Government guidance, and validated through visits from WDC’s Health & Safety Team.
- 3.5** In October the Health and Safety Executive conducted COVID secure spot checks in West Dunbartonshire schools. The Health and Safety Executive were satisfied with West Dunbartonshire Schools’ risk assessments which were based on schools operating at full capacity. All visits were positive, reporting evidence of much planning and organising to manage the risk of transmission of coronavirus. Regular drop-in sessions update Head Teachers

¹ No source reference is provided for this statistic.

of changes in guidance enabling effective implementation of COVID safety measures (see section 4.2 below)

It is worth noting that the risk assessments prepared and deemed suitable and sufficient by the HSE were based on full school occupancy/operation as deemed necessary by Scottish Government. In terms of this review, it is the opinion of WDC Health and Safety Officers that we are well placed to continue minimising risk of COVID-19 transmission with the supports, measures and risk assessments in place.

- 3.6** In September 2020 the Council entered a period of further restrictions with clear direction from Scottish Government that schools would remain open; November 2020 saw the move to 'Level 4' with schools to remain open with the protective measures set out in the latest guidance for schools. Risk assessments were again reviewed at this stage, and updated as required.
- 3.7** The National COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) monitors the incidence and prevalence of COVID-19 in school communities across Scotland to inform guidance around safety and wellbeing in schools. The CERG also considers current COVID-19-related data in relation to children and young people and their associated workforce, such as the number of tests and positive cases reported, and the attendance and absence of both children and staff in childcare and school settings. Neither the Strategic Framework nor the guidance for schools requires any automatic move to school closures or remote/blended learning as a result of a specific protection level. The measures put in place across the country at different levels of the Strategic Framework have been designed to allow schools to remain open safely.
- 3.8** All measures required at 'Level 4' are in place across our establishments. The only way to reduce capacity would be implementation of blended learning in addition to 'Level 4' measures. This would however have an impact on families, on wellbeing and on learning, teaching and attainment particularly if we are the only Council in Scotland to take this action.

4. Main Issues

4.1 Review of COVID safe capacity of secondary schools

- 4.1.1** West Dunbartonshire schools implement COVID-19 safe policy and practice. In line with legal duties under health and safety regulations and adhering to the national guidance for schools, the Service has implemented all of the key public health measures required by local authorities to minimise the risks and prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children and staff. A programme of COVID secure inspection visits has been conducted by WDC Health and Safety and Education Officers to ensure schools continue to be COVID secure and compliant.

4.1.2 The Service has been supported by colleagues across the Council including Asset Management, Facilities Management, Procurement, Health and Safety, Environmental Health and Human Resources. In West Dunbartonshire we ensure our schools and ELCC's are able to operate safely with appropriate measures, adaptations and PPE in place.

4.1.3 West Dunbartonshire Council must ensure that it complies with Education Legislation which required Education Authorities to provide 190 days school education per year. Clearly that creates an expectation that schools will be open to all pupils for the 190 days. The Council has a statutory duty to provide adequate and efficient provision of school education and for the reasons detailed in sections 5.3 and 5.4 of this report blended learning will prejudice the Council's ability to fulfill this duty. Similarly for those reasons and given the other issues raised in this report it is likely that any unilateral move towards blended learning contrary to the current Scottish Government advice which is based on the Scottish Government's scientific advice would leave the Council open to challenge by way of judicial review by an interested party.

4.2 COVID-19 safe measures in West Dunbartonshire Schools

4.2.1 The Service has ensured schools and ELCCs are able to operate safely with appropriate measures, adaptations and PPE in place. The Service has produced a COVID Policy for Education which is implemented in all schools which detail risk mitigating measures to be deployed.

4.2.2 Personal hygiene: At all times schools have had regular access to supplies of hand sanitiser and hand washing facilities. Good use of signage across schools has promoted the need for good personal hygiene. Key personal hygiene messages have been shared with parents/carers.

4.2.3 Enhanced hygiene: At all times schools have had appropriate and regular access to relevant PPE.

4.2.4 Enhanced cleaning regime: There has been an enhanced cleaning regime put in place in all establishments. This includes; day cleaners in all establishments, identification and focus on high touch/risk areas and increased cleaning of shared areas and resources.

4.2.5 Face coverings: From 2 November the Scottish Government made it mandatory for staff and Senior Phase pupils to wear face coverings. Secondary Head Teachers report that compliance rates range from excellent to very good among their Senior Phase pupils.

4.2.6 Physical distancing: Our secondary schools have followed the Scottish Government guidance for physical distancing which states the scientific advice that physical distancing between young people in secondary schools is not required to ensure safety in schools. Secondary teachers have arranged a 2m space between themselves and young people in their classrooms. As a

precautionary approach the guidance states that distancing should be strongly encouraged wherever practicable between young people, and particularly in the Senior Phase. The advice is clear that secondary schools should ensure that the specific approaches they adopt do not introduce capacity constraints and/or prevent full-time learning in school.

4.2.7 Ventilation & Heating: Guidance for ventilating and heating buildings has been produced with advice from Environmental Health, Health & Safety and Asset Management. This is with Trade Unions for consultation. Heating and ventilating a classroom at the same time is challenging. Advice has been given to staff, pupils and parents concerning how best to keep warm in a room that is well ventilated.

4.2.8 Senior Phase: From 2 November, where the timetable allows, Senior Phase students have been asked not to attend school if they have free periods, thereby reducing the number of young people in the school building at any one time.

4.3 Public Health Scotland/ WDC Education Service/Environmental Health

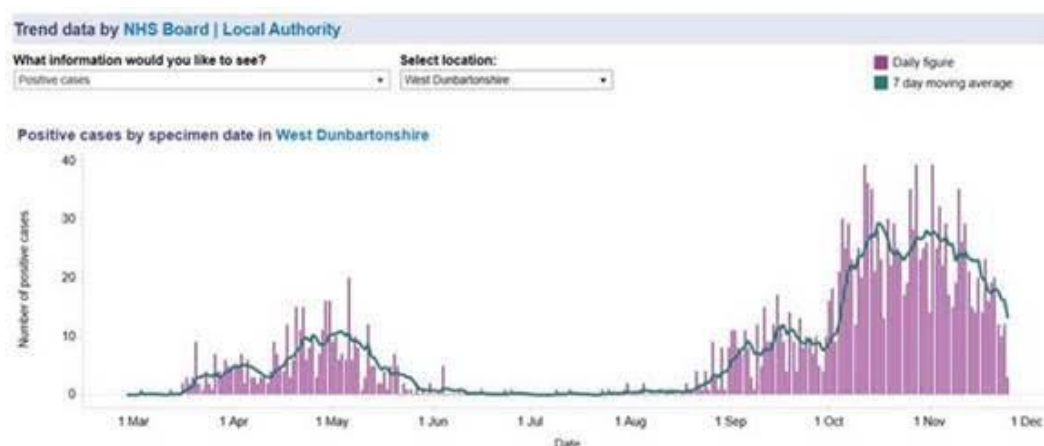
4.3.1 There is a very robust policy and process for managing COVID cases in schools following an established WDC protocol for education management of COVID cases. The protocol was developed with colleagues from Environmental Health, Education and Civil Contingencies Services.

4.3.2 Test and Protect: Active engagement with Public Health Scotland Test and Protect is necessary to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. WDC Schools' Protocol is in place for management of a positive case scenario which ensures there is a clear and consistent process and all necessary follow up actions are taken promptly.

4.3.3 Self-isolation: Schools ensure that those young people or staff who show COVID-19 symptoms stay at home to self-isolate.

4.4 Office of National Statistics and Public Health Scotland Data

4.4.1 Overall, there has been a decline in the number of positive cases in the wider population in West Dunbartonshire since November. This would suggest that the existing mitigating measures in place in 'Level 4' are having a positive impact in repressing the virus.



4.4.2 Analysis by the SAGE Children's Task and Finish group using Office of National Statistics data shows no difference between the positivity rates of pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers and staff, relative to other worker groups of a similar age. This is the same when including household members of such groups. Experimental analyses undertaken by Public Health Scotland also indicate that teachers are not at an increased risk of testing positive for COVID-19, more detailed analysis will be available shortly.

4.4.3 Research from Public Health Scotland is that transmission from staff-to-staff is most common; among staff and students was less common; and student-to-student spread is rare. A qualitative analysis around incidents in Scottish schools indicated that in-school transmission was largely found to be related to teacher-to-teacher or (more rarely) teacher-to-pupil transmission.

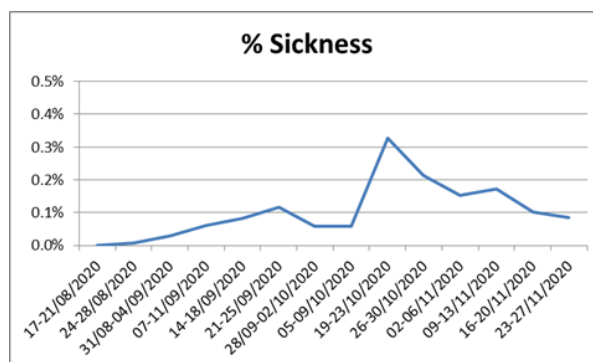
4.4.4 International comparators from the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-group suggest that there is no consistent pattern of relationship between the reopening of schools and increases in case numbers.

4.5 Pupil Attendance

4.5.1 In West Dunbartonshire secondary school attendance remains at a level consistent with previous years, at 91.2%. Of this 8.8% not attending, only 1.3% of absence relates to COVID-19, with only 0.1% as a result of positive testing.

4.5.2 At the time of reporting, the number of days of absence recorded due to secondary pupils testing positive for COVID-19 is 390 out of a possible 382,039 or **0.1%**

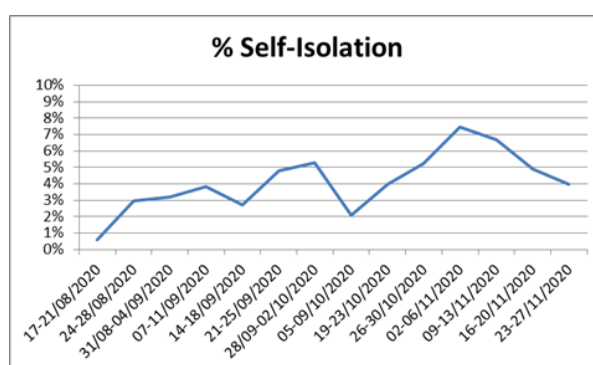
4.5.3 From a high point of **0.3%** recorded as testing positive for COVID-19 immediately following the October holidays, the rate is reducing, as shown in the following chart:



4.5.4 The data shows a reduction in the number of young people testing positive since October. It should be noted that a spike in positive cases occurred on return from the October break, suggesting that infection was not caused by school attendance, but rather community transfer. If this is the case, then the

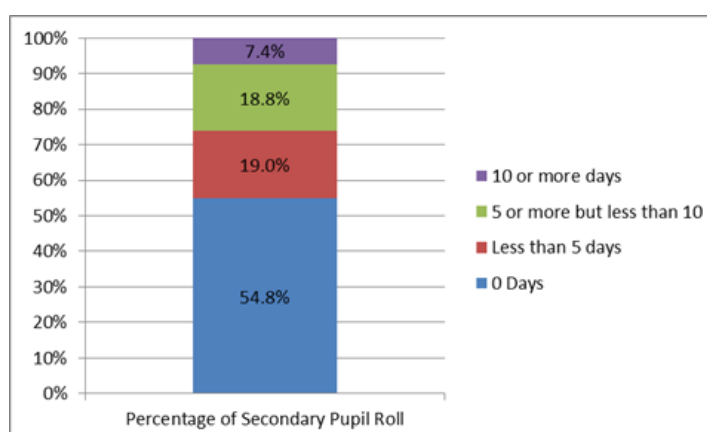
data would suggest that the transmission was due to community rather than schools.

- 4.5.5** The percentage of those being asked to self-isolate due to being identified as a close contact is also in decline since a peak in early November:



- 4.5.6** At the time of reporting, those asked to self-isolate has resulted in a total loss of 15,166 days – 3.97% of the total number of school days. Whilst this number is relatively small, 45.17% of the student population have each had to self-isolate at some stage this session. Where young people have been asked not to attend school, they have been supported remotely in their learning.

The number (and %) of secondary pupils who have 0 school days recorded as COVID-19	2,994	54.83%
The number (and %) of secondary pupils who have less than 5 school days recorded as COVID-19	1,036	19.00%
The number (and %) of secondary pupils who have 5 or more but less than 10 school days recorded as COVID-19	1,029	18.80%
The number (and %) of secondary pupils who have 10 or more school days recorded as COVID-19	402	7.40%
Total secondary student population	5,461	100.00%



4.6 Staff Attendance

- 4.6.1** There has been a total of 15 positive cases in secondary schools amongst teaching and support staff between August and November². This represents a total of 2.31% of the workforce, unable to attend work for a total of 150 days out of a possible 46,656 (0.32%).

Number of positive cases amongst staff	Teaching Staff	Support Staff	Combined
Aug – Nov	7	8	15

For teaching staff alone, 7 members of staff have tested positive since August. This represents 1.35% of the workforce, unable to attend work for a total of 70 days out of a possible 37,440 (0.19%).

- 4.6.2** Between August and November 107 members of staff in secondary schools have been asked to self-isolate having been identified as a close contact of someone who tested positive (16.51% of secondary workforce). Those asked to self-isolate has resulted in a total loss of 695 days – 1.49% percent of the total number of school days.
- 4.6.3** For teaching staff alone, 77 teachers in secondary schools have been asked to self-isolate having been identified as a close contact of someone who tested positive (14.81% of secondary teaching workforce). Those asked to self-isolate has resulted in a total loss of 485 days – 1.30% percent of the total number of school days.

4.7 Stakeholder Views

4.7.1 Facilities Management

It is worth noting that many FM staff working as cleaners and catering staff are parents and grand-parents who have chosen these jobs as they can work around school hours for their children. Facilities Management note that a Blended Learning model will result in significant pressure on staffing availability across the wider Council. For example, in Educational Services there would be a risk to the capacity to ensure appropriate enhanced cleaning regimes established across our schools.

4.7.2 Head Teachers

It is the shared view of the secondary Head Teacher group that:

- Current risk assessment and COVID-19 protocols noted in 4.2 effectively

¹ Due to the small numbers involved, this cannot be shown by establishment or by month as it would make it possible to identify individuals

mitigate risks to staff during the current pandemic. All protocols and measures have been planned and implemented in conjunction with staff Trades Unions health and safety representatives.

- Existing contingency plans were devised to support the safe reopening in August 2020. Since then, schools have been fully operational in line with Scottish Government guidance. A move to blended learning at this point would require considerable additional strategic planning, resulting in a very significant reduction in the number of young people accessing learning, teaching and assessment in school on a daily basis.
- They share concerns regarding the logistics of all teachers being required to teach full time in school whilst also delivering online support via direct live learning and note this is not feasible. Despite significant investment in staff training and ICT, they continue to have concerns regarding equity of experience in home learning due to increased dependency on ICT infrastructure at home and at school. It is noted that teacher representative groups are not supportive of simultaneous face to face teaching and online direct teaching.
- They note the uncertainty over finalised arrangements for the 2021 examination diet and the challenges of gathering quality evidence necessary to estimate grades for candidates. Reducing face to face teaching time may make it impossible to deliver all aspects of the curriculum and generate the necessary assessment evidence. This will inevitably create additional workload and anxiety for our teaching staff and pupils.
- They note the proposed move is particularly concerning in light of the deprivation that already exists for the young people of West Dunbartonshire Council and will widen the equity and poverty related attainment gap.

4.7.3 Pupil Voice

Schools consulted with pupils regarding their recent experience of lockdown and a meeting was held with the WDC Pupil Leadership Group for the purposes of this review report. Views of pupils:

- Feel schools are safe and all young people, especially those in the Senior Phase, have a clear understanding of the safety protocols and processes;
- See safe practices such as sanitising, wearing face coverings and physical distancing are now a normal part of their daily routines; there were plentiful supplies of wipes and sanitiser and that Senior Leadership teams are distributing masks daily;
- For those young people in Broad General Education (BGE) the wearing of face coverings could be more explicitly enforced, however that compliance in Senior Phase was for almost all young people;

- Young people feel well supported by staff in schools and that the Pastoral Care teams are engaging with them regularly to support their wellbeing;
- Opportunities to learn with peers and to socialise is a key aspect of their wellbeing, as this was a struggle for them during 'lockdown';
- Young people appreciate the work that their teachers are doing to enable them to engage with their learning through google classroom, if they need to isolate, then they felt included in the learning. There were examples of live learning, virtual supported study before and after school and ongoing learning resources through google classrooms;
- Not being in a class face to face with your teacher has a negative impact on motivation and the progress they can make when they encounter a challenge with their learning, and cannot access face to face support in real time;
- Particular concern for those in the BGE as per the models of reduced time in school and the negative impact that this would have on their learner journey and preparation for the Senior Phase;
- In-school supports and services wouldn't be able to be accessed by children and young people who need these if there were to be a blended model. They spoke of breakfast clubs, distribution of snacks at break times, paired reading and access to Pastoral Care teams;
- They would always prefer to be in school 100% of the time but expressed the opinion that if numbers of positive cases were to show a concern in a particular year group that a more targeted and specific approach could be taken with that year group engaging in blended learning while all others remain in school; and
- Their voices are being sought and listened to in relation to their learning and wellbeing and know how to raise a concern if they have any worries in relation to the COVID-19 safety of their school. They spoke of feeling empowered to do this.

4.7.4 Parent Views

At the recent WDC Parent Forum, the views of parent were sought:

- They are confident that schools have all of the measures in place to mitigate any risk, they are aware of the protocols in place, they confirm that their children feel safe;
- They acknowledged the challenge to ensure that all young people comply with the wearing of face coverings, they noted that they are aware that school staff are relentless in their enforcement of this;

- Due to the period of lockdown and self isolation a number of children and young people are struggling with mental health;
- Concerns around the psychological impact of missed time in school, with their peers, with face to face learning - especially for those in the Senior Phase and their concerns that they are losing time in crucial SQA years;
- That their children and others struggling with ongoing assessment with the need to get evidence of learning for National 5 and worries about uncertainty around SQA arrangements for Higher and Advanced Higher (This has subsequently been clarified by the DFM). The parents are concerned that there is a lot of pressure, especially if young people lose more time due to periods of isolation and absence;
- Strong views that the young people who have missed any school for a period will not be on a level playing field with others, parents expressed concern over this; and
- That their position is that schools should be kept open as they feel the numbers of positive cases do not warrant school closure.

5. Options to reduce capacity

5.1 Young people in Scotland are entitled to 25hrs education per week. Reducing the numbers of pupils being educated in West Dunbartonshire's secondary school buildings requires provision of home learning and personal study to ensure young people are provided with their weekly legal entitlement to education. The option of blended learning allows for reduced pupil numbers in school at any given time and an attendance rotation in order to achieve this goal.

5.2 A Blended Learning approach provides:

- a mixture of online and face-to face teaching.
- learning that happens in real time (synchronous) alongside a teacher such as online discussions
- learning which happens at the learners pace (asynchronous) such as project work.

The Key Principles for Blended Learning are set out in **Appendix 1**.

5.2.1 In June 2020 West Dunbartonshire Secondary Schools conducted scoping exercises to identify options for delivery of blended learning with consideration given to number of pupils in buildings and the number of pupils at home. These options for delivery (**Appendix 2**) were developed by individual schools and they do not offer a consistent level of provision. Guidance on social distancing in secondary schools subsequently changed following these plans being developed.

- 5.2.2** Following consultation with Head Teachers as part of this review, the model they would require to implement blended learning would be 50% of pupils in school and 50% of pupils at home. This would mean each young person would engage in 12.5 hours of their 25 hour weekly entitlement in school and 12.5 hours at home. Possible models for this are given in **Appendix 3**.
- 5.2.3** Teachers would be expected to fulfil their contractual obligation to 35hrs working week with direct class contact of 22.5 hrs. As the teachers would be engaged in direct class contact with all young people who would attend over the course of the week, providing capacity to support young people learning at home will be challenging.
- 5.2.4** During the earlier lock-down period a remote learning model was in place as teachers worked from home and provided lessons to children and young people via Google Classroom. Their time during this period was not divided between online and in-class lessons. This approach was essential during this time when no other options were available to engage pupils and help them to prepare them for return to full time, face to face learning education.
- 5.2.5** The Service analysis of levels of engagement in remote learning during lockdown has identified that children from our families experiencing poverty and disadvantage found it more difficult to engage continuously in the remote learning provision. Our working parents have highlighted concern about managing their own work at home and providing sufficient support for the education of their own children when engaged in learning at home. Our local information matches national research data:
- Social isolation and loneliness are a growing concern for young people with literature suggesting that it is the duration of loneliness, rather than its intensity, that is more strongly related to poorer outcomes
 - Stress and anxiety appear to be higher in older children (teenagers)
 - Children in families with low incomes appear to be less confident with supporting home learning (Scottish Government, November 2020)
- 5.2.6** It is recognised that a blended model in the context of restricted school time for learners, remains a significant challenge and is no substitute for full-time classroom based learning and teaching; nonetheless, delivered effectively a blended approach can mitigate at least some of the adverse impact of part-time in-school education.

5.3 Ensuring Equitable Experience

- 5.3.1** Presently our schools are in 'Level 4' with others across the central belt. We already face an equity issue when compared with schools in lower levels, such as our neighbours in Argyll & Bute. Reducing the poverty related attainment gap is a key national and local priority. As an authority we are committed to supporting our young people and communities to flourish and grow. Since 2015 a strategy to raise attainment and achievement has focussed on ensuring equitable access to high quality experiences and

outcomes for our young people. The provision of a blended model reduces the contact time for children with staff and their peers. There is clear evidence that time out of school has a detrimental effect on children and young people's wellbeing, including impacts on developmental and mental health. Evidence suggests that the mental health of adolescents is particularly affected. These detrimental effects are particularly prevalent for vulnerable children and young people. School closures put educational outcomes at risk, especially for vulnerable children and young people. COVID-19 increases educational and social inequities for children and young people. The outcomes we strive for are ones that will support them in life as young adults who are able to succeed in life, in study and employment. No other schools in the central belt are considering moving to blended learning, so we would further widen the equity gap if we did.

5.4 Senior Phase Qualifications

- 5.4.1** As part of the process to gather evidence of assessment, schools have timetabled Interim Assessments (Prelims) to take place in January-February. Moving to a blended learning model is likely to create increased pressure on both teachers and senior pupils at a time when they are preparing for these critical assessments which will determine their future progression opportunities.
- 5.4.2** If we move to a model of reduced time in schools there will be limited access to a teacher when our young people are learning at home and not in schools. This is a different model of provision to the time of lockdown where all teachers were working from home. All of our teachers will be in school teaching classes with a percentage of our pupils at home studying remotely. The EIS has published their own guidance for Blended Learning for their members (5 November 2020). In this, the EIS say they believe that teacher staffing of online teaching, whether delivered by teachers working from school or home, should be voluntary.
- 5.4.3** The reduced class contact time will also mean that the notional number of hours required (the learning time that it would take a learner to meet the outcomes defined) to complete an SQA qualification will not be able to be achieved, leaving young people at significant disadvantage compared to their peers in other local authorities that are not moving to model that by its nature leads to reduced class contact time.

5.5 Supporting Children, Young People and Families: Wellbeing

- 5.5.1** As a service we are very mindful of the impact of COVID-19 on our children and young people, many of whom may have suffered loss and trauma as a result. For all learners a key focus during the Recovery Phase needs to be health and wellbeing, this is our key driver in recovery planning and in establishment of our blended model as suggested by the Education Recovery Group research.

5.5.2 We have adapted our strategic approaches to supporting wellbeing, loss and change. Whilst we can and have provided support remotely to pupils, the most effective delivery of these programmes is within the safe established group settings schools provide. All research on Adverse Childhood Experiences confirms the value of significant positive adult relationships is key to supporting and building resilience in our children and young people. We have contingency within our blended model to ensure regular communications with young people considered particularly vulnerable and in ensuring all young people are aware of the range of ways they can access individual support if required. However, it is recognised that the most consistent and effective provision of social and emotional wellbeing support is delivered in a timely and responsive manner in the school setting by the significant adults with whom safe nurturing relationships have been established.

5.5.3 Recent national surveys of Head Teachers and their deputies on online learning during the coronavirus lockdown identifies that 39% of the 1,558 surveyed identified the two biggest barriers to effective learning in a blended model of learning were low pupil participation and poor or no internet connection. We have established protocols within our schools to address these concerns such as regular contacts with young people and families considered vulnerable and at risk of non-engagement and supporting digital provision.

5.5.4 It is recognised that for some of our most vulnerable families, despite mitigation factors, issues still remain. Locally, we recognise the challenges of chaotic home lives, substance misuse, parental mental health issues, domestic abuse and poverty are significant barriers to positive and effective home learning for some of our pupils and families. This is confirmed in national research, (*Coronavirus (COVID19): impact on children, young people and families-evidence summary*), which identifies there is evidence that children and families with low incomes are spending less time on home learning and have been at a cumulative disadvantage. The Education Recovery research group findings also note young people were concerned about the loss of routine and coping measures during lockdown; both suggesting the routines, continuity and face to face delivery schools offer are more conducive to effective pupil support and engagement in learning.

5.6 Child Protection

5.6.1 We have ensured continuity and adherence to Child Protection Procedures throughout the COVID 19 pandemic; revising collaborative practices and building upon the effective multi-agency working already established to support children, young people and families. The effective use of digital platforms has enabled all establishments to continue to plan effective support with families and partners. A recent survey by the British Association of Social Workers identifies concerns of increased risk for many families as a result of isolation. It recognised there were increased challenges in ensuring effective safeguarding given inabilities of staff to carry out home visits and school closures where the day to day “eyes on” of teachers was not

possible. Throughout lockdown we operated a range of childcare hubs across the authority to ensure the wellbeing and safety of some of our most vulnerable for whom home learning was considered an increased risk to them or a factor contributing to family stress. Childcare Hubs would not be possible within a blended learning model at this time. We have 55 children and young people on the Child Protection register at present and a significant number of others who are supported less formally but significantly by social work and educational services. Professional consensus is the most effective and regular way of ensuring their wellbeing, safety and responding to their needs is through daily attendance at school.

5.7 Transport

- 5.7.1** Existing contracts for school transport would have to be amended, as the volume of young people travelling to school would reduce. Should we be looking to introduce social distancing on school transport, the volume of vehicles required would increase. The scale of this task is significant, as every contract would have to be reassessed. There would be financial penalties for the council in making changes to contracts, and a negative financial impact on many of our small local taxi contractors as they would not be required to transport as many young people to school on a daily basis.

5.8 Free School Meals

- 5.8.1** Evidence from the child poverty action group showed that families entitled to free school meals valued having that support continue during lockdown. Should a move to a blended model happen local authorities should continue the provision of a free school meal or an alternative to all children who are eligible. We have 5,316 pupils registered for Free School Meals which currently costs £65,000 per week. Our current model ensures that all children and young people entitled to a free school meal are offered a hot, healthy lunch option every day whilst in school. While we would be able to continue supporting lunch provision on a blended model via direct payment to families, it does incur additional costs to the Council of approximately £23,000 (£5,000 for mainstream secondary schools) per week. It is also the case that children and young people would then be dependent on their families being able to purchase and provide the lunch with funds provided while at home.

6. People Implications

- 6.1** Throughout the pandemic West Dunbartonshire Council have been committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of employees and have followed Scottish Government advice regarding the safety of employees in the workplace, including consideration of those who were on the shielding list. This advice has been updated and shared regularly with managers and employees across the Council as well as Trade Union colleagues.

- 6.2** The advice from Scottish Government relating to employees who had been part of the shielding category is that, whilst in Level 4 restrictions, they can continue to attend work if they cannot work from home and the workplace is COVID-19 safe. A range of measures highlighted in this report have been put in place to ensure that the workplace is COVID-19 safe. In addition to these overarching measures ongoing consideration has been given to employee's individual circumstances to ensure that, where appropriate, the Council's duty under the Equality Act to put reasonable adjustments in place for those with disabilities is met and that this is subsequently reflected in the individual's risk assessment. This has involved input and support from the individuals themselves, management, Human Resources, Occupational Health, Health and Safety and Trade Union colleagues where appropriate.
- 6.3** Whilst it is imperative that as an employer the Council's obligations in relation to employment law are met, the wider commitment to employee health and wellbeing has been at the forefront of the Council's response to the pandemic. To this end a wide ranging and varied package of supports has been put in place to support employees in returning to the workplace. This has included a particular focus on supporting the mental health of employees as evidenced by the continued provision of counselling and coaching as well as a range of online learning opportunities focusing on resilience, managing anxiety, work/life balance and grief. Beyond the 'face to face' delivery of these supports, recordings of which are available for employees to watch at their own convenience, a significant number of support resources have been shared to sign post employees to external supports where that is helpful.
- 6.4** In order to ensure that appropriate supports are being offered to employees, Wellbeing Advocates are asked to provide feedback on a regular basis about the types of challenges that employees are facing and this feedback directly influences the supports and activities delivered through the Employee Wellbeing Group.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 Potential costs of implementing Blended Learning in Secondary Schools

Item	Cost in £000 per month
School transport - adjustments, decreased usage, social distancing etc.	222
Cost of FSM in context of blended learning	23
Broadband/device access for pupils	15
Staffing costs - additional training, additional resource/recruitment, etc.	14
Total	274

- 7.2** Where there is significant variation in transport contracts they would have to be re-tendered.

8. Risk Analysis

- 8.1** Impact of the ongoing uncertainty and possible services disruption during the pandemic could impact on delivery of strategic outcomes.
- 8.2** Failure to implement an authority-wide strategy to raise attainment and secure improvement will disadvantage our young people and may become a reputational risk to the Council.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1** The assessment highlight significant potential differential impacts for some groups (e.g. cross cutting, disability, sex, human rights) these are detailed in the assessment, but we draw attention to the level of engagement of children in their learning from more deprived backgrounds and the impact on the mental health of young people particularly. This means that appropriate actions must be identified to mitigate possible negative impacts which would prove particularly challenging.

It is also important that the impact of the introduction of any kind of blended learning is monitored after implementation, and that this feeds back into provision.

10. Consultation

- 10.1** Stakeholders have been consulted as part of the review including Head Teachers, Pupils and Parents
- 10.2** Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.

11. Strategic Assessment

- 11.1** Strong governance and contingency planning in place for the education recovery plan.
- 11.2** This reports reflects the Council's 2017-2022 overarching priority to reduce inequalities for the people of West Dunbartonshire which supports improved outcomes for all learners in our community.

Laura Mason
Chief Education Officer
December 2020

Person to Contact: Laura Mason, Chief Education Officer

Appendixes:

- Appendix 1 – Key Principles of Blended Learning
- Appendix 2 – School Blended Learning Delivery Models:
June 2020
- Appendix 3 – Possible Blended Learning Models:
November 2020

Background Papers:

Wards Affected:

Appendix 1 – Key Principles of Blended Learning

Key principles for a blended learning model include:	What does this mean for teachers	Considerations
<p>Class teacher retains responsibility for planning and organising children's and young people's learning</p> <p>Key learning which is available for learners to revisit as often as necessary opportunities for learners to progress and extend their learning</p>	<p>Teachers will need to consider how they will plan most effectively for both the 'live' teaching and learning which they will deliver and the learning that will take place remotely.</p>	<p>Where this time would come from? The working time agreements to support this?</p> <p>Ensure no additional workload implications for teachers and support staff.</p>
<p>Regular high quality face-to-face learning and teaching</p> <p>Learning opportunities which reflect the principles of Curriculum for Excellence allowing learners to develop their knowledge, skills and attributes in a variety of relevant contexts</p>	<p>Support and resources to be used away from the school/setting require to be differentiated to meet the needs of learners.</p>	<p>Where this time would come from and the working time agreements to support this. To ensure no additional workload implications for teachers and support staff.</p>
<p>A shared understanding between home and school of the blended learning approach and the respective roles and responsibilities of all involved</p>	<p>Parents and families will require support about what blended learning is, what it means for their children and how they can continue to contribute positively and effectively to their children's learning.</p>	
<p>Approaches to assessment of learning and providing feedback that support and capture children's and young people's achievements in school and at home</p>	<p>A revised approach to assessment as ongoing classroom formative assessment opportunities will be minimised to ensure that teachers know the progress that all young people are making.</p>	<p>For young people in the senior phase evidence generated at home can not be used as robust evidence to support teacher professional judgement for SQA qualifications. This is essential for N5, Higher and Advanced Higher alternative assessment models in place for this session.</p>
<p>Ongoing dialogue,</p>	<p>Learners will need to</p>	<p>Ensure that all young</p>

Appendix 1 – Key Principles of Blended Learning

reflection and feedback with learners in relation to their own learning provision of learning activities to ensure engagement for all	adapt to these new circumstances which may require them to complete tasks prior to working directly with their teacher.	<p>people have access to the technology and resources required to enable them to make progress with their learning.</p> <p>Time for teachers to give feedback will need to be considered.</p>
By considering the age and stage of development of learners who require additional support with learning and any learners who may be particularly vulnerable or disadvantaged	Specific consideration will need to be given to young people with additional support needs or those who encountered barriers to engagement during lockdown.	<p>The arrangements required to support children with additional support needs during any blended learning model.</p> <p>For some children and young people with additional support needs the return to any form of home learning may have a significant impact on them, due to further changes in their learning approach.</p> <p>Wherever possible, consistency in learning approaches and support should be maintained.</p>

Clydebank High School – Blended Learning Delivery Model: June 2020

*Plan to extend this to 50% in S3

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Our Lady & St. Patrick's High School – Blended Learning Delivery Model: June 2020

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
S1			All pupils attend 6 x 1 hour periods		
S2			All pupils attend 6 x 1 hour periods		
S3	All pupils attend 4 x 1.5 hour periods			All pupils attend 4 x 1.25 hour periods	
S4	All pupils attend 4 x 1.5 hour periods			All pupils attend 4 x 1.25 hour periods	
S5		All pupils attend 5 x 1.2 hour periods			All pupils attend 5 x 1 hour periods
S6		All pupils attend 5 x 1.2 hour periods			All pupils attend 5 x 1 hour periods

St. Peter the Apostle High School – Blended Learning Delivery Model: June 2020

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
S5/6	50% OF COHORT		50% OF COHORT		FLEXIBLE
S4					
S3 *	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	
S2	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	
S1	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	25% of cohort	

*Plan to extend this to 50% in S3

Appendix 2 – School Blended Learning Delivery Models: June 2020

Vale of Leven Academy – Blended Learning Delivery Model: June 2020

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	S1/2	S4/5/6	S1/2	S4/5/6	S3
PM	S4/5/6	S3	S4/5/6	S3	S1/2

Possible Blended Learning Models: November 2020

It must be considered here the impact that this additional workload may have on the wellbeing of practitioners as through both blended learning modes or rotational face to face/remote learning there is significant face to face time for teachers and support staff.

It should also be noted that teachers as yet have not worked through a blended learning approach nor a rotational model as set out in the contingency planning phase.

Rotational Models	Learners rotate on a fixed schedule between learning online in a one-one, self paced environment and sitting in a classroom with a face to face teacher.			
	Key features	What this looks like for staff	What this looks like for learners	Worth noting
1. Rotation of half classes	<p>Week on/week off rotation</p> <p>Days on/days off model across the week.</p>	<p>100% of staff in school, with a full timetable,</p> <p>Reduced number of young people in their classes.</p> <p>No capacity to provide online support for the other half of the class</p> <p>EIS position is that synchronous live learning of in-class lessons is not acceptable (3.3 & 3.4 of EIS Advice on Blended and Remote Learning).</p>	<p>Face to face contact 50%</p> <p>50% of learners would be in school</p> <p>50% of learners at home learning independently</p> <p>No access to school services, supports, free school meals.</p> <p>Challenge to maintain engagement and motivation on week that they are not being supported directly with their learning face to face.</p>	<p>This model does not feature in any school contingency plan to date as one of the key principles on which to plan blended learning plans was to ensure that all children and young people were in school face to face every week.</p> <p>This was to ensure a relentless focus on the welfare and engagement of learners.</p> <p>Pace of learning affected.</p> <p>The potential that a large</p>

Appendix 3 – Possible Blended Learning Models: November 2020

				<p>number of young people will be in the community during the school day.</p> <p>If days on/days off model young people would not engage in their full curriculum offer as they would miss certain curriculum subjects - a rolling day on day off model would be required which would be challenging for young people, staff and parents.</p>
2. Rotation by year/stage	Individual secondary school contingency planning put into place.	<p>Teachers would not have a full face-to face timetable</p> <p>Would free up time to support classes who are working online from home.</p> <p>teachers still have full classes in front of them so any social distancing concerns will not be alleviated</p>	<p>Face to face contact in school</p> <p>DA BGE: 5 days over 3 weeks S Phase: 5 days over 3 weeks</p> <p>CHS, STPTA and OLSP BGE: 1 day S Phase: 2 days</p> <p>'Flexible Fridays' used for additional</p>	<p>Technical constraints around bandwidth since many teachers will be online at the same time from the one location.</p> <p>Engagement of young people in online independent learning.</p> <p>EIS position that learning should not be live, streamed</p>

Appendix 3 – Possible Blended Learning Models: November 2020

			learning opportunities / support for some young people. VOLA BGE: 3 half days S Phase: 4 half days	learning.
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It is important to note that both rotational models presented do not reflect the principles of true blended learning. It should be noted that during the time that young people are not face to face in the school building they will be engaging in what we describe as remote learning given the union position in relation to expectation of teachers not to engage in 'live' learning or streamed learning.