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### Questions and Answers from Maureen McKenna – Executive Director Education Services

#### INEQUALITY AND ATTAINMENT

**\*We've had a lot of messages from parents concerned that youngsters who are from less privileged backgrounds will be struggling at the moment. Are schools working to stop the attainment gap widening?**

I too am very concerned about the potential for the attainment gap between the least disadvantaged and the most disadvantaged widening. Many of our families through no fault of their own do not have the capacity to support their child's learning. Some do not have access to IT or wifi and although our iPad roll-out has assisted, it was part of a three year planned programme so not everyone has access yet. In addition, broadband would be required in order to maximise the impact of digital learning.

Our schools will continue to work with their families during the closures, offering support and advice, learning plans and where appropriate, resources for learning at home.

We are already starting to think about our 'recovery phase', that is, how we support our children and young people back to school. However, we need a timescale and at this point we don't have one as it is dependent on government advice.

Parents should be assured that we are very aware of this as an issue and are committed to ensuring that all our children and young people continue to improve and achieve their potential regardless of their circumstances.

**\*Poverty amongst minority communities is high. How are schools helping with digital equipment or making home teaching reachable to those families as many parents may have English as a second language?**

Officers from our English as an Additional language team are publishing information and advice as part of the Home Times weekly features to help families. This includes one teacher working on a film of her doing activities with her own children in Polish.

School staff have sent home ideas and activities that children can do at home, so they won't all rely on having internet access as we know this will be a barrier for some families.

**\*Speaking of equipment, there have been questions about the iPad roll out and about access to wifi. Will pupils who don't have online access be disadvantaged?**

**\*And are there any plans to speed up the iPad roll out so that all children in the city have them?**

All three of the above relate to digital learning, our iPad roll-out has helped improve children's access to digital learning. However, we have a three-year plan for this. It was carefully thought out so that we built support and training into it and didn't just issue the iPads. Indeed, at the time we launched, there were some who criticised on social media that issuing iPads was the wrong thing to do – and now it is being suggested that we speed up the roll-out.

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We are considering whether we can speed up the roll-out. However, we were clear from the outset that digital learning had to be supported with appropriate training. The current situation limits our ability to deliver training and, indeed, to issue iPads at scale.

**\*A lot of parents have expressed concern that the supports from different schools vary across the city. One mum said her child's teacher has been in touch once in the three weeks since schools finished and that's all they've had while others are praising the high level of engagement from teachers. Are there plans to make support more uniform across the city? There's also lots of questions about whether more schools could be using Zoom so that pupils can see their teachers.**

When we became aware that the schools were going to close, we issued advice to all schools and nurseries in advance of the final closure decision about the importance of staying connected, particularly with vulnerable families. We were never going to be able to have a one-size fits all approach as each headteacher and their staff know their families and know which families would benefit the most from contact. We also have to be sensitive to teachers who have been advised to work from home and the problems this brings along with the practicalities of contacting families.

If the national advice continues to be that people should stay at home after the spring break then we will need to consider how we continue to maintain contact with families safely across the city.

Updated guidance advising caution on the use of Zoom has been well reported and the council IT service is looking at possible video conferencing solutions that we could safely signpost to schools and families.

### WORKING PARENTS

**\*How are parents working at home meant to do anything other than their work, what can keep young kids occupied while mum and dad are on the phone?**

\*The hardest weeks for children and parents in lockdown might still be to come. After possibly another 12 weeks, locked in, better weather than summer holidays stress levels could be high. If possible could schools be opened for universal Out of School care?

I understand and am sympathetic to parents who are working from home and have young children too. However, there is no expectation that they re-create school in the house. There needs to be a balance maintained and do what's right for your family/work circumstances. I would suggest that for primary-aged children a timetable is created so that parents and children know what they are going to do and when. It doesn't have to be complicated but it would give a routine to the day which families would find helpful. The timetable should be varied and should build in plenty of breaks and time for play – remembering that play is also learning.

The national advice is currently to stay at home and to reduce social contact. Opening the schools for universal out of school care would go completely against that advice.

### PLACING REQUESTS

**\*Will we still find out about placing requests?**

In Glasgow, we are planning to issue the placing request letters by the end of April in line with the legislation and as we would do every year.

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However, parents need to be aware that due to the current situation with COVID-19 the Council has taken the decision to cancel all face to face meetings and Committees. Committee Services will continue to gather in appeals where parents submit them but parents should be aware that, unlike in previous years, it is unlikely that the Appeal Committee will hear appeals in June.

### FROM A PUPIL

**\*Why aren't the school kids getting told more about what the plan is? Have you been telling us the truth about when we go back?**

I am sorry that I cannot be clearer about when we are going to open the schools again – we have tried to be open and honest throughout this whole process – sometimes having to take decisions really quickly and I know this has caused stress to our children and families. But we need government advice on this. I know that the government is as keen as we are to get children and young people back to school but this must be done safely.

### NURSERY

**\*Are parents still having to pay council nursery fees?**

We are not charging for parents' places in GCC settings whether taken up as a key worker, not available due to closure, or the place is not being taken up.

### ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

**\*Many children with additional needs are struggling and showing signs of regression, can anything be put in place for them?**

I'm really sorry to hear this. There has been some support provided for children and young people with complex learning needs in consultation with their families. This all needs to be done safely – a number of children with additional support needs have underlying health conditions and rightly, their parents are keeping them at home.

We are working with our social work colleagues and our headteachers to continue to review what support can be offered while adhering to the current government advice.

### TRANSITION

**\*My son is due to start school in August and I would like to know what the council's plans are in terms of the children starting. Will they push back the school date so they can still have their nursery graduations we have talked of for months and their school visits. Surely if they continue to be closed into the summer they can't expect children to just arrive at school to start primary one with no planning or transition period?**

**\*I am meant to start High School in August. What happens then?**

**\*If the schools don't go back until August, will procedures be put in place for kids moving on from Nursery to primary school and from primary school to high school.**

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**This is an unusual difficult time for the kids to understand and no doubt a lot maybe worried about the next step.**

**\*If return of school is not until the new year (August) then will kids go back to their original class/teacher to complete the months they have missed. I have a P1. Will they basically complete the last 3 months / keep their same teacher?**

**\*Will there be consideration for earlier phased returns for pupils to school, with shortened summer holidays if lockdown is sustained until then?**

**\*Will students have to repeat this year?**

All of the above relate to transition, either transition from nursery into primary or primary into secondary.

Transition planning is really important. Children and young people need to feel secure and confident about where they are going to learn. In normal circumstances, there will be visits planned during the summer term to enable children and young people to get to know their new school and their new classmates. For some children who have additional support needs or are just anxious about change, schools and nurseries plan more visits, sometimes just on their own with a trusted member of staff to walk around the new building to help them be less anxious ahead of an August start.

This year, all those plans have not been able to be made and I know that school staff across the city share the concerns of the people who have written in.

There is no simple response to this because, again, it is dependent on government advice. What I can say is that it will be different this year and we will need to consider the needs of our children carefully. Some of the options might be more of a 'soft start' to primary 1, that is, having a few weeks where the children come in for the morning only as we have done in previous years. However, some working parents may find that challenging. We might consider activities through the summer – this would be dependent on having the staff as teachers would be on holiday then. We are actively thinking about this and considering different scenarios dependent on government advice and will let our families know as soon as we have the information.

I was delighted to see one school post a 'virtual school tour' on their twitter account for the new Primary 1s due to start in August. This is something that other schools might want to adopt and something we will add to the planning list.

## SECONDARY

**\*Have high schools been told not to collect any more 'evidence' for N5, H and AH students?**

I wrote a letter to all families last week with children due to sit exams this year and following the updated SQA advice last Thursday 2 April. We've posted it online and schools have texted the link out to families <https://glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=49063&p=0>

\*Engagement with online lessons is pretty much voluntary. If you have a child who won't engage with the work and that becomes apparent through non-submission of work, or submission of poor work, are teachers going to do anything about it?

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Please be reassured that our teachers know their young people – estimates will not be based on one source of evidence. Teachers will take into consideration everything they know about the young person as a learner.

### HEALTH AND WELLBEING

#### **\*What mental health provision will be put in place to help children through this?**

A number of our schools already have counselling in place through third sector providers and this is continuing, mainly through phone contact.

We have also engaged with Big White Wall – here's the link to the recent Glasgow Times story <https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/18348390.new-website-giving-24-7-mental-health-support-glasgows-teenagers/>

Our educational psychologists are part of the Glasgow Times special advisers and will publish updated information on how to speak to children and young people who are understandably anxious and worried...and even angry about the situation at the moment.

Our schools have also been signposting to online resources including the Young Scot website that's got some very good advice.

#### **\*What options are there for enabling the physical and mental wellbeing of Glasgow children living with limited access to outdoor space, using school facilities or negotiating with Glasgow Life for use of sports pitches etc?**

We encourage community access to our pitches wherever possible in normal times. Families should feel free to use school playgrounds/pitches/parks where they are open. However, government advice is currently to stay at home and to reduce contact with others and only going out once a day in their family groupings to exercise. We must continue to follow this advice and use social distancing rules at all times when out on your daily exercise.

Our PEPASS team are tweeting and posting daily updates on what exercises and activities that can be done in the house or if you have a garden – they are being featured in the Glasgow Times 'Home Times' updates in the paper and online every Wednesday and Friday. Or you can follow them on twitter @PEPASSGlasgow.

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