

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



Department of
Education

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To: School Principals

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Dear Principal

COVID GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Ahead of the new academic year, I want to thank all of the staff working in schools and on Boards of Governors for the dedication that has been shown over the last 18 months in responding to the range of very significant challenges that have arisen because of the pandemic. While many of these are ongoing, I have seen many examples of how the best of our education sector is delivered by child-centred, knowledgeable and professional school staff often going the extra mile for their pupils and colleagues. I believe that the worst of the pandemic is now behind us, however, I know that staff in schools will continue to do everything they can in the new academic year to ensure that our children can continue to access a high quality education in a safe and supportive school environment.

I understand that there will be a number of issues which you would like to have clarity on to support your preparation for the return of pupils and I wanted to update you on the current situation. My officials have been revising the Department's COVID-19 Guidance for Educational Settings over the summer period and it remains my intention to publish this ahead of the new term.

You may be aware of the Executive's decision in principle on 8 July that there would no longer be a requirement in guidance for bubbles and face coverings in classrooms, subject to ratification. The decision to ratify this has been deferred until the Executive meeting on 12 August. While I will continue to encourage Executive colleagues to ratify

this decision, it is ultimately a decision that is to be taken by the Executive, guided by the Department of Health, taking account of the relevant medical and scientific advice.

I am also continuing to engage with Executive colleagues in relation to the current requirement for under 18s who are identified as a close contact of a positive case having to self-isolate for ten days. I am aware of the differing policy approaches being taken across England, Scotland and Wales and the need for a level playing field for pupils, particularly those taking external examinations.

While I recognise that it is not yet possible to provide a definitive update on these issues, I will continue to work with Executive colleagues to resolve these issues as quickly as possible and publish revised guidance ahead of the new academic year. I appreciate your patience as we are in a fast changing period in respect of key restrictions across the UK and the timeframe for making changes has to take account of the prevailing public health position as well as the practical implications for pupils, parents and school staff.

Michelle McIlveen

MICHELLE MCILVEEN MLA
Minister of Education