

2.9.21

Dear Parents and Carers,

We were delighted to welcome children and young people back to school at the start of the new term in August.

We are extremely grateful to you as parents and carers for your understanding and ongoing support through what has been a very difficult 18 months for everyone as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for education and learning have been significant and far-reaching.

It has also been a very challenging period for our Education and school teams who have carried out tremendous work to continue providing high-quality learning for children and young people across East Lothian.

We are all hopeful that the session ahead will be an opportunity for everyone to re-connect in the classroom and benefit from learning alongside and seeing their friends, classmates and teachers.

With us now being several weeks into the new school term, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight a few important aspects in relation to what is currently happening in our schools.

Focus on maintaining in-school learning

While the indications are that the vaccination programme is reducing the harm caused by the virus, we have recently seen a general increase in the number of positive cases of COVID-19 reported in the community. Although this is not unique to East Lothian, it is a reminder that we cannot afford to be complacent and that the virus still presents a risk to public health.

There is a possibility that, in the event of school staff being unwell or being identified as close contacts of people with COVID-19, there may be occasions when some classes are required to revert to remote learning on a temporary basis. This would be an absolute last resort and I would reassure you that, should we face staffing challenges of this nature, we will do everything we can to maintain in-school learning.

Mitigations to prevent spread of COVID-19

While Scotland has now moved beyond Level 0, it is important that we take mitigations to minimise the risk of the virus spreading in our school buildings.

We continue to ensure our schools are cleaned to the highest possible standard, with staff taking all necessary precautions and following government and public health advice.

In order to keep visits into school buildings to a minimum, our expectation is that parent-teacher consultations will continue to be held on a virtual/remote basis throughout the current session.

Visits into school buildings will until further notice be limited to essential only.

We are also grateful for your understanding in respecting individual school requirements in terms of, where applicable, staggered start and finishing times, and any other school specific 'asks' which may have been communicated to you.

We are all pleased that restrictions have continued to be removed in recent months, and having children and young people back in school really is fantastic.

But life in school does still look and feel different from 'normal' which is why at this time we need to do things a bit differently in the interests of everyone's health and wellbeing.

Once again thank you for your support and understanding at this time.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola McDowell', enclosed in a light grey rectangular box.

Nicola McDowell
Head of Education Service